



# Democracy Rules

== An electoral education resource ==



**AEC**

Australian Electoral Commission

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this resource contains images of people who have died.

*Democracy rules: An electoral education resource* – revised edition

Produced by Education Services Australia for the National Training and Education Unit, Australian Electoral Commission

First edition written by Pamela R Dudgeon and Patricia M Hincks

Revised edition written by Patricia M Hincks

Enquiries to:

National Electoral Education Centre

Australian Electoral Commission, ACT [education@aec.gov.au](mailto:education@aec.gov.au)

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# Contents

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<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
To the teacher	2
How to use this resource	4
Links to the Australian Curriculum	6
<b>Topics and investigations</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Topic 1: You and me, the decision makers</b>	<b>12</b>
Investigation A: What do we mean by democracy?	15
Investigation B: Can we all make the decisions?	23
<b>Topic 2: Representing everyone!</b>	<b>39</b>
Investigation A: How do you have your say?	42
Investigation B: How are we represented?	50
<b>Topic 3: What's your vote worth?</b>	<b>63</b>
Investigation A: How and why do Australians vote?	65
Investigation B: How do electorates change over time?	72
<b>Topic 4: The voice of a vote in a world of change</b>	<b>91</b>
Investigation A: How did Indigenous Australians achieve civic rights?	93
Investigation B: How did Timor-Leste take the first steps to democracy?	100
<b>Topic 5: Young people and the vote</b>	<b>115</b>
Investigation: How engaged are young people in voting and elections?	116
<b>Further Resources</b>	<b>129</b>
Running an election in your school	129
Background briefings	140
Glossary	144

## To the teacher

Teachers play a critical part in shaping young people's understanding of their role as citizens and future electors. In fact, the work of the teaching profession helps to guide the democratic development of our nation.

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) has played a significant role in the advocacy and support of civics and citizenship education with a particular focus on building electoral literacy and encouraging future participation in Australian electoral processes. In recent years, the Australian Curriculum has been developed and has specified the teaching and learning of civics and citizenship education as a core part of the curriculum in all Australian states and territories. For this reason, the AEC has worked with Education Services Australia to update *Democracy rules: An electoral education resource*.

This revised edition of *Democracy rules* maintains the strengths of the previous edition while incorporating:

- updates to electoral information, reflecting changes to electoral law and the latest information on voting and elections
- specific links between the topics and the Australian Curriculum (see table)
- modification of teaching and learning activities to strengthen links to the curriculum
- increased use of digital options within teaching and learning activities
- revision of current animations and interactives
- development of new animations to support teaching and learning: 'Making your vote count', 'Redistributions', 'Preferential voting', 'Changing the constitution' and 'Your rights and responsibilities' (see table)
- the creation of a separate 'Background briefings' section
- a new topic – 'Young people and the vote' – designed for middle- and upper-secondary-school students.

The proposition that electoral and voting systems safeguard our democratic principles and values underpins this resource. Electoral and voting systems are a vital link between citizen participation and democratic representation, and provide the mechanism for free and fair elections and political change. Sound electoral systems empower representatives to make decisions on behalf of others and confer legitimacy on governments. Electoral systems also have the power to transform conflict and competition into cooperative activity, and prevent rivalries that place a destructive strain on communities.

In Australia, the Commonwealth Parliament contains two representative institutions at the federal level: the House of Representatives and the Senate. They rely on different electoral and voting systems, which in turn affect the nature of their representation.

The Australian Constitution provides for the composition of both houses of parliament. The Constitution also provides the legal framework within which the parliament can determine the electoral and voting systems used to elect both houses of parliament, and the procedures and processes used to conduct referendums. The *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (Cth) (the Electoral Act) and the *Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Act 1984* (Cth) (the Referendum Act) outline the rules for federal elections and referendums, providing for electoral and voting systems that reflect the principles of democratic representation – including universal adult franchise and free and fair elections – and mechanisms for constitutional change. The Constitution and the Electoral and Referendum Acts thus reflect and give meaning to liberal democratic practice.

*Democracy rules* aims to explain these facts and themes in an engaging manner and to make a worthy contribution to what might be described as the 'democratic life experience' of your students.



## The role of the Australian Electoral Commission

The AEC is an independent organisation established by an amendment to the Electoral Act in 1984.

Six processes uniquely identify the AEC:

- managing the Commonwealth electoral roll
- preparing for, conducting and reviewing elections
- educating and informing the community about participating in the electoral process
- providing advice and assistance on electoral matters in Australia and overseas
- ensuring that political parties and others comply with financial disclosure requirements
- supporting electoral redistributions.

Through its enforcement of the provisions of the Electoral Act, the AEC ensures that electoral systems for the Commonwealth Parliament are administered fairly and that elections are free from interference and intimidation. The AEC also enforces voter eligibility requirements, and provides electors with access to the ballot. These are some of the key elements of free and fair elections that sustain Australia's democratic system of government.

Should you have any feedback on the content of this electoral education resource, please email your comments to [education@aec.gov.au](mailto:education@aec.gov.au).



**Figure 1:** Image of polling place signage

# How to use this resource

The teacher guide contains nine investigations grouped under five topics. Teachers may connect many of the activities to the Discovering Democracy units already used in Australian classrooms. These units have been revised and will be published on the [Civics and Citizenship Education Hub](http://www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au/cce/): [www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au/cce/](http://www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au/cce/) launching in 2021.

## Purposes

This guide has three main purposes:

- to equip teachers with background knowledge so they can confidently lead students in an exploration of Australian electoral and voting systems
- to provide students with appealing, engaging and accessible material that furthers their understanding of the key concepts and functions of Australian electoral and voting systems
- to support the teaching and learning of the Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship.

## Inquiry approach

The activities in this book use a three-stage inquiry approach to learning: 'Gathering information', 'Identifying and analysing' and 'Presenting findings'. This approach is consistent with the Civics and Citizenship skills strand outlined in the Australian Curriculum. Students are encouraged to develop understandings of key concepts through exploration and investigation. Where appropriate, a linking stage – 'Making connections' – is also included.

## Ready references

This guide contains 'Background briefings', a 'Glossary' and a 'Franchise timeline' (BLM 4 in 'You and me, the decision-makers') for ready reference. The latter provides a simple introduction to the historical evolution of Australian electoral and voting systems.

## AEC website links

Many investigations in this guide direct you to the [AEC website](http://www.aec.gov.au).

## Investigations and activities

Introductory activities at the beginning of the first four topics allow teachers to elicit students' prior learning and to develop their understandings of the relevant concepts before tackling more complex investigations. Each investigation is designed around a concept, issue or event, and invites exploration through a series of activities that represent different stages in the inquiry approach.

## At a glance

Each investigation begins with a table – 'The investigation at a glance'. This contains important information for teachers, and will assist their navigation of the resource. The table includes:

- links to relevant background briefings
- suggested classroom teaching time for each activity
- indicators of student achievement, which align to the cognitive levels of the Achievement standards in the Australian Curriculum.

## Recommended levels and curriculum alignments

Each topic has been aligned to appropriate year levels and content descriptions in the Australian Curriculum.

- Topic 1: upper primary
- Topic 2: upper primary, lower secondary
- Topic 3: lower secondary, middle secondary
- Topic 4: middle secondary
- Topic 5: middle secondary, upper secondary

As Topic 5 addresses youth enrolment and voting processes, it is appropriate for upper secondary as these students near voting age. Curriculums in each state and territory vary considerably in regard to this topic and teachers are advised to consult their relevant senior secondary curriculum in regard to alignments.

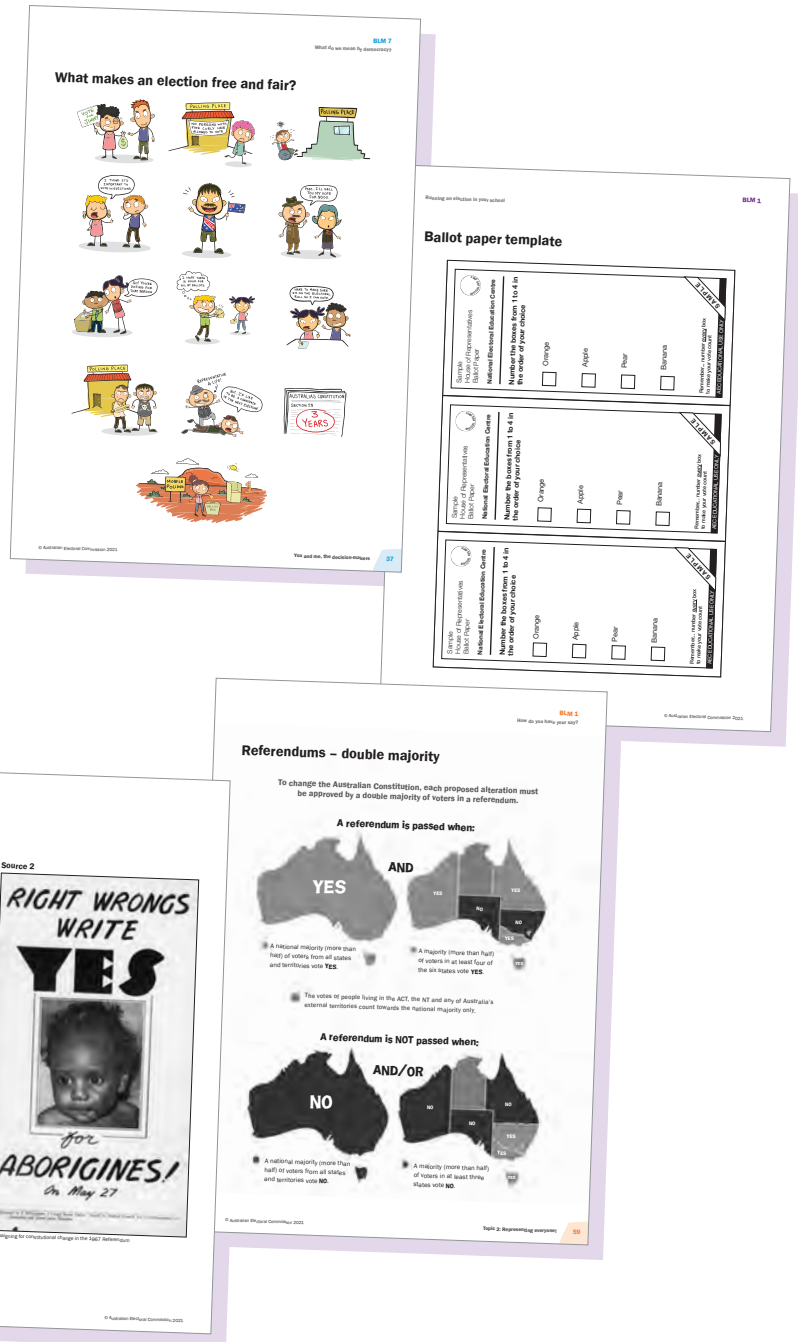
Given the diversity of learning abilities and needs in classrooms, teachers are invited to use their professional judgement in conducting the investigations and activities in this resource to suit their classroom curriculum planning.

## Blackline masters

Blackline masters (BLMs) accompany every investigation and may be freely copied for student use or used with the whole class on interactive boards. Many activities make use of BLMs and teachers are advised to prepare them in advance.

## Connections to multimedia resources

The teacher guide uses a system of icons to link the text to recommended animations and interactives. Teachers may choose to pause at particular stages to allow students to explore a particular item or may use them as standalone activities.





# Links to the Australian Curriculum

## Level: Upper primary

Topic	Investigations	Content	Australian curriculum content descriptions
<b>1. You and me, the decision-makers</b>	What do we mean by democracy?	Meanings and values of democracy Decision-making in a democracy Representation in the House of Representatives and Senate The right to vote Free and fair elections	<b>Civics and Citizenship Knowledge and Understanding</b> <b>Year 5</b> The key values that underpin Australia's democracy ( <a href="#">ACHASSK115</a> ) The key features of the electoral process in Australia ( <a href="#">ACHASSK116</a> )  <b>Inquiry and skills</b> <b>Year 5</b> Examine different viewpoints on actions, events, issues and phenomena in the past and present ( <a href="#">ACHASSI099</a> )  Work in groups to generate responses to issues and challenges ( <a href="#">ACHASSI102</a> ) Present ideas, findings, viewpoints and conclusions in a range of texts and modes that incorporate source materials, digital and non-digital representations and discipline-specific terms and conventions ( <a href="#">ACHASSI105</a> )
	Can we all make the decisions?	Decision-making responsibility of levels of government Decision-making through representation The qualities and characteristics of a good representative People who represent us	<b>Civics and Citizenship Knowledge and Understanding</b> <b>Year 6</b> The roles and responsibilities of Australia's three levels of government ( <a href="#">ACHASSK144</a> ) The responsibilities of electors and representatives in Australia's democracy ( <a href="#">ACHASSK145</a> )  <b>Inquiry and skills</b> <b>Year 6</b> Interpret data and information displayed in a range of formats to identify, describe and compare distributions, patterns and trends, and to infer relationships ( <a href="#">ACHASSI128</a> ) Use criteria to make decisions and judgements and consider advantages and disadvantages of preferring one decision over others ( <a href="#">ACHASSI131</a> )

## Level: Upper primary and lower secondary

Topic	Investigations	Content	Australian curriculum content descriptions
<b>2. Representing everyone!</b>	How do you have your say?	<p>Membership of the House of Representatives and the Senate</p> <p>Having a say through House of Representatives and Senate elections</p> <p>Having a say through constitutional referendums</p>	<p><b>Civics and Citizenship Knowledge and Understanding</b></p> <p><b>Year 6</b></p> <p>The key institutions of Australia's democratic system of government and how it is based on the Westminster system (<a href="#">ACHASSK143</a>)</p> <p><b>Inquiry and skills</b></p> <p><b>Year 6</b></p> <p>Interpret data and information displayed in a range of formats to identify, describe and compare distributions, patterns and trends, and to infer relationships (<a href="#">ACHASSI128</a>)</p> <p>Use criteria to make decisions and judgements and consider advantages and disadvantages of preferring one decision over others (<a href="#">ACHASSI131</a>)</p> <p>Present ideas, findings, viewpoints and conclusions in a range of texts and modes that incorporate source materials, digital and non-digital representations and discipline-specific terms and conventions (<a href="#">ACHASSI133</a>)</p>
	How are we represented?	<p>The significance of the Australian Constitution</p> <p>How our history has affected the Australian Constitution</p> <p>How the Australian Constitution provides a framework for our society</p> <p>Provisions of the Constitution – Federal Parliament and the states</p> <p>Constitutional change over time and the role of the AEC</p>	<p><b>Civics and Citizenship Knowledge and Understanding</b></p> <p><b>Year 7</b></p> <p>The key features of government under the Australian Constitution with a focus on: the separation of powers, the roles of the Executive, the Houses of Parliament, and the division of powers (<a href="#">ACHCK048</a>)</p> <p>The process for constitutional change through a referendum (<a href="#">ACHCK049</a>)</p> <p><b>Inquiry and skills</b></p> <p><b>Year 7</b></p> <p>Interpret and analyse data and information displayed in a range of formats to identify and propose explanations for distributions, patterns, trends and relationships (<a href="#">ACHASSI158</a>)</p> <p>Develop and use criteria to make informed decisions and judgements (<a href="#">ACHASSI161</a>)</p> <p>Present ideas, findings, viewpoints, explanations and conclusions in a range of texts and modes that incorporate source materials, citations, graphic representations and discipline-specific terms, conventions and concepts (<a href="#">ACHASSI163</a>)</p>

## Links to the Australian Curriculum (Continued)

## Level: Lower secondary and middle secondary

Topic	Investigations	Content	Australian curriculum content descriptions
3. What's your vote worth?	How and why do Australians vote?	<p>Who can vote in Australia?</p> <p>Compulsory enrolment and voting</p> <p>Political parties and elections</p> <p>Mock election</p> <p>Voting systems and democratic values</p> <p>Voting systems used in states</p>	<p><b>Civics and Citizenship Knowledge and Understanding</b></p> <p><b>Year 8</b></p> <p>How citizens can participate in Australia's democracy, including use of the electoral system, contact with their elected representatives, use of lobby groups, and direct action (<a href="#">ACHCK062</a>)</p> <p><b>Civics and Citizenship Skills</b></p> <p><b>Year 8</b></p> <p>Identify, gather and sort information and ideas from a range of sources (<a href="#">ACHCS069</a>)</p> <p>Critically analyse information and ideas from a range of sources in relation to civics and citizenship topics and issues (<a href="#">ACHCS070</a>)</p> <p>Present evidence-based civics and citizenship arguments using subject-specific language (<a href="#">ACHCS073</a>)</p>
	How do electorates change over time?	<p>Redistributions and 'one vote, one value'</p>	<p><b>Civics and Citizenship Knowledge and Understanding</b></p> <p><b>Year 9</b></p> <p>The role of political parties and independent representatives in Australia's system of government, including the formation of governments (<a href="#">ACHCK075</a>)</p> <p>How citizens' political choices are shaped, including the influence of the media (<a href="#">ACHCK076</a>)</p> <p><b>Civics and Citizenship Skills</b></p> <p><b>Year 9</b></p> <p>Identify, gather and sort information and ideas from a range of sources and reference as appropriate (<a href="#">ACHCS083</a>)</p> <p>Critically evaluate information and ideas from a range of sources in relation to civics and citizenship topics and issues (<a href="#">ACHCS084</a>)</p> <p>Present evidence-based civics and citizenship arguments using subject-specific language (<a href="#">ACHCS088</a>)</p>

## Level: Middle secondary

Topic	Investigations	Content	Australian curriculum content descriptions
4. The voice of a vote in a world of change	How did Indigenous Australians achieve civic rights?	<p>United Nations Declaration of Human Rights</p> <p>Context for the 1967 Referendum – civic rights for Indigenous Australians</p> <p>The Referendum campaign and arguments for and against</p> <p>The referendum process and results</p> <p>Indigenous rights since 1967</p>	<p><b>Civics and Citizenship Knowledge and Understanding</b></p> <p><b>Year 10</b></p> <p>How Australia's international legal obligations shape Australian law and government policies, including in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (<a href="#">ACHCK093</a>)</p> <p><b>Civics and Citizenship Skills</b></p> <p><b>Year 10</b></p> <p>Critically evaluate information and ideas from a range of sources in relation to civics and citizenship topics and issues (<a href="#">ACHCS097</a>)</p> <p>Present evidence-based civics and citizenship arguments using subject-specific language (<a href="#">ACHCS101</a>)</p> <p><b>Historical Knowledge and Understanding</b></p> <p><b>Year 10</b></p> <p>Background to the struggle of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples for rights and freedoms before 1965, including the 1938 Day of Mourning and the Stolen Generations (<a href="#">ACDSEH104</a>)</p> <p>The significance of the following for the civil rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: 1962 right to vote federally; 1967 Referendum; Reconciliation; Mabo decision; Bringing Them Home Report (the Stolen Generations), the Apology (<a href="#">ACDSEH106</a>)</p> <p><b>Historical Skills</b></p> <p><b>Year 10</b></p> <p>Identify and locate relevant sources, using ICT and other methods (<a href="#">ACHHS186</a>)</p> <p>Identify and analyse the perspectives of people from the past (<a href="#">ACHHS190</a>)</p> <p>Develop texts, particularly descriptions and discussions that use evidence from a range of sources that are referenced (<a href="#">ACHHS192</a>)</p>
	How did Timor-Leste take the first steps to democracy?	<p>Timor-Leste under Portuguese and Indonesian rule</p> <p>Timor-Leste resistance</p> <p>United Nations Missions and Australian involvement</p> <p>The role of the AEC in introducing democratic elections</p>	<p><b>Civics and Citizenship Knowledge and Understanding</b></p> <p><b>Year 10</b></p> <p>The Australian Government's role and responsibilities at a global level, for example provision of foreign aid, peacekeeping, participation in international organisations and the United Nations (<a href="#">ACHCK091</a>)</p> <p><b>Civics and Citizenship Skills</b></p> <p><b>Year 10</b></p> <p>Identify, gather and sort information and ideas from a range of sources and reference as appropriate (<a href="#">ACHCS096</a>)</p> <p>Account for different interpretations and points of view (<a href="#">ACHCS098</a>)</p> <p>Present evidence-based civics and citizenship arguments using subject-specific language (<a href="#">ACHCS101</a>)</p>

Links to the Australian Curriculum (Continued)

### Level: Middle secondary and upper secondary

Topic	Investigations	Content	Australian curriculum content descriptions
<b>5. Young people and the vote</b>	How engaged are young people in voting and elections?	<p>Young people, issues and political parties</p> <p>Young people, influence and interest groups</p> <p>Lowering the voting age to 16</p> <p>Elections, engagement and fake news</p> <p>Promoting enrolment and voting amongst young people</p>	<p><b>Civics and Citizenship Knowledge and Understanding</b></p> <p><b>Year 10</b></p> <p>The challenges to and ways of sustaining a resilient democracy and cohesive society (<a href="#">ACHCK094</a>)</p> <p><b>Civics and Citizenship Skills</b></p> <p><b>Year 10</b></p> <p>Critically evaluate information and ideas from a range of sources in relation to civics and citizenship topics and issues (<a href="#">ACHCS097</a>)</p> <p>Account for different interpretations and points of view (<a href="#">ACHCS098</a>)</p> <p>Present evidence-based civics and citizenship arguments using subject-specific language (<a href="#">ACHCS101</a>)</p>

The animations	Topic one	Topic two	Topic three	Topic four	Topic five
<b>History of voting</b> March through the history of the franchise and the voting systems for the Federal Parliament, beginning with the evolution of the franchise in colonial Australia and concluding with compulsory enrolment and voting for Indigenous Australians in 1984.	✓		✓		
<b>Making your vote count</b> Experience this concise demonstration and explanation of the different voting systems used to elect representatives.		✓	✓		
<b>Election day</b> Can't remember the order of things? Let the professor take you through a step-by-step description of the election process from the calling of an election and enrolment, to the count and return of writs.	✓		✓		
<b>Redistributions</b> How does our electoral system ensure that electorates are equal and each citizen's vote is worth the same – the democratic principle of 'one vote, one value'? This animation takes you through the process of redistributions that helps to ensure our representative democracy is fair.			✓		
<b>Preferential voting</b> What is the difference between first-past-the-post and preferential voting? This animation takes you through the process and lets you consider the impact and fairness of each method of voting.	✓				
<b>Changing the Constitution</b> How do we change the Australian Constitution? This animation explains the constitutional requirements for change – a process called referendum, which lets all citizens have a say in whether we change our foundation document.		✓		✓	
<b>Your rights and responsibilities</b> Who can vote in Australia and what is the role of the AEC? This animation provides an overview of the AEC's role in organising free and fair elections and the roles and responsibilities of the voter.					✓

The interactives	Topic one	Topic two	Topic three	Topic four	Topic five
<b>The history of voting game</b> Help the new museum attendant reorder the pictures by researching their place in the history of voting in Australia.	✓		✓		
<b>Quiz 1 – Referendums – Do you get it?</b> Test your knowledge of the referendum process and the history of referendums in Australia in this interactive, multiple-choice game show.		✓		✓	
<b>Quiz 2 – The Constitution – Are you a whiz?</b> Test your knowledge of the Australian system of government in this interactive, multiple-choice game show.		✓			
<b>History challenge – Test your knowledge</b> Take a speed test of your knowledge of the history of the franchise in Australia with this quick, interactive, multiple-choice quiz.	✓				
<b>Voting challenge – What do you know?</b> Use your knowledge of voting to compete against the clock in this quick, interactive, multiple-choice quiz.	✓	✓	✓		
<b>Democracy rules – The quests 1 and 2</b> Compete against the clock or a friend, and collect as many gems as you can by answering as many questions as you can about Australia's democracy.		✓	✓		
<b>Voting tool</b> Running an election in your school or classroom? Learn about preferential voting from the animation in this interactive and then use the preferential counting tool to count the votes in your election.	✓				



**Topic 1:**

# You and me, the decision-makers

- **Investigation A:**  
What do we mean by democracy? .....p 15  
Upper primary
- **Investigation B:**  
Can we all make the decisions? .....p 23  
Upper primary



# Topic 1: You and me, the decision-makers

We are all decision-makers. Our decisions range from those that impact only on our own lives to decisions that affect the way we participate in and contribute to society. We make many decisions individually or collaboratively but other decisions are made for us or are made indirectly through representatives.

'You and me, the decision-makers' provides students with the opportunity to explore the purpose and meaning of voting as a democratic form of decision-making.

## The topic contains two investigations:

- Investigation A: What do we mean by democracy?
- Investigation B: Can we all make the decisions?

These investigations explore the democratic principles and values that underpin the individual's right to a free and fair vote, the concept of representation, and the electoral systems that facilitate the election of parliamentary representatives.

## Introductory activity

Randomly choose four students to be the class decision-makers for a day or two. Draw colour-coded paper or discs out of a box to ensure random selection.

Inform the class that you will only be consulting these four students on classroom decisions over the next one to two days. They are to be the 'decision-makers' who will be making the decisions for the entire class over this time. Tell the decision-makers that they are not to consult the rest of the class about the decisions that they will make.

Decisions could include the choice of any games played, which students go to recess first, group structures for activities, where students sit, timing of an activity, medium of activity, sport, and so on.

If students become agitated about their lack of consultation during this time, reassure them that in a few days they will be told the reasons for deciding class activities in this way.

Provide all students with a reflective journal and ask them to record their feelings and perceptions of the situations they encounter during the day. Prompts could include these:

- Did you agree with the way the decision-makers were chosen?
- How are you feeling about the situation?
- Are decisions being made fairly?
- Is your opinion changing, and if so, in what way?

After one or two days (according to teacher judgement), conduct a classroom discussion directing the following questions to the decision-makers and to the rest of the class. Their answers should be summarised and recorded on poster paper as a PMI (plus, minus, interesting) chart:



Figure 2: Being marked off the roll in a class election

	Decision-makers	Other class members
Plus (positive points)		
Minus (negative points)		
Interesting		

### Decision-makers

- How did you make the decisions? What did you take into account?
- Did you mainly consider yourself, your friends or everybody?
- How did you feel about yourself and other class members when making these decisions?
- Did you feel you were able to 'represent' other class members?
- Would you feel the same if you had been making decisions with the help of everyone in the class?
- Did you like or dislike this role? Why?

### Other class members

- Did you like the decisions being made for you?
- Did you feel that they 'represented' you?
- What did you think about the decision-makers? How did they make you feel?
- What did you think about the way the decision-makers made their decisions?
- Would you have felt any different if there was a different group of decision-makers?

### Whole class

Was this a fair way of organising the decision-making in the class?

- What did you like or dislike about it?
- How could it have been fairer?
- How can you have your say?

Teachers should now contrast this undemocratic system by asking the class about issues in school life that concern them. Make a list of contributions on the board. Then ask the students to consider what skills and personal qualities a representative would need if one person was to be chosen to speak on behalf of the class on the issues listed on the board. Make a list of these qualities. Finally, ask the group to nominate candidates who would be good class representatives and who could take class concerns to the principal or year-level coordinator. Elect one or two representatives by a show of hands. Arrange a meeting between the representatives and the principal or year-level coordinator, and have the representatives report the results to the rest of the class in a subsequent lesson.



**Figure 3:** Receiving a ballot paper before voting in a school election



# Investigation A

## What do we mean by democracy?

Recommended level | Upper primary

In this investigation students explore the principles and values that underlie the right of all individuals to a free and fair vote. They will learn about the exercise of the franchise, and link the act of voting with democratic decision-making. The investigation emphasises the formalities of the voting process and the different kinds of voting in Australian elections, especially full preferential voting. Students will participate in an 'election' using the procedures followed by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) to ensure a free and fair vote.

### The investigation at a glance

#### Background briefings for teacher reference

- Australian Electoral Commission; Constitution; democracy; electoral division; full preferential voting; House of Representatives; Senate

#### Suggested classroom teaching time

- **Activity 1:** What is democracy? (40 minutes)
- **Activity 2:** How do we make decisions in a democratic society? (80 minutes)
- **Activity 3:** Who has the right to vote and choose our representatives? (40 minutes)
- **Activity 4:** How do we make sure that elections reflect democratic values? (80 minutes)

#### Indicators of student achievement

- Understand how the Australian electoral system accords with democratic principles and values
- Understand how voting and electoral systems facilitate representation
- Describe the key features of the Australian electoral system including the franchise, preferential voting and electoral processes
- Explain the role of the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) in administering the electoral system



**Figure 4:** The Australian Electoral Commission works with other countries to improve their electoral processes

## Activity 1

# What is democracy?

### Focus questions

- What do you know and understand about democracy?
- What are democratic values?

### Resources

- [BLM 1](#) Concept cards



### Gathering information

Review the ideas about fairness that students arrived at in the introductory activity. Then ask them what they think the term 'democratic' means. For example: 'We say that Australia is a democratic society; what does this mean?' Briefly discuss and write class responses on poster paper or the board.



### Identifying and analysing

Have students sit in a circle on the floor. In the middle of the circle place signs labelled 'democratic', 'undemocratic' and 'not sure'. Cut out and distribute the concept cards ([BLM 1](#)), which list a range of democratic and undemocratic values, behaviours and systems. Ensure there is enough room for students to place their concept cards around each of the signs.

Students individually classify their concept cards as 'democratic', 'undemocratic' or 'not sure' and place cards around the appropriate sign.

When all cards have been positioned, ask students whether they agree or disagree with the placements. Ask them to clarify and justify their reasons for placement. At this stage, some cards may be changed to different positions because cards next to the 'not sure' position might be explained by others. Cards are moved with the agreement of the person who placed that card and by class consensus. Any cards that students disagree about can be classified in the 'not sure' category and be revisited later.

Teachers should keep a checklist of the card placements so the concepts can be revisited in 'Going further' at the end of this investigation.



### Presenting findings

Ask students to use the cards grouped around the 'democratic' sign to develop their own short definition of democracy. After writing their definitions on sticky notes, students place them on a class poster where they can be displayed under the heading 'Our definitions of democracy'.

### From the margin

#### Voting for the prime minister

The prime minister is not directly elected by the Australian people. By convention, the party or coalition of parties with a majority (more than half) of the members elected to the House of Representatives, form the government. The position of the leader of the government is known as the prime minister and this position is determined by the members of the elected government. The members of the government can also decide to change their leader at any time.



## Activity 2

# How do we make decisions in a democratic society?

### Focus questions

- What is representative democracy?
- How does choosing representatives reflect democratic principles?
- How are we represented in the Australian Federal Parliament?

### Resources

- [BLM 2 Representation – Federal Parliament](#)
- [Electoral division profiles and maps](#): [www.aec.gov.au/profiles/index.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/profiles/index.htm)
- Parliamentary Education Office, [Understand our Parliament](#): [www.peo.gov.au/understand-our-parliament/](http://www.peo.gov.au/understand-our-parliament/)
- Parliament of Australia, a [list of members of the House of Representatives](#): [www.aph.gov.au/Senators\\_and\\_Members/Members](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Members)
- Parliament of Australia, a [list of senators](#) of the Senate: [www.aph.gov.au/Senators\\_and\\_Members/Senators](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Senators)



### Gathering information

Tell students that the word ‘democracy’ comes from two Greek words: *demos* meaning ‘the people’ and *kratos* meaning ‘power’. Effectively, the word ‘democracy’ means ‘people power’ – the right of the people of a nation to make decisions about how they are governed.

Discuss the practicality of a country the size of Australia, with 16.4 million voters (in 2019), all taking part in democratic decision-making. Is it possible? (Canvass factors such as size of population, remoteness, time to make a decision and vote counting.) Could it be an effective way of making decisions and would it be fair?

Using the analogy of school, discuss the ways students take part in decision-making in different situations. For example:

- between friends – discussion and mutual agreement
- in the classroom – discussion, hands-up voting, decisions made by the teacher
- within the school – Junior School Council through representatives, elections.



### Identifying and analysing

Use a PMI chart on an electronic whiteboard, blackboard or a sheet of poster paper to analyse these three examples and comment on the effectiveness of different decision-making processes.

For example, agreement between friends is direct involvement, gives ownership to the decision and is quickly decided. Classroom decisions can be made quickly in small groups of people who know each other. Hands-up voting is fast and allows majority decisions within a larger group, but can be intimidating and subject to peer pressure. Decisions made by the teacher alone are fast but imposed without agreement, and free students of responsibility. Junior School Council involves lengthier processes and representatives, rather than direct participation, but allows a larger group to be involved in decision-making.

### From the margin

#### Joining the party

Political parties are organised groups of like-minded people with broadly similar views. They aim to influence or control government by having members elected to parliament. Parties are a key feature of Australia’s representative democracy as the majority party or coalition of parties in the House of Representatives forms the government.





## Making connections

Explain to students that Australia is a representative democracy, meaning that we choose representatives to make decisions on our behalf, similar to a Junior School Council.

Confirm student understanding of what we mean by the terms 'representative' and 'representation'. Clarify any misconceptions (refer to Investigation B: 'Can we all make the decisions?', Activity 1: 'Who makes the decisions?').

Briefly explain that Australia has three levels of government with different responsibilities and law-making powers.

Provide students with [BLM 2](#) and photos and seating plans of the Parliament of Australia.

Explain to students that the citizens of Australia have chosen representatives in both houses of parliament to make the laws that govern all Australians.

Ask students to fill out the two blank maps of Australia in [BLM 2](#) with the number of members in the House of Representatives and the number of senators for each state and territory.

Divide students into two broad groups: one to find information about the House of Representatives and one to find information about the Senate. Allocate an electorate (House of Representatives) or state or territory (Senate) to individual students or groups of students to investigate. They should use the AEC website and the Australian Parliament website with its details of the Parliament of Australia to complete the listed questions.



Figure 5: Parliament House, Canberra

## From the margin

### Gerrymander

A gerrymander is the deliberate drawing of electoral boundaries to maximise the number of seats that one party might win while minimising the number of seats that might be won by another. The term comes from America where in 1812 Governor Eldridge Gerry, of Massachusetts, rigged the boundaries of electoral districts to give maximum advantage to the Republican Party. On a map, one of these electorates looked like a salamander (a type of amphibian) – thus the term gerrymander.

### House of Representatives

- What is the name of the electorate you are investigating?
- What is the size (in square kilometres) of the electorate?
- What is the total enrolment for the electorate?
- How many members of the House of Representatives come from the state or territory in which the electorate is located?
- What is the history of the electorate's name?
- Who is the representative?

Have students compare the electorates they are investigating, using the above questions.

### The Senate

- Which state or territory are you investigating?
- What is the total enrolment for the state or territory?
- How many senators represent the state or territory?
- Who are they?

Have students compare the states or territories they are investigating, using the above questions.

Bring students together to discuss what they have learnt about parliamentary representation from these maps, pictures and electoral research, including reasons for the different numbers of representatives.

Confirm student understanding of the House of Representatives being based on single-member, population-based electorates, and the Senate electorates as multi-member, with senators chosen to represent their state or territory.



## Presenting findings

Students may work as individuals or in pairs to present their research on electoral representation as a poster or booklet or in digital form.

They could title the posters or booklets 'Electorates and representatives' and display them in the classroom or school library.

### Activity 3

## Who has the right to vote and choose our representatives?

### Focus questions

- What is the meaning of the word 'franchise'?
- How has the franchise changed over time?

### Resources

- [BLM 3](#) Franchise cards
- [BLM 4](#) Franchise timeline
- Magazines, textas, scissors and glue
- [Animation: History of voting](#)
- [Interactive: The history of voting game](#)
- [Interactive: History challenge](#) – Test your knowledge



### Gathering information

Cut out and distribute the cards on [BLM 3](#) to students. Copy extra cards to ensure that each class member has a card. Read [BLM 4](#) to students and ask individuals to stand in line as their 'person' is read out. (Suggested teaching points have been provided on the BLM in italics.) Explain to students that people remaining seated would not have been able to vote for representatives at that time in history and would not have had a voice in decisions that affected their daily lives. In practice, they were disenfranchised. Continue until all 'persons' are standing.



### Identifying and analysing

Remind students of the introductory activity and discuss how they felt about not being able to vote because of colour, race, gender or financial status. Was this fair? Was this democratic? Why do they think the right to vote has changed over time?

Ask students to draw a picture of their 'person' and paste it onto their own history of the franchise in Australia timeline.

Provide students with the opportunity to explore the [animation 'History of voting'](#) during this stage of the activity.

Bring students together and discuss the following:

- Who do you think is eligible to vote in Australia today?
- Is this a reasonable and democratic franchise?
- Who is disenfranchised?
- Should the franchise be extended? If so, why and to whom?



### Presenting findings

Using online images, magazines or hand-drawn illustrations, create a class collage or poster headed 'The faces of our voters' to show who can vote in Australia today. Use multiple pictures of people who look over 18, and create labels for them, such as university student, apprentice, wait staff, rock band member, teacher, parent, sky diver and grandparent. The poster should also include an image of an Australian birth certificate, passport or Australian citizenship certificate to remind the class that citizenship is a necessary qualification for voting. Display the finished poster or collage in the classroom or school library.

### From the margin

#### On a roll

It is compulsory for Australian citizens who have turned 18 to enrol and to vote (*Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*, section 101). The AEC maintains the electoral rolls for federal elections. Eligible voters only need to enrol once, but need to ensure that their details, such as name and address, remain up to date.

## Activity 4

# How do we make sure that elections reflect democratic values?

### Focus questions

- What are the features of our voting system that ensure a free and fair vote? What are the rights and responsibilities of voters?
- What is meant by preferential voting and compulsory voting? What role does the AEC have in ensuring free and fair elections?

### Resources

- [BLM 5](#) Participating in free and fair elections
- [BLM 6](#) The wild residents of Blackwattle Swamp
- [BLM 7](#) What makes an election free and fair?
- [Running an election in your school](#)
- [Animation: Election day](#)
- [Animation: Preferential voting](#)
- [Interactive: Voting challenge](#)
- [Interactive: Voting tool](#)



### Gathering information

Provide students with [BLM 5](#) and briefly discuss the rights and responsibilities of the voter.

Take the following steps as preparation for the running of a classroom election.

Show students the [animation 'Preferential voting'](#). Discuss the following with students:

- The differences between first-past-the-post and preferential voting. Which method of voting could be considered more democratic and why?
- Why the secret ballot is important in a democracy.

Show students the [animation 'Election day'](#). Discuss with students what steps are taken by the AEC to ensure free and fair elections.

Run an election in your classroom following the procedures outlined in the ['Running an election in your school'](#) section of this teacher guide. Mock election scenarios have been provided in the guide to facilitate this activity. Outline the chosen scenario and explain to students that they will be taking part in an election using the voting formalities and practices that are used in a federal election to elect members to the House of Representatives. The animations and interactives will also assist in explaining these features and concepts.

Explain full preferential voting to students and how to cast a formal vote. Choose polling officials and scrutineers and explain their roles – these are outlined in 'Running an election in your school'. Use the class list as the electoral roll and provide ballot papers, a sealed ballot box and a place for voters to vote in secret. Conduct the election and count according to the guidelines.



### Identifying and analysing

Reflecting on the experience and drawing on understandings and information from previous activities, ask students to critically evaluate the election, discussing:

- Was it a fair and free election? Why or why not?
- What processes and features were used?
- Did the election follow AEC procedures?
- What were the benefits and/or problems of this model of voting and election?

Have students use the [interactive 'Voting tool'](#) as an activity to reinforce their understanding of voting.

### From the margin

#### Compulsory voting

What do Singapore, Cyprus, the Philippines, Uruguay and Egypt have in common? Like Australia, they have compulsory voting. Other countries with compulsory voting include Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Dominican Republic, Greece, Guatemala, Honduras, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Panama, Switzerland (some cantons only) and Venezuela.



## Making connections

Provide students with a copy of **BLM 6** and ask them to read it individually. Alternatively, the reading could be conducted as a whole-class activity.

Draw the class together and discuss the election described in the article. Ask students to compare that election with their classroom election based on AEC procedures.

Questions could include:

- Were there any similarities?
- How did they differ?
- Which election reflected the democratic principles of a free and fair election?



## Presenting findings

Group students in pairs or small groups and distribute **BLM 7**, a large sheet of poster paper, scissors and glue.

Using information from **BLM 5** and **BLM 6** and the classroom experience of participating in an election, ask students to complete a table classifying illustrations from **BLM 7** under the following heading:

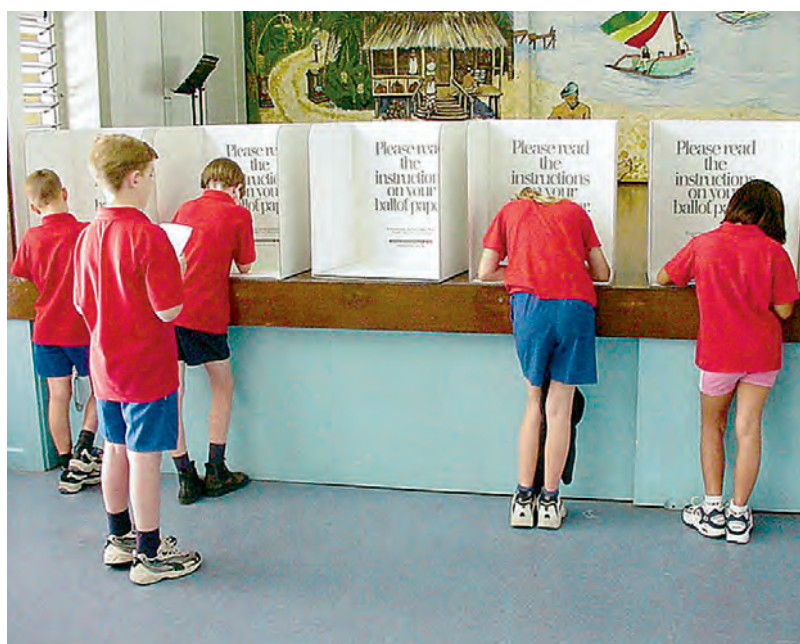
What makes an election free and fair?	
Fair	Unfair

As a class draw on the information from the table and summarise the democratic voting/electoral system in Australia in a statement beginning: 'The electoral rights of Australian citizens are protected by ... As Australian citizens we have the responsibility to ...'

## From the margin

### Are you qualified?

Australian citizens aged 16 years or older are eligible to enrol, but only those who have turned 18 years of age are able to vote. British subjects who were on the electoral roll prior to 26 January 1984 are also eligible to enrol and to vote (*Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*, sections 93 and 100).



**Figure 6:** Respecting the secret ballot in a school election





## Going further

### Focus questions

- What are the key features of our democratic society?
- What processes facilitate democratic representation?

Ask students individually to reflect and draw on their understandings from the previous activities in the investigation to complete a Y-chart (looks like, feels like, sounds like) on the features of Australian democracy.

Drawing on individual Y-charts, combine responses into a class 'Democracy' Y-chart and display.

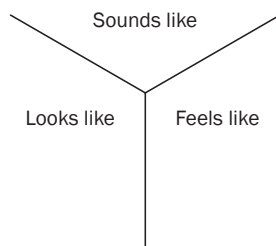


Figure 7: Australian Democracy Y-chart

Revisit the original democratic values concepts chart from Activity 1 and discuss with students whether there are any additions or changes they wish to make, and any further clarifications.

Ask students to rewrite their definition of democracy and to compare it with their original definitions. Discuss the changes they made, and inquire if their definitions are more comprehensive.

What have they added or changed?

Write a combined class statement beginning with: 'We say that Australia is a democratic country because it has the following values, systems and features ...'

Examples could include:

- the people of the country make the decisions on how it is governed
- it has free and fair elections
- the ballot is secret
- we choose our representatives.

### From the margin

#### Fair share

Each original state (New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania) is entitled to a minimum of five members in the House of Representatives, regardless of its population. This is outlined in the Australian Constitution section 24.



Figure 8: Voters being checked against the electoral roll



# Investigation B

## Can we all make the decisions?

Recommended level

Upper primary

In this investigation students consider the concept of representation and the role of voting and electoral systems in facilitating representation. Students consider how electoral representation translates into parliamentary representation and accountability. The need for informed choices about candidates and criteria for selecting candidates is examined.

### The investigation at a glance

#### Background briefings for teacher reference

- Democracy; Parliament; representation

#### Suggested classroom teaching time

- **Activity 1:** Who makes the decisions? (40 minutes)
- **Activity 2:** What should we consider when choosing a representative? (80 minutes)
- **Activity 3:** Who represents you? (40 minutes)

#### Indicators of student achievement

- Understand the importance of making informed decisions
- Evaluate the qualities and characteristics of good representatives
- Analyse the role of representatives at school and in the general community



Figure 9: House of Representatives



## Activity 1

# Who makes the decisions?

### Focus questions

- How do we make decisions?
- Who makes decisions on our behalf?

### Resources

- **BLM 8** Who makes the decisions?
- Government websites, such as the following:  
Local: [www.darebin.vic.gov.au](http://www.darebin.vic.gov.au); [www.randwick.nsw.gov.au](http://www.randwick.nsw.gov.au); [www.cottesloe.wa.gov.au](http://www.cottesloe.wa.gov.au)  
State or territory: [www.qld.gov.au](http://www.qld.gov.au); [www.vic.gov.au](http://www.vic.gov.au); [www.nsw.gov.au](http://www.nsw.gov.au)  
Federal: [www.australia.gov.au](http://www.australia.gov.au)



### Gathering information

Provide students with **BLM 8** and website addresses to assist them to investigate decision-making responsibility at different levels of government.

Ask students to read through the examples of decision-making and check for understanding. Explain or give examples to clarify. Students individually complete **BLM 8**, drawing on their own experience. They also research personal, community, local, state and federal areas of decision-making responsibility while completing their investigation.



### Identifying and analysing

Following completion of **BLM 8**, discuss responses with the class. Suitable prompts to elicit understanding of direct, indirect and consultative representation could include the following:

- What decisions do you make personally, without consultation, or in direct consultation? (Note: Some answers will differ according to family dynamics.)
- Are many decisions made through representation? If so, what are they?
- How do others know what we want?
- How important is it for us to have good representatives to make decisions on our behalf?



### Presenting findings

Organise students into pairs or small groups and instruct them to design a decision-making concept map based on their understanding of direct, indirect, personal, group, consultative and representative decision-making. Ask students to include examples of each.

Draw the class together and allow each group to present their maps, justifying their links and placements.

### From the margin

#### Ballot papers

For the 2019 federal election, 52 million ballot papers were printed.

Strict security during the printing, handling and storage of ballot papers ensures the integrity of the electoral process.

## Activity 2

# What should we consider when choosing a representative?

### Focus questions

- What are the qualities and characteristics of a good representative? Why is it important to make informed decisions about candidates when electing representatives?

### Resources

- [BLM 9](#) Qualities in a good representative



### Gathering information

Linking to the previous discussion of decision-makers as representatives and the need for 'good representation', discuss with students what they think are the qualities and characteristics of a 'good' representative. If students have difficulty with this, try to initiate discussion by asking whether they would choose someone with qualities such as aggression, impressive sporting achievements, assertiveness, effective communication, knowledge, kindness, fairness, intelligence or good looks. Students then conduct a survey of other students, teachers, family and friends using [BLM 9](#). This could be a homework assignment where students report their findings in the following lesson.



### Identifying and analysing

Using results from the survey, list all the qualities and rank the qualities according to the number of responses. Students could graph the results as part of a related mathematics activity.

Discuss what most people think are the three or four most important qualities of a good representative. Do students personally agree with these responses? Record responses on a sheet of poster paper for display.

Further analysis could include classifying the responses according to groups interviewed, for example, qualities parents thought were important and qualities different age groups thought were important.

### From the margin

#### Pumping flesh

Not a new gym program but a colourful term that describes the kind of campaigning some candidates use to gain votes – they shake the hand and slap the back of every citizen they meet. Some even hold and kiss lots of babies during campaigning!



**Figure 10:** Receiving information about the candidates outside a polling place



## Making connections

Explain to students that representation relies on people in the community being willing to take on the responsibility to represent others. Our representative democracy could not function without people willing to stand as candidates. In Australia, any Australian citizen who is over 18 years of age and enrolled to vote is eligible to stand as a candidate in federal, state or local elections. (There are some exceptions, such as people serving prison terms of more than 3 years and people of unsound mind.)

Discuss with students why they think people are willing to stand as candidates, considering motives and benefits. Drawing an analogy with the Junior School Council could be a useful starting point.

Questions could include:

- Why do you think people are willing to be candidates?
- Do all candidates seek election for the 'right' reasons?
- What other reasons could there be?
- What are the benefits of being able to choose from a range of candidates?
- How does choice of candidates improve our representation?
- How important is it that we make an informed decision when choosing candidates?

Summarise discussion points, linking the qualities of a good representative to making informed decisions when electing candidates.



## Presenting findings

Ask students to use the information they have gathered from the survey and through discussion to design their ideal representative. They could work in pairs or in small groups to present their ideas in a choice of mediums: cardboard cut-out, role-play, outline of a person, model, poster, comic, cartoon, illustration, jigsaw or slide presentation. The final product should clearly display the qualities of a good representative.

### From the margin

#### An informed decision?

In 1974, the voters of a town in Western Australia re-elected a mayor whose death had caused the election in the first place. The town clerk explained that the bad mistake was caused by confusion while preparing the ballot papers. The sister-in-law of the deceased mayor said, 'I know that George was very popular with the townsfolk, but I was surprised to hear his election victory announced on the radio, driving back from the crematorium'. (NSW Electoral Commission website)



**Figure 11:** A polling official assisting a voter at a polling place

## Activity 3

# Who represents you?

### Focus questions

- How are you represented?
- Why is it important for electors be informed about their representatives?
- Why is representative accountability important?

### Resources

- Parliament of Australia, profiles of senators and members of the House of Representatives: [www.aph.gov.au/Senators\\_and\\_Members](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members)
- Media articles and websites involving community representatives, for example, from environmental groups, sporting clubs, volunteer organisations



### Gathering information

Provide students with a selected range of media articles and online links and ask them to read and select articles that refer to issues, profile representatives, describe candidates or present viewpoints.

Instruct students to look for a range of articles that reflect different types of representation, for example, local clubs, lobby groups, local councils and government.

Ask students to bring further examples to build up profiles of a range of representatives. Encourage students to also include representatives from Junior School Council, School Council, clubs and sports organisations.



### Identifying and analysing

Distribute one or two photos and articles to pairs or small groups of students and ask them to analyse the articles to find the name of the representative, who they represent, the issues discussed, and viewpoints expressed by the representative. Record accompanying summaries as representative profiles.



### Presenting findings

Draw the class together and allow students to present their representative profiles to the class. Discuss with students the importance of being informed about how our representatives represent us, reinforcing the concept of representative accountability. Combine work to make a book entitled *Our representatives at work*.



## Going further

Provide students with the opportunity to compose a series of questions they can use in an interview with a local representative. If an interview is not possible, students can use the questions to frame a letter that can then be sent to a representative.

Ask students to choose one of their representatives (community, local, state, federal) and write a series of questions about being a representative. They could ask what the person likes about the job, the main difficulties faced, their views about representation, how they deal with community issues, what qualities and characteristics they think make a good representative, why they chose to be a candidate seeking election and so on.

OR

Arrange for a representative to visit the school so students can conduct an interview based on questions that have been collaboratively constructed by the class.

## Concept cards

Elections	Freedom	Being responsible for your behaviour	Acknowledging that people have rights	Displaying tolerance
Respecting others	Fairness	Secret ballot	Free speech	Allowing citizens to elect representatives
Understanding	Giving people a fair go	Including others in activities	Understanding	Excluding people because of their background or gender
Racism	Decisions made by one	Laws	Voting	Behaving in a violent way towards others
Treating people equally	Providing people with opportunities to reach their potential regardless of race, age or gender	Being allowed to express your opinions	Citizenship	Bullying
Punishing people without reference to the law	Freedom	Having one vote, one value	Rigging elections	Bribing people with money to get your own way
Franchise	Living in fear	Dictatorship	Corruption	Intolerance
Elected government	Punishment according to the agreed laws	Being given choice	Constitution	Leadership
Being able to demonstrate against a decision	Respecting diversity	Trustworthiness	Interference by governments in our daily lives	Justice
Actions that match words	Caring for self and others	<b>DEMOCRATIC</b>	<b>UNDEMOCRATIC</b>	<b>NOT SURE</b>



# Representation – Federal Parliament

## THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Electorate name: .....

Size (square kilometres): .....

Total enrolment: .....

Number of members in the House of Representatives from the state or territory in which the electorate is located:

.....

History of the electorate's name:.....

Member's name:.....

Number of members for each state or territory:



## THE SENATE

State or territory: .....

Total enrolment for the state or territory: .....

Number of senators who represent the state or territory:

.....

Senators' names:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Number of senators for each state or territory:



## Franchise cards

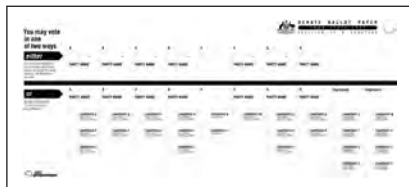
Male who owns land in 1843	Victorian male aged 21 years or over
South Australian male aged 21 years or over	New South Wales male aged 21 years or over
Queensland male aged 21 years or over	South Australian female aged 21 years or over
Western Australian male aged 21 years or over	Tasmanian male aged 21 years or over
New South Wales female aged 21 years or over	Western Australian female aged 21 years or over
Victorian female aged 21 years or over	Queensland female aged 21 years or over
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander man who served in the defence forces	Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person aged 21 years or over
18-year-old person	Governor of the colony of New South Wales

## Franchise timeline

<b>Pre-European settlement</b>	<p>Prior to European settlement Australia was occupied by groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people led by elders and subject to traditional laws. These groups governed themselves through a corporate decision-making process.</p> <p><i>Acknowledge the rule of law pre-European settlement before starting the timeline.</i></p>
<b>European settlement prior to 1843</b>	<p>Autocratic government</p> <p><i>New South Wales was a British penal colony with a governor appointed by the Crown who made all decisions concerning the policies and laws of the colony, both for convicts and free settlers.</i></p>
<b>1843</b>	<p>Only men who owned or paid rent on property could vote.</p> <p><i>Most men, all women and Indigenous Australians could not vote.</i></p>
<b>1856</b>	<p>The right to vote in South Australia was granted to males 21 years of age or over.</p>
<b>1857</b>	<p>The right to vote in Victoria was granted to all males 21 years of age or over.</p> <p><i>This was the time of the gold rush in Victoria. There were many people from around the world living there – Chinese, Americans, Europeans – and many had settled permanently, but they had no right to vote.</i></p>
<b>1858</b>	<p>The right to vote was granted in New South Wales to all males 21 years of age or over.</p>
<b>1872</b>	<p>The right to vote in Queensland was granted to all males 21 years of age or over.</p> <p><i>Remind students that Australia was six independent colonies at this time with separate laws and policies, including franchise laws.</i></p>
<b>1893</b>	<p>The right to vote in Western Australia was granted to all males 21 years of age or over.</p>
<b>1895</b>	<p>Women 21 years or over were given the right to vote in South Australia.</p> <p><i>This was the first time in Australia's European history that women could vote – it was one of the first places in the world to give women the vote.</i></p>
<b>1896</b>	<p>The right to vote in Tasmania was granted to all males 21 years of age or over.</p>
<b>1899</b>	<p>Women 21 years or over were given the right to vote in Western Australia.</p>
<b>1901</b>	<p>The first federal elections were held under state legislation – state franchises applied.</p> <p><i>This meant that the only people allowed to vote in the first federal elections were men 21 years or over from NSW, Vic, Qld, Tas, SA and WA; and women from SA and WA. How many people are still not included on the timeline?</i></p>
<b>1902</b>	<p>Universal suffrage at federal elections (most men and women over 21) <i>but there were some exceptions.</i></p> <p><i>Indigenous Australians and natives of Asia, Africa and the Pacific Islands (except New Zealand) were excluded from enrolment and voting unless they had the franchise at state level. Australia at this time thought of itself as a 'white' society, still a British society.</i></p> <p>Women over 21 were given the right to vote in New South Wales state elections.</p>
<b>1903</b>	<p>Women over 21 were given the right to vote in Tasmanian state elections.</p>
<b>1905</b>	<p>Women over 21 were given the right to vote in Queensland state elections.</p>
<b>1908</b>	<p>Women over 21 were given the right to vote in Victorian state elections.</p>
<b>1949</b>	<p>Indigenous Australians, as long as they had the right to enrol at state elections (NSW, SA, Vic, Tas) or had served in the defence forces, were given the right to vote in federal elections.</p> <p><i>Many Indigenous Australians served during the Second World War. Indigenous Australians in Qld, WA and NT were still not able to vote, unless they had served in the defence forces.</i></p>
<b>1962</b>	<p>Indigenous Australians were entitled to enrol and vote at federal elections and referendums.</p> <p><i>Voluntary, not compulsory enrolment and voting.</i></p>
<b>1973</b>	<p>Franchise was lowered from 21 to 18 years of age.</p>
<b>1984</b>	<p>Compulsory enrolment and voting for Indigenous Australians.</p> <p>Franchise qualification changed to Australian citizenship.</p>

# Participating in free and fair elections

Our rights	Our responsibilities
<p><b>To vote in elections</b></p> <p>Australian citizens, 18 years of age or over and enrolled, have the right to vote. In Australia enrolment and voting is compulsory.</p> <p>No person can be prevented from voting because of their appearance, religion, wealth, disability, racial background, or where they live.</p>	<p><b>Enrol as voters</b></p> <p>Australia has compulsory enrolment. Only people who have enrolled to vote may vote in an election. People can enrol to vote from when they are 16 years old so that they are on the electoral roll ready to vote at the first election after they turn 18. Voters are required to keep their details (address) up to date.</p>
<p><b>Equal vote</b></p> <p>All voters have one vote in each election. This is the same for everyone. Votes cannot be bought or sold, nor can extra votes be given to people. Every vote has the same value. For example, an 18-year-old's vote is worth the same as the vote of someone twice their age.</p>	<p><b>Vote in elections</b></p> <p>Australia has compulsory voting, so it is against the law not to vote in an election.</p>
<p><b>Secret ballot</b></p> <p>Citizens vote in secret. A screen is provided to prevent others from seeing how they voted. The secret ballot allows people to vote without fear of intimidation from others and reduces the risk of bribery.</p>	<p><b>Know how to fill out a ballot paper correctly</b></p> <p>Voters should understand how the voting system works, from filling out a ballot paper correctly to how it is counted when all the votes are collected. If a ballot paper is not filled out correctly, an elector's vote cannot be counted.</p>
<p><b>Participate in regular elections</b></p> <p>Elections must be held regularly. This is outlined in the Australian Constitution. Each member of parliament must go before the people in an election to be re-elected to parliament. New candidates can also stand for election.</p>	<p><b>Be 'active citizens'</b></p> <p>This means having your say in choosing representatives who make decisions that affect your life. Citizens need to be aware of the issues that affect their lives and choose representatives who will take action on those issues.</p>
<p><b>Participate in elections that are free and fair</b></p> <p>The Australian Electoral Commission conducts federal parliamentary elections according to the provisions of the Australian Constitution and the <i>Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918</i>.</p>	<p><b>Make informed decisions</b></p> <p>This means that electors know who the candidates are in an election, and understand their viewpoint and opinions on issues, because if elected they will be making decisions on behalf of the people of Australia.</p>



## Participating in free and fair elections

Australia is a representative democracy where voters elect people to represent them in parliaments. It is important that its citizens are able to participate in free and fair elections. It is also important that we take our right to vote and participate in elections seriously as we are electing representatives to parliaments to make the policies and laws that govern us.

### How are our rights protected?

Federal elections are organised by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC). The AEC is an independent statutory body. This means that it organises and conducts elections without interference from government, political parties, businesses or other groups. It is against the law for anyone to interfere with the organising and running of elections.

The AEC protects the rights of the voter by:

- ensuring candidates follow nomination rules
- planning, setting up and controlling polling places on election day
- training staff to run polling places
- producing the ballot papers used and keeping them secure
- counting votes and announcing election results
- maintaining the electoral roll
- educating the public on Australian voting systems, enrolling to vote and how to vote correctly.



The Australian Electoral Commission ensures that everyone has an opportunity to vote in elections



# The wild residents of Blackwattle Swamp

This is a description of a NSW Legislative Council election in 1843. It was written by the manager of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, FG Brewer.

The **nomination** took place on Tuesday, June 13th at the **hustings** in front of the old Star Hotel. Mr Wentworth, Mr Bland and Captain O'Connell were three of the **candidates** standing for election. Each had his own colours. Those of Wentworth and Bland were blue, and O'Connell's were green.

Separate processions escorted each candidate to the hustings. However, the processions all reached Macquarie Place at the same time and a fierce struggle took place. The O'Connellites took over the area occupied by the **returning officer** and his staff so the Wentworth and Bland group stormed the platform. Many people were hurled to the ground.

It was so noisy that orderly speaking was impossible. Mr Cooper spoke loudly to the mob and stated his claims to election. His supporters were the wild residents of Blackwattle Swamp. They attacked anybody who had different opinions so Cooper was able to talk away for some time without interruption.

Election day finally arrived. The **polling** started at nine o'clock on June 15th, and went fairly well for the first two hours. About twelve o'clock, a mob of some 500 O'Connellites went to the **polling booth** in Gipps Ward on Flagstaff Hill, tore down the colours of Wentworth and Bland, flattened their booth and made a furious attack on their supporters, who ran away in all directions.

The polling booth was surrounded. For a while, the mob stopped anybody entering except people who wanted to vote for O'Connell. They attacked Mr John Jones, the owner of some whaling ships. He ran down to his wharf in Windmill Street and returned with a number of sailors, armed with **whale lances**. Luckily the mob had gone to another place, and the whalers were met by a unit of the mounted police, who chased them back to their ships and disarmed them.

Meanwhile, there was such a **riot** on Flagstaff Hill that the returning officer decided to put off the poll until the following morning. The same mob then

went to other polling places. It stopped outside the residence and auction rooms of Mr Samuel Lyons, who was a strong supporter of Wentworth and Bland. Large stones were hurled through the plate-glass windows of the auction rooms and smaller ones were used on the windows of the first and second floors.

The mob proceeded to Hyde Park. They chased Captain Innes, one of the police magistrates but he escaped by jumping his horse over a fence. Then there was a short battle with fists against friends of the popular candidates. The rioters were driven from the park but returned with fence palings they tore from some houses in Elizabeth Street. They attacked again until some mounted police arrived to restore order.

In the evening a group of some thirty or forty men, with as many boys, carrying O'Connell's colours, paraded some of the streets, violently assaulted a peaceable passer-by and broke a number of windows. So ended the first election day in Sydney.

(Source: Adapted from *A Century of Journalism: The Sydney Morning Herald and Its Record of Australian Life 1831-1931*, John Fairfax & Sons, Sydney, 1931)

## Glossary

**candidate** – a person running for election to a political position

**hustings** – a platform where speakers stand to address a crowd of listeners

**nomination** – somebody put forward as a suitable person for election

**polling** – what happens at a political election including the casting, recording and counting of votes

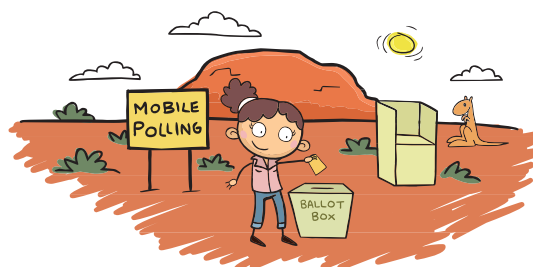
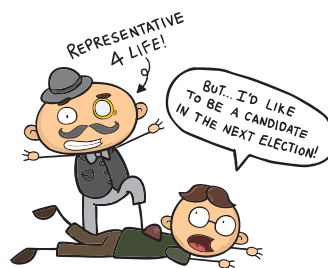
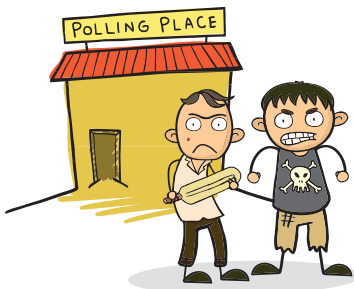
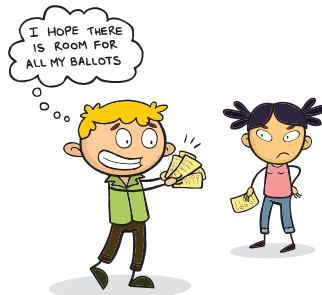
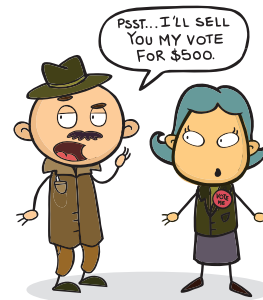
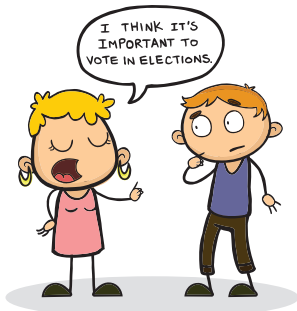
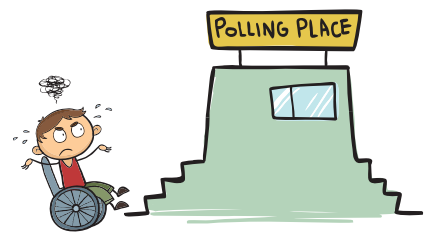
**polling booth** – a small cubicle where people can vote

**returning officer** – an election official who supervises the counting of votes and announces the result

**riot** – a violent public disturbance where people are noisy and out of control

**whale lance** – a long spear with a metal point used to kill whales

# What makes an election free and fair?



## Who makes the decisions?

	Me	I ask others to help me Who?	Others make it for me Who?
Sports team selection			
Family holiday destinations			
Style of school uniform			
Garbage collection days			
School fundraising			
Granting Australian citizenship			
Road and traffic rules			
My bedtime			
Where Australian defence forces serve			
Funding for schools			
Pet registration fees			
Postal services			
Public transport			
Local parks			
Homework			
School crossings			
Television viewing			
Movie ratings (e.g. PG, M15+)			
Amount of pocket money			
Spending pocket money			
Street tree planting			
Who can come and live in Australia			
National parks			
Seeing a movie with friends			

Can we all make the decisions?

## Qualities in a good representative

Name of person interviewed	Age group (e.g. primary student, secondary student, adult)	Gender	Three or four most important qualities of a good representative and why

## Topic 2:

# Representing everyone!

- **Investigation A:**

How do you have your say? .....p 42

Upper primary | Lower secondary

- **Investigation B:**

How are we represented? .....p 50

Upper primary | Lower secondary





# Topic 2: Representing everyone!

Australia is a representative democracy. The Australian Constitution provides the framework for our government. The democratic principles of representation are protected under the Australian Constitution. Included in the provisions of the Constitution is the right of individuals to be represented at the federal level and to participate in the choosing of representatives.

Representing everyone! provides students with the opportunity to explore how individual citizens are represented at the federal level.

## The topic contains two investigations:

- Investigation A: How do you have your say?
- Investigation B: How are we represented?

These investigations explore the federal arrangements created by the Australian Constitution, how individual citizens are represented at the federal level through different voting and electoral configurations, and the referendum process required for constitutional change.

## Introductory activity

### Resources

- Photos/illustrations/objects representing the Constitution, Parliament House, the Senate, House of Representatives, laws (Electoral Act), a referendum, elections, Member of Parliament, enrolment form, ballot paper, ballot box
- Seven large sheets of poster paper, plus seven extra sheets for summary statements

Divide the class into seven groups and allocate each group a photo and poster paper. Ask all groups the following three questions: What does this image represent? What do you know about it? What questions does this image raise?

Allow enough room for all groups to record their responses under each of the three headings.

Tell students to discuss each image and to record their responses to the questions. Rotate each group to add their responses.

Draw the class together to discuss the responses. To facilitate discussion, ask one group to read out or summarise the recorded responses from one of the posters.

Some questions to consider:

- Do we agree on what the image represents?
- What do we know about (the image)? Does anybody disagree with this information? Why? (Any incorrect or queried responses should be transferred to the 'questions raised' heading.) Is there any other information that you would like to add?
- What were the questions raised about (the image)? Can you think of others to add?

Return the posters to the groups. Using the revised information on each poster, ask students to summarise information under the heading 'What we know' on a new piece of poster paper. Ask students to group similar questions and to summarise these in two or three 'big' questions. Write these on the poster under the heading 'What we would like to know'.

Display the seven new posters. Students will be given the opportunity to revisit these posters and add information under 'What we know'.

Questions answered can be crossed off the 'What we would like to know' list.



**Figure 12:** Ballot boxes for the House of Representatives and Senate elections

## From the margin

### A vote for the environment

A large amount of cardboard equipment and paper materials is produced for each federal election. Whenever possible, the AEC uses cardboard and paper equipment manufactured from recycled materials that is in turn recycled or reused.



# Investigation A

## How do you have your say?

Recommended levels | Upper primary | Lower secondary

In this investigation students examine the federal arrangements created by the Constitution and compare the different voting and electoral configurations used to facilitate representation in the House of Representatives and the Senate, and in the referendum process.

### The investigation at a glance

<b>Background briefings for teacher reference</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Australian Electoral Commission; Constitution; electoral division; full preferential voting; House of Representatives; referendum; Senate</li></ul>
<b>Suggested classroom teaching time</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Activity 1:</b> How are we represented in Federal Parliament? (40 minutes)</li><li><b>Activity 2:</b> How are members of Parliament elected? (40 minutes)</li><li><b>Activity 3:</b> Are there other ways to have your say? (40 minutes)</li><li><b>Activity 4:</b> How do referendums help decision-making? (80 minutes)</li></ul>
<b>Indicators of student achievement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Compare voting procedures for the House of Representatives and the Senate</li><li>Understand the differences between Senate and House of Representatives electorates</li><li>Explain how the citizens of Australia can alter the Constitution by voting in a referendum</li></ul>



Figure 13: A busy polling place on election day

### From the margin

#### Swinging voters

Swinging voters do not hang from the trees or a trapeze! These are voters who tend to vote for different parties at different elections. These voters are in a minority as most people tend to vote for the same party at each election.

## Activity 1

# How are we represented in Federal Parliament?

### Focus questions

- How many members represent us in Federal Parliament?
- What is the distribution of members of the House of Representatives and the Senate across all the states and territories?
- What are the similarities and differences in representation for the House of Representatives and the Senate between each state and territory?

### Resources

- AEC, [electorates maps](http://www.aec.gov.au/Electorates/maps.htm): [www.aec.gov.au/Electorates/maps.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/Electorates/maps.htm)
- AEC, [elections results map](http://www.aec.gov.au/Elections/federal_elections/2013/files/results-map-2013.pdf): [www.aec.gov.au/Elections/federal\\_elections/2013/files/results-map-2013.pdf](http://www.aec.gov.au/Elections/federal_elections/2013/files/results-map-2013.pdf)
- Parliament of Australia, a [list of members](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Members) of the House of Representatives: [www.aph.gov.au/Senators\\_and\\_Members/Members](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Members)
- Parliament of Australia, a [list of senators](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Senators) of the Senate: [www.aph.gov.au/Senators\\_and\\_Members/Senators](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Senators)
- Parliamentary Education Office, [understand our Parliament](http://www.peo.gov.au/understand-our-parliament/): [www.peo.gov.au/understand-our-parliament/](http://www.peo.gov.au/understand-our-parliament/)



### Gathering information

Explain to students that Australia is a representative democracy. This means that its citizens choose representatives to make the laws on their behalf. Through provisions made in the Australian Constitution, there are two houses in Federal Parliament: the House of Representatives and the Senate. These houses make the laws that govern Australia. The members of both houses are elected by the citizens of Australia.

Provide students with web addresses, election results maps or hard-copy information showing electorates and members of both houses of parliament. Ask students to investigate the number of seats in the House of Representatives and the Senate. Instruct students to record their findings in a table.



### Identifying and analysing

Group students in pairs or small groups and ask them to analyse their findings for commonalities and differences between the states and territories for both the House of Representatives and the Senate, and to record their findings.

For example: NSW has ... members in the House of Representatives. South Australia has ... There are different numbers of members for the House of Representatives for each state and territory. However, each state and each territory has the same number of senators. All states have 12 representatives and each territory has two representatives in the Senate. Although each state has a different number of members in the House of Representatives, they have the same number of senators.



### Presenting findings

Draw the class together and discuss these findings. Summarise students' findings on poster paper or the board.

Ask students to question and hypothesise about the reasons for commonalities and differences. Add these questions and hypotheses to the summary.

## Activity 2

# How are members of Parliament elected?

### Focus questions

- How are members elected to the House of Representatives?
- How are senators elected to the Senate?
- How do the voting systems and electoral configurations differ and what are the similarities?

### Resources

- Multiple class numbers list for year levels or whole school (depending on size of school)
- **Animation: Making your vote count**



### Gathering information

Explain to students that both houses of parliament use full preferential voting to elect representatives.

View the **animation 'Making your vote count'** with students. Have students draw a flow chart that explains the process. Discuss with students why preferential voting might be considered more democratic than first-past-the-post voting. Explain to students that the houses differ in that the House of Representatives is a single-member system and the Senate is a multi-member system. These arrangements have been set out in the Australian Constitution. The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) conducts elections for both houses.

The House of Representatives is often called the 'people's house'. The 151 members of the House of Representatives are chosen from each of the 151 electorates in Australia. These electorates are population based, and within each state or territory electorates have similar numbers of voters. For a member to be elected they must receive an absolute majority of the formal vote, meaning over 50%. These may have been gained by a candidate as the result of first preference votes only or after the distribution of further rounds of voter preferences.

Provide students with lists indicating the number of students in each class at a year level or in whole-school year levels. Using the school as an analogy, explain to students that each class will be a single-member 'electorate'.

Instruct students to work out how many votes a candidate would need to be elected. For example, a class of 24 students as an electorate would require a candidate to receive 13 votes to become the member for that electorate. In a class of 21 electors, 11 votes would be required for election, assuming that all class members vote formally. Students can record their results in a table like the one below.

Class	Number of electors	Votes required by candidate

Check student responses.

Explain to students that each state and territory is an electorate in the Senate and voters choose senators to represent their state or territory.

The Senate is often called the 'states' house'. Each state, regardless of its size or population, is represented by the same number of senators to ensure equal representation.

### From the margin

#### Donkey vote

Some voters number the candidates in the order that they appear on the ballot paper, not because it reflects their real choice, but because it is the easiest way to cast a formal vote. This is called a 'donkey vote'. Until 1983, candidates were listed in alphabetical order on ballot papers. This gave candidates at the top the 'donkey vote' advantage – estimated to be 2–3% of the vote. (Jaensch, D, *Election: How and why Australia votes*, Allen & Unwin, 1995, p 47)



The boundaries of each state or territory form an electorate and people voting in those eight electorates elect a group of people to represent them. There are 12 senators for each state; the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory are each represented by two senators. There are 76 senators in the Senate.

A proportional system of representation applies to the Senate. Under this system candidates must gain a specific proportion of the electorate's (the state or territory) votes – a quota – to be elected.

The quota is worked out by dividing the total number of formal ballot papers by one more than the number of vacancies to be filled and by adding 1 to the result:

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

For example: Three senators are to be elected and the total number of formal votes for the state is 2,400. Therefore the quota is:

$$\frac{2,400}{3 + 1} + 1 = 601$$

So for a candidate to be elected as a senator they must receive 601 votes.

This may be through first preferences or by a complicated distribution of preferences until a candidate has received the quota.

Demonstrate this to the students and also allow them to again view the [animation 'Making your vote count'](#).

Using the selected lists, inform students that the whole year level or school (whichever was used in the first section of this activity) will be the electorate (state) and that three representatives need to be elected.

Explain that other schools (states or territories) would form other electorates.

Using the quota formula, ask students to work out how many votes each candidate would require to be elected. Assume that all members of the electorate will vote formally.

Record as follows:

Number of electors	Votes required by candidate

Check students' responses.



## Identifying and analysing

Discuss how the different electoral configurations of the same population provide us with representation. Are you represented in both systems? How are you represented? Review the previous discussion and hypotheses in Activity 1.

Were the questions answered and were the hypotheses correct? What needs revising?

Summarise discussion points.



## Presenting findings

Instruct students (in pairs or small groups) to visually represent the electoral configurations of the school – as single-member electorates and as a multi-member electorate. For example:

Twelve classes, 12 single-member electorates, with 12 representatives; total number of students in 12 classes as one multi-member electorate with three representatives. Allow students to be as creative as they wish, as long as the information is accurate and able to be interpreted by others. Display visual representations.

Senate Ballot Paper  
State - Election of 6 Senators

You may vote in one of two ways

Either

**Above the line**  
By numbering at least 6 of these boxes in the order of your choice (with number 1 as your first choice).

Or

**Below the line**  
By numbering at least 12 of these boxes in the order of your choice (with number 1 as your first choice).

The ballot paper shows 12 columns for candidates, grouped by party (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L) and an 'UNGROUPED' column. Each column has a box for the candidate's name and a box for the voter's number. The 'Below the line' section is marked as a sample.

Figure 14: A sample ballot paper for the Australian Senate

### Activity 3

## Are there other ways to have your say?

#### Focus questions

- What is a constitution?
- How is the Australian Constitution changed?
- What is a referendum?
- What voting system is used in referendums?

#### Resources

- **AEC, Referendums:** [www.aec.gov.au/Elections/referendums/](http://www.aec.gov.au/Elections/referendums/)
- **BLM 1** Referendums – double majority
- **BLM 2** Referendum maps of Australia
- **Animation: Changing the Constitution**
- **Interactive quiz 1: Referendums – Do you get it?**



Figure 15: Counting ballots in the 1999 referendum



#### Gathering information

Provide students with a copy of **BLM 1**.

Show students the **animation 'Changing the Constitution'**. Discuss with students the procedures outlined in the Australian Constitution; the vote in parliament; the 'double majority'; and that in a referendum voters write 'Yes' or 'No' to the proposed alteration.

Discuss the information on **BLM 1**. Check for understanding by asking, for example, if a referendum is passed if 45% of the national population voted 'Yes', and the majority of voters voted 'Yes' in two states. Give a range of examples, asking students to justify their responses.



#### Identifying and analysing

Provide students with **BLM 2**.

Instruct students to use information from the AEC website on referendums from 1901 to 1999 to research three constitutional referendums. Information could include proposed alterations, which states voted 'Yes/No', national 'Yes/No' votes and whether the proposed alterations were passed. Students could graph the 'Yes/No' votes by national and state results. Ensure that students choose a range of referendums. Present information pictorially on **BLM 2** with accompanying statements.



#### Presenting findings

Cut out the maps of the completed **BLM 2** and ask students to classify each example under the headings of 'Approved – Yes' and 'Not approved – No'. Display and discuss these questions:

- Is it easy to change the Constitution?
- How important are the states in such decisions?
- Is it fair to require a double majority?
- What are the safeguards provided by a double majority?

Summarise discussion points.

## Activity 4

# How do referendums help decision-making?

### Focus questions

- How does the referendum process allow for decision-making?
- What type of representation does the referendum process facilitate?
- How does this representation differ from the House of Representatives and the Senate?

### Resources

- [BLM 3 Representation](#)
- Ballot boxes; ballot paper with the proposed change and provision to write: 'Yes' or 'No'
- Class lists to use as electoral rolls
- [Interactive quiz 1: Referendums – Do you get it?](#)
- [Interactive voting challenge – What do you know?](#)



### Gathering information

Inform students that they will participate in a referendum.

Provide a scenario, either the example provided or one decided by the students on an issue of their choice. Possible scenarios could be based on the desirability of school uniforms, privileges for final-year students or another school-related issue.

### Scenario example

The School Council has decided that they would like to introduce a school blazer which will have to be worn by all students to and from school. They believe that this will help profile the school in the area, create uniformity and look neater than the current mixture of jumpers, windcheaters and spray jackets being worn. Others believe that the introduction of the blazer will impose too great a cost on parents, especially for those with students in the final years of school. Blazer cleaning is costly and time consuming. Dirty blazers would not look good. Some believe that part of the charm of the school is that students have some choice in what they wear.

The introduction of the school blazer requires a change to the school uniform rules.

The school believes it is important for the school community to be involved in decision-making and has decided to hold a referendum. The question is: 'A school blazer will be worn by all students to and from school. Yes or No?'

Ask students to summarise reasons for and against the proposal. They may add their own reasons as well. Discuss and summarise all responses on large poster paper. The paper will serve the role of the pamphlets that are distributed to all voters to help them make an informed decision.

Divide the students into five groups. It is not necessary for groups to be even as states and territories do not have even populations either. Four groups will be states and one group will represent a territory.

### From the margin

#### Taking polling to the people

Early voting is available for people who are not able to get to a polling place on election day. Early voting centres are located:

- in or near AEC offices around the country
- in remote areas with mobile polling teams
- at airports for Australians travelling interstate or overseas
- at special sporting and cultural events depending on the time of the election.

#### Activity 4 (Continued)

Ask the groups to choose a name for their state or territory. Label each ballot box with the chosen name.

Instruct students on how to participate in a referendum by following the AEC procedures as outlined in '[Running an election in your school](#)' – highlight compulsory voting and the secret ballot. The procedures for running an election and a referendum are similar, with the same rules applying to the franchise, electoral roll, secret ballot and polling officials. The procedures differ in the design of the ballot paper and the count.

Discuss with students what will be required for the referendum to pass. That is, three out of the four states will need to have voted 'Yes', plus a majority of the whole class will have to have voted 'Yes'. Display visually to reinforce the concept.

The ballot paper needs to state: 'A school blazer will be worn by all students to and from school.' Students need to write 'Yes' or 'No' in the square.



### Identifying and analysing

Allow each state or territory to vote and place their ballot paper in their respective ballot box. Count the formal votes separately for each state and record the results. Record the states with a majority of 'Yes' votes. Is there a majority of states with a 'Yes' vote? Now recount the states' votes together and include the territory's votes. Has a majority of voters in the class voted 'Yes'? Record the results on a poster showing 'State' and 'National' votes and the result.



### Making connections

Drawing on information from previous activities, discuss with students how citizens are represented in our federal system and how they can have their say.

Possible prompt questions:

- Who represents us in Federal Parliament?
- How do we choose these representatives?
- What types of electorates and voting systems facilitate this representation?
- How do we have our say in changing the Constitution?
- Do we have a direct or indirect say in the proposed alterations to the Constitution?
- How does this differ from other ways of having our say?

Provide students with a copy of [BLM 3](#) to complete based on this discussion. Also refer students to the [Interactive quiz 1: 'Referendums – Do you get it?'](#) and ['Interactive voting challenge – What do you know?'](#).



### Presenting findings

Draw the class together and combine information from individual responses to create a class summary. This will also provide an opportunity to clarify understandings.

Ask students to provide summary statements about what they have learnt in this investigation, for example: 'Both the House of Representatives and the Senate use the full preferential voting system to elect representatives'; 'The Senate and the House of Representatives have different electoral configurations'; 'Australian citizens have the opportunity to change the Constitution through the referendum process'.

Write statements and display findings. Instruct students (individual or in pairs) to design a pamphlet outlining the features of the different systems.



## Going further

### Focus questions

- How are citizens represented in Australia?
- What are the relationships between the Constitution, Parliament, referendums, electoral systems and electoral configurations, and the voter?
- How do the features of Australian democracy assist to represent us?

Display images used in the introductory activity and posters produced in the investigation. Revisit the original questions and check how they have been answered during the investigation.

Divide the class into small groups and ask each group to design a concept map showing the relationship between the Constitution, Federal Parliament, the House of Representatives, the Senate, referendums, elections, voting systems, members of parliament and Australian citizens. Encourage students to think about how they want to present concept maps; for instance, as illustrations, labels, sentences or computer graphics.

Display maps and allow each group to speak about their concept map, explaining reasons for placement and links. Further discussion could take place around the commonalities and differences of each map.



# Investigation B

## How are we represented?

Recommended levels | Upper primary | Lower secondary

In this investigation students research the history of arrangements created by the Constitution and the history of referendums in Australia as a means of changing the Constitution.

### The investigation at a glance

#### Background briefings for teacher reference

- Australian Electoral Commission; Constitution; democracy; electoral division; Federation; full preferential voting; House of Representatives; referendum; Senate

#### Suggested classroom teaching time

- **Activity 1:** Who rules? (80 minutes)
- **Activity 2:** How does the Australian Constitution influence our lives? (120 minutes)
- **Activity 3:** How can we change the Constitution? (80 minutes)

#### Indicators of student achievement

- Describe the ways in which rules help society to function in a fair and orderly way
- Identify the arguments for and against the federation of the Australian colonies
- Understand the way the Australian Constitution can be changed by a referendum
- Explain the role of the Australian Electoral Commission in administering the referendum process



## Activity 1

# Who rules?

### Focus questions

- How do rules allow us to function in society?
- How and why are rules formalised?
- What is a constitution?

### Resources

- *Alice's adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll
- Multiple copies of the school rules
- Multiple copies of a constitution, for example, from a sports club



### Gathering information

Begin by reading chapter 8 'The Queen's croquet-ground' from *Alice's adventures in Wonderland*. Set the scene by reminding students of the story. Some students will have knowledge of the book and could help set the context.

In discussion with students include the following questions:

- What happened in the chapter?
- Why was the croquet game so chaotic? What made it chaotic?
- Were there any rules? Were they followed?
- How did the Queen behave? Was her behaviour consistent?
- Did the playing cards have any say?
- Could you live in a world like this? What would be the problems?

Pose the question: 'Why are rules important in a society?' Record student responses on the board or poster paper.



### Identifying and analysing

Instruct students to list examples of rules they follow in their everyday life. Ask whether they are informal (general consensus) or formally written, and the reasons for the rules. For example: classroom (hands up to ask questions, to allow everyone to participate, to be heard); community group, such as sports club (getting to practice on time, doesn't waste others' time, respects others). List this information under the headings in the table below.

Draw the class together and ask students to share their examples. Record examples on a class poster and display.



### Making connections

Group students into pairs or small groups and provide each with a copy of the school rules and the selected constitution. Instruct students to analyse the documents according to their purpose, who they are directed to, areas covered, mechanisms for change, format and language.

Draw the class together. Discuss the analysis and record responses under the table categories.



## Presenting findings

As a class, compare the recorded information, discussing commonalities and differences between documents. Summarise findings in the following statements:

- Rules provide .....
- A constitution provides .....

Display the statements.

	Rules	Formal/Informal	Reasons
<b>Friends</b>			
<b>Home</b>			
<b>Classroom</b>			
<b>School</b>			
<b>Community groups</b>			

## Activity 2

# How does the Australian Constitution influence our lives?

### Focus questions

- How has our past influenced the Australian Constitution of today?
- How does the Australian Constitution provide the framework for our society?
- What are the federal arrangements provided by the Constitution?
- Why is it important to protect state rights and how are they protected?

### Resources

- [BLM 4](#) Provisions of the Constitution



### Gathering information

Explain to students that the six British colonies of Australia joined to form the Commonwealth of Australia, with the colonies becoming the six states of the new Federation. The Australian Federation was proclaimed on 1 January 1901. The colonies had been self-governing, making laws for their own territories. In the 1890s there had been much debate about whether the colonies should join together or remain separate.

Different colonies had different opinions; people within colonies had different viewpoints. There was no uniform point of view, with a range of reasons on both sides of the argument.

Throughout the 1890s debate raged. A series of conventions was held to debate these issues, and finally a draft constitution was agreed on. The draft constitution was submitted to the people of each colony in referendums. The people of the six colonies voted 'Yes' to federate under the Australian Constitution. When agreed to by the people, the Constitution was taken to the British Parliament. Queen Victoria signed the *Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act* into law. This Act took effect on 1 January 1901.

Divide the class into two groups. Explain that one group will be taking the position of those opposed to Federation and the other for Federation. Encourage sub-groups, such as defence and trade, to research information on points of argument. These 'experts' can present the research on behalf of the larger group. Ask students to nominate who in their group will present each argument. Responses to arguments can be by anyone in the team.



**Figure 16:** The *Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act* was passed by the Parliament of the United Kingdom in 1900, during the reign of Queen Victoria



## Identifying and analysing

Select two teams of four members each to argue opposing views. Use the following modified debating model to debate the issue. Numbers indicate the order in which speakers present their case.

In favour of federation (affirmative case)	Against federation (negative case)
1. First speaker presents first argument in favour	2. First speaker presents first argument against
3. Second speaker presents second argument in favour	4. Second speaker presents second argument against
5. Third speaker presents third argument in favour	6. Third speaker presents third argument against
7. Fourth speaker rebuts the opposing side's arguments and sums up the arguments in favour of federation	8. Fourth speaker rebuts the opposing side's arguments and sums up the arguments against federation

The remainder of the class can take notes during the debate and score the teams on criteria such as content, relevance and performance of individual speakers. A show of hands at the end can be used to decide which team presented the better case. Alternatively, the teacher may use the board to record points made during the debate and adjudicate the result.

Follow up by discussing the importance of the colonies maintaining their voices in the new federation.

Instruct students to complete the following table using information from the previous debate.

Advantages	Disadvantages

Draw students' attention to the fact that the colonies' respective franchises applied in the Federation referendums. This meant that in South Australia and Western Australia men *and* women over the age of 21 could vote. Women in Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania and Queensland did not have a voice. With some exceptions, Indigenous Australians also did not have a vote.



## Making connections

Group students in pairs. Provide students with a copy of [BLM 4](#). Using information from [BLM 4](#), instruct students to summarise in their own words the provisions outlined. Draw the class together and discuss provisions made under the Constitution, for example, federal arrangements, the bicameral system, terms of office, state and federal responsibilities, and division of powers. Also discuss with students why they think the people of the colonies were willing to accept the draft constitution. How were their rights protected? Summarise discussion points.



## Presenting findings

Organise students into pairs or small groups. Instruct them to draw on information from the debate and the provisions of the Constitution to present a persuasive case for adopting the Australian Constitution. This could be presented orally, as a role-play or in graphic form (such as a cartoon or poster).

## From the margin

### The Senate

When the Constitution was being drawn up, the Senate was designed to represent the states equally. This was to stop states with large populations – such as New South Wales and Victoria – dominating states with small populations, such as Tasmania and South Australia.

### Activity 3

## How can we change the Constitution?

#### Focus questions

- How are state and federal rights protected under our Constitution?
- How does the referendum process allow for both the states and the nation as a whole to have a say?
- How does the Australian Constitution remain relevant in contemporary society? What is the role of the AEC in the referendum process?

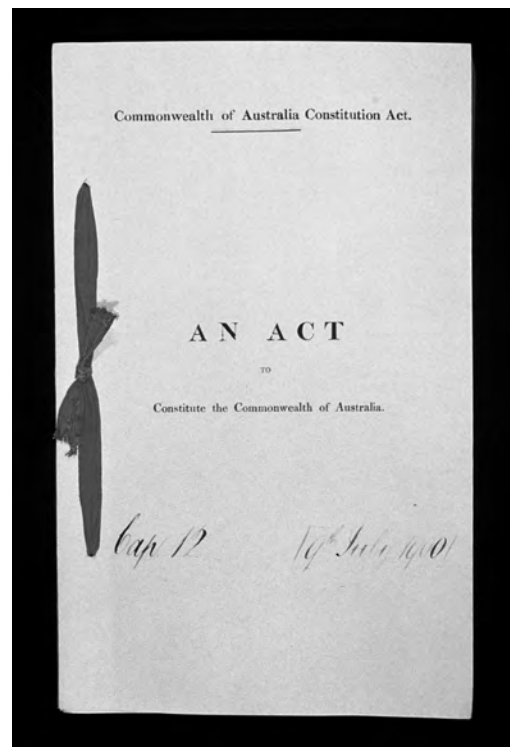
#### Resources

- Parliament of Australia, **The Australian Constitution**: [www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Senate/Powers\\_practice\\_n\\_procedures/Constitution](http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Senate/Powers_practice_n_procedures/Constitution)
- **AEC, Referendum dates and results**: [www.aec.gov.au/Elections/referendums/Referendum\\_Dates\\_and\\_Results.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/Elections/referendums/Referendum_Dates_and_Results.htm)
- Australian Politics website, **1999 Republic referendum**: [www.australianpolitics.com/topics/republic](http://www.australianpolitics.com/topics/republic)
- Parliamentary Education Office, **Referendums and plebiscites**: [www.peo.gov.au/understand-our-parliament/having-your-say/elections-and-voting/referendums-and-plebiscites/](http://www.peo.gov.au/understand-our-parliament/having-your-say/elections-and-voting/referendums-and-plebiscites/)
- Parliament of Australia, **Constitutional Referenda in Australia**: [www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/rp/rp9900/2000RP02](http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp9900/2000RP02)
- **Interactive Quiz 1: Referendums – Do you get it?**
- **Interactive Quiz 2: The Constitution – Are you a whiz?**

#### Gathering information

Explain to students that the Australian Constitution is a living document. Display a copy of the Constitution for students and give them the opportunity to examine it. The Constitution of Australia was written over 100 years ago, and society has changed dramatically since then. The writers of the Constitution provided a mechanism for change, to deal with situations that were unforeseen at the time the Constitution was written. Section 128 of the Constitution provides the framework for changes to the Constitution. Only the citizens of Australia can alter the Constitution, through the process of a referendum. Since Federation 44 proposals for constitutional change have been put to the Australian electors but only eight have been approved.

For a referendum to be successful and become law, a double majority of electors must approve the proposed change: a national majority of electors from all states and territories combined, and a majority of electors in a majority of states (at least four of the six states).



**Figure 17:** Australia's Constitution



### Activity 3 (Continued)

In 1999 two proposed laws to change the Constitution were put to eligible voters.

One was to alter the Constitution to establish the Commonwealth of Australia as a republic and the other was to alter the Constitution to insert a preamble.

Divide the class into six groups; each group is to research one of the following:

- The 'Yes' position for Constitution Alteration (Establishment of Republic)
- The 'No' position for Constitution Alteration (Establishment of Republic)
- The 'Yes' position for Constitution Alteration (Preamble)
- The 'No' position for Constitution Alteration (Preamble)
- The results of each of the referendums
- The role of the AEC in conducting the 1999 referendums

Explain to students that they will be the 'experts' in their area and will be presenting to the rest of the class. Groups may choose the medium of presenting the information. This could include role-plays, speeches, Yes/No posters, diagrams, slide presentations and flow charts.

### Identifying and analysing

Drawing on information presented by each group, discuss the following questions with students:

- How do referendums give Australian citizens a voice?
- What is the importance of the double majority? Why do you think the double majority is required?
- How does our system of referendums protect our Constitution?
- Do you think it is too difficult to change the Constitution?
- Can you think of other ways that would allow us to change our Constitution in a fair and responsible way?
- What problems do you think could arise if referendums were not administered by an independent statutory body?

Have students use **Interactive Quiz 1: 'Referendums – Do you get it?'** and **Interactive Quiz 2: 'The Constitution – Are you a whiz?'** to test their knowledge of this topic.

### Presenting findings

Instruct pairs of students to design a 'report card' to evaluate and assess the Australian Constitution based on agreed rubrics. They might consider such criteria as relevance in contemporary Australia, mechanisms for change, protection of state and federal rights, and representation. Provide an opportunity for students to present their 'Australian Constitution report cards' to the class.

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



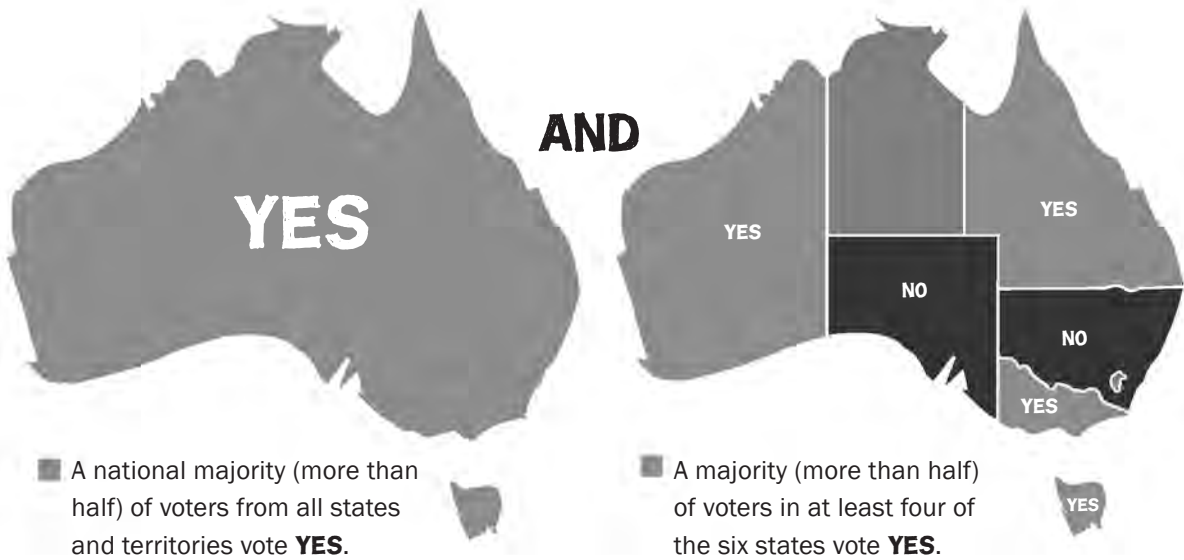
Figure 18: Promoting in the referendum in 1999



# Referendums – double majority

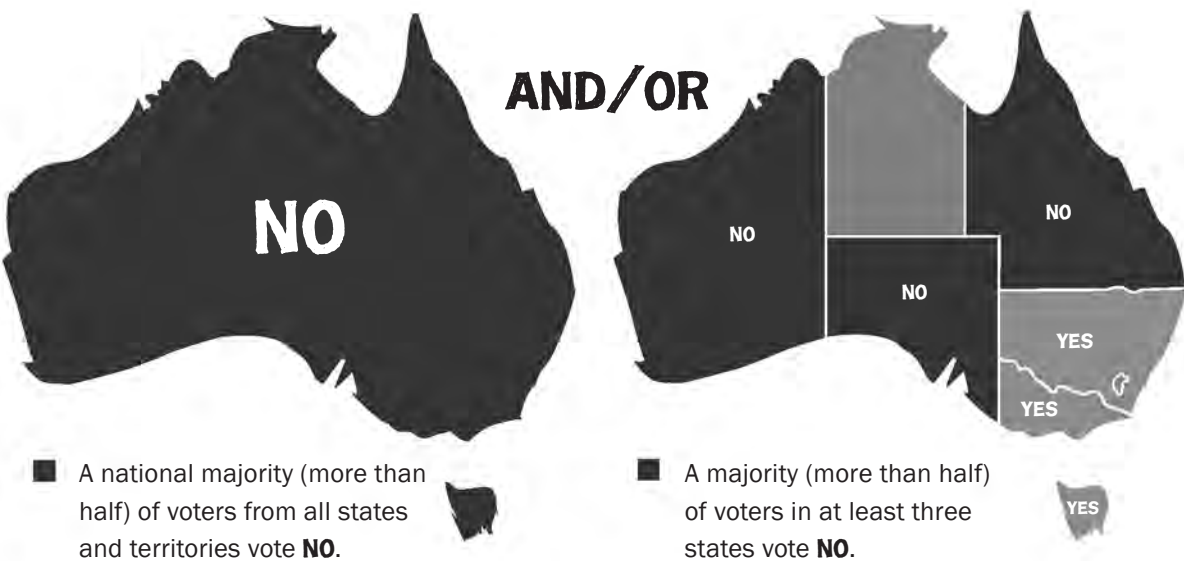
To change the Australian Constitution, each proposed alteration must be approved by a double majority of voters in a referendum.

## A referendum is passed when:



■ The votes of people living in the ACT, the NT and any of Australia's external territories count towards the national majority only.

## A referendum is NOT passed when:



# Referendum maps of Australia



Proposed alteration: .....

.....

Referendum date: .....

National vote: 'Yes' votes ..... 'No' votes .....

Number of states with majority 'Yes' votes: .....

Was the referendum successful? .....



Proposed alteration: .....

.....

Referendum date: .....

National vote: 'Yes' votes ..... 'No' votes .....

Number of states with majority 'Yes' votes: .....

Was the referendum successful? .....



Proposed alteration: .....

.....

Referendum date: .....

National vote: 'Yes' votes ..... 'No' votes .....

Number of states with majority 'Yes' votes: .....

Was the referendum successful? .....

# Representation

Interesting facts I learnt about the Senate:
Interesting facts I learnt about the House of Representatives:
Interesting facts I learnt about referendums:

# Provisions of the Constitution

## Chapter 1: The Parliament

### Section 1: Legislative power

The legislative power of the Commonwealth shall be vested in a federal parliament, which shall consist of the Queen, a Senate and a House of Representatives, and which is hereinafter called 'The Parliament', or 'The Parliament of the Commonwealth'.

### Section 7: The Senate

The Senate shall be composed of senators for each state, directly chosen by the people of the state, voting, until the parliament otherwise provides, as one electorate ...

Until the parliament otherwise provides there shall be six senators for each original state. The parliament may make laws increasing or diminishing the number of senators for each state, but so that equal representation of the several original states shall be maintained and that no original state shall have less than six senators.

The senators shall be chosen for a term of six years, and the names of the senators chosen for each state shall be certified by the Governor to the Governor-General.

### Section 8: Qualification of electors

The qualification of electors of Senators shall be in each state that which is prescribed by this Constitution, or by the parliament, as the qualification for electors of members of the House of Representatives; but in the choosing of Senators each elector shall vote only once.

### Section 15: Casual vacancies

If the place of a senator becomes vacant before the expiration of his term of service, the Houses of Parliament of the state for which he was chosen ... shall choose a person to hold the place until the expiration of the term ...

Where a vacancy has ... occurred in the place of a senator chosen by the people of a state and, at the time when he was so chosen, he was publicly recognized by a particular political party as being an endorsed candidate of that party ... a person chosen or appointed under this section ... shall, unless there is no member of that party available to be chosen or appointed, be a member of that party ...

### Section 24: Constitution of House of Representatives

The House of Representatives shall be composed of members directly chosen by the people of the Commonwealth, and the number of such members shall be, as nearly as practicable, twice the number of the senators ...

### Section 27: Alteration of number of members

Subject to this Constitution, the parliament may make laws for increasing or diminishing the number of members of the House of Representatives.

# Provisions of the Constitution

## Section 28: Duration of House of Representatives

Every House of Representatives shall continue for three years from the first meeting of the House, and no longer, but may be sooner dissolved by the Governor-General.

## Section 30: Qualification of electors

Until the Parliament otherwise provides, the qualification of electors of members of the House of Representatives shall be in each State that which is prescribed by law of the State as the qualification of electors of the more numerous House of Parliament of that State; but in the choosing of members each elector shall only vote once.

## Section 34: Qualifications of members

Until the Parliament otherwise provides, the qualifications of a member of the House of Representatives shall be as follows:

- i** He must be of the full age of twenty-one years, and must be an elector entitled to vote at the election of members of the House of Representatives, or a person qualified to become such elector, and must have been for three years at the least a resident within the limits of the Commonwealth as existing at the time when he is chosen;
- ii** He must be a subject of the Queen, either natural-born or for at least five years naturalized under law of the United Kingdom, or of a Colony, which has become a State, or of the Commonwealth, or of a State.

## Section 51: Legislative powers of the Parliament

The Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have power to make laws for the peace, order, and good government of the Commonwealth with respect to:

- i** Trade and commerce with other countries, and among the States ...
- v** Postal, telegraphic, telephonic, and other like services;
- vi** The naval and military defence of the Commonwealth and of the several States, and the control of the forces to execute and maintain the laws of the Commonwealth ...
- xii** Currency, coinage, and legal tender ...
- xv** Weights and measures ...
- xxi** Marriage ...
- xxiii** Invalid and old-age pensions ...
- xxiv** The service and execution throughout the Commonwealth of the civil and criminal process and the judgments of the courts of the States ...
- xxvi** The people of any race, for whom it is deemed necessary to make special laws;
- xxvii** Immigration and emigration ...
- xxix** External Affairs ...

# Provisions of the Constitution

## Chapter 3: Judicature

### Section 71: Judicial power and Courts

The judicial power of the Commonwealth shall be vested in a Federal Supreme Court, to be called the High Court of Australia, and in such other federal courts as the Parliament creates, and in such other courts as it invests with federal jurisdiction. The High Court shall consist of a Chief Justice, and so many other Justices, not less than two, as the Parliament prescribes.

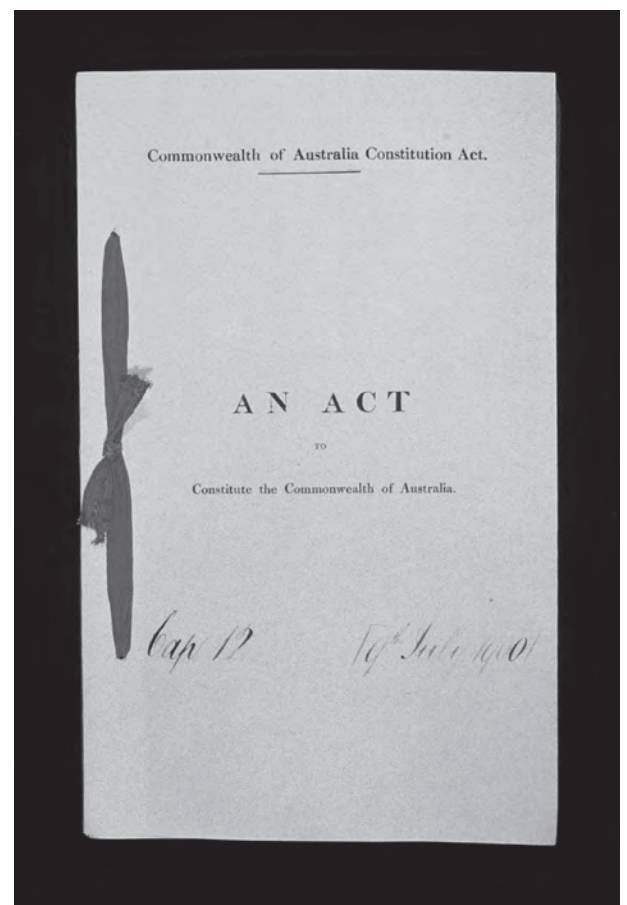
## Chapter 8: Alteration

### Section 128: Mode of altering the Constitution

This Constitution shall not be altered except in the following manner: The proposed law for alteration thereof must be passed by an absolute majority of each House of the Parliament, and not less than two nor more than six months after its passage through both Houses the proposed law shall be submitted to each State and Territory to the electors qualified to vote for the election of members of the House of Representatives ...

And if in a majority of the States a majority of the electors voting approve the proposed law, and if a majority of all electors voting also approve the proposed law, it shall be presented to the Governor-General for the Queen's assent ...

Note: Only selected provisions of the Constitution are reproduced here.



Australia's Constitution



## Topic 3:

# What's your vote worth?

- **Investigation A:**  
How and why do Australians vote? .....p 65  
Lower secondary | Middle secondary
- **Investigation B:**  
How do electorates change over time? .....p 72  
Lower secondary | Middle secondary



**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?

**Recommended levels** | Lower secondary | Middle secondary

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

### Focus questions

- Who can vote in Australia?
- What are the arguments for and against compulsory voting?
- How do citizens enrol to vote?

### Resources

- Australian Electoral Commission, Enrolment: [www.aec.gov.au/enrol/](http://www.aec.gov.au/enrol/)
- Animation: History of voting
- Interactive: The history of voting game
- BLM 2 Compulsory voting



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

### Focus questions

- What is a political party?
- What is party policy?
- What role do political parties play in democratic elections?

### Resources

- [BLM 3](#) Parties, policies and elections
- Websites of parties and independents represented in parliament
- Parliament of Australia, [senators and members](#): [www.aph.gov.au/Senators\\_and\\_Members](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members)



### 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](http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/House_of_Representatives)
- Parliament of Australia, **Senate**: [www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Senate/](http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Senate/)
- Australian Electoral Commission, **Counting the votes**: [www.aec.gov.au/voting/counting/](http://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 of 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

### Focus questions

- What voting systems are used in the states and territories?
- How voter-friendly are websites with information on voting?

### Resources

- **BLM 5** States' and territories' voting systems
- **Electoral Council of Australia:** [www.ecanz.gov.au](http://www.ecanz.gov.au)
- State and territory electoral authority websites:
  - **ACT:** [www.elections.act.gov.au](http://www.elections.act.gov.au)
  - **NSW:** [www.elections.nsw.gov.au](http://www.elections.nsw.gov.au)
  - **NT:** [www.ntec.nt.gov.au/elections](http://www.ntec.nt.gov.au/elections)
  - **Qld:** [www.ecq.qld.gov.au](http://www.ecq.qld.gov.au)
  - **SA:** [www.ecsa.sa.gov.au](http://www.ecsa.sa.gov.au)
  - **Tas:** [www.tec.tas.gov.au](http://www.tec.tas.gov.au)
  - **Vic:** [www.vec.vic.gov.au](http://www.vec.vic.gov.au)
  - **WA:** [www.waec.wa.gov.au](http://www.waec.wa.gov.au)

### 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?

**Recommended levels** | Lower secondary | Middle secondary

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

### Focus questions

- What is an electorate?
- What are the characteristics of our electorate?
- What is taken into account when determining electoral boundaries?

### Resources

- AEC, [Electorates](http://www.aec.gov.au/Electorates/): [www.aec.gov.au/Electorates/](http://www.aec.gov.au/Electorates/)
- AEC, [Monthly enrolment statistics by state and division](http://www.aec.gov.au/Enrolling_to_vote/Enrolment_stats/gazetted/index.htm): [www.aec.gov.au/Enrolling\\_to\\_vote/Enrolment\\_stats/gazetted/index.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/Enrolling_to_vote/Enrolment_stats/gazetted/index.htm)



### 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

<b>Inner metropolitan</b>	Situated in capital cities and consisting of well-established built-up suburbs
<b>Outer metropolitan</b>	Situated in capital cities and containing large areas of recent suburban expansion
<b>Provincial</b>	Outside capital cities, but with a majority of enrolment in major provincial cities
<b>Rural</b>	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.

## Activity 1 (Continued)



### 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?



### 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

## 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.



## Activity 2

# Redistributions

### Focus questions

- What is a redistribution?
- When do redistributions occur?
- How do redistributions contribute to fair and equal representation?

### Resources

- [BLM 6](#) Federal redistributions
- [Animation: Redistributions](#)
- AEC, [Federal Redistributions](http://www.aec.gov.au/Electorates/Redistributions/): [www.aec.gov.au/Electorates/Redistributions/](http://www.aec.gov.au/Electorates/Redistributions/)

## 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.



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

## 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](http://www.aec.gov.au/profiles/index.htm)
- [Farm Online](#) (portal for rural newspapers): [www.farmonline.com.au](http://www.farmonline.com.au)
- [Newspapers](#): [www.onlinenewspapers.com](http://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.

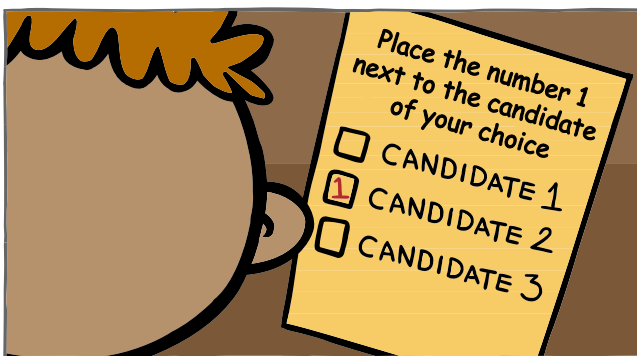
Discuss and record your answers:

- 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
<b>Total</b>	<b>24 votes</b>

- 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.

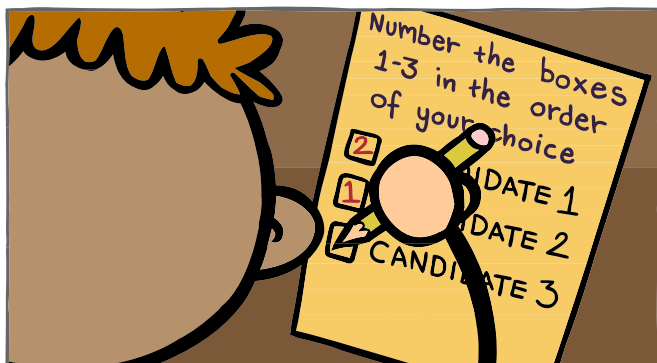
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of this method of voting?

## 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
<b>Total</b>	<b>26 votes</b>

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
<b>Total</b>	<b>26 votes</b>

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](http://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](http://www.aec.gov.au/About_AEC/Publications/electoral_pocketbook/2019/2019-electoral-pocketbook.pdf): [www.aec.gov.au/About\\_AEC/Publications/electoral\\_pocketbook/2019/2019-electoral-pocketbook.pdf](http://www.aec.gov.au/About_AEC/Publications/electoral_pocketbook/2019/2019-electoral-pocketbook.pdf))

#### House of Representatives election result 2019

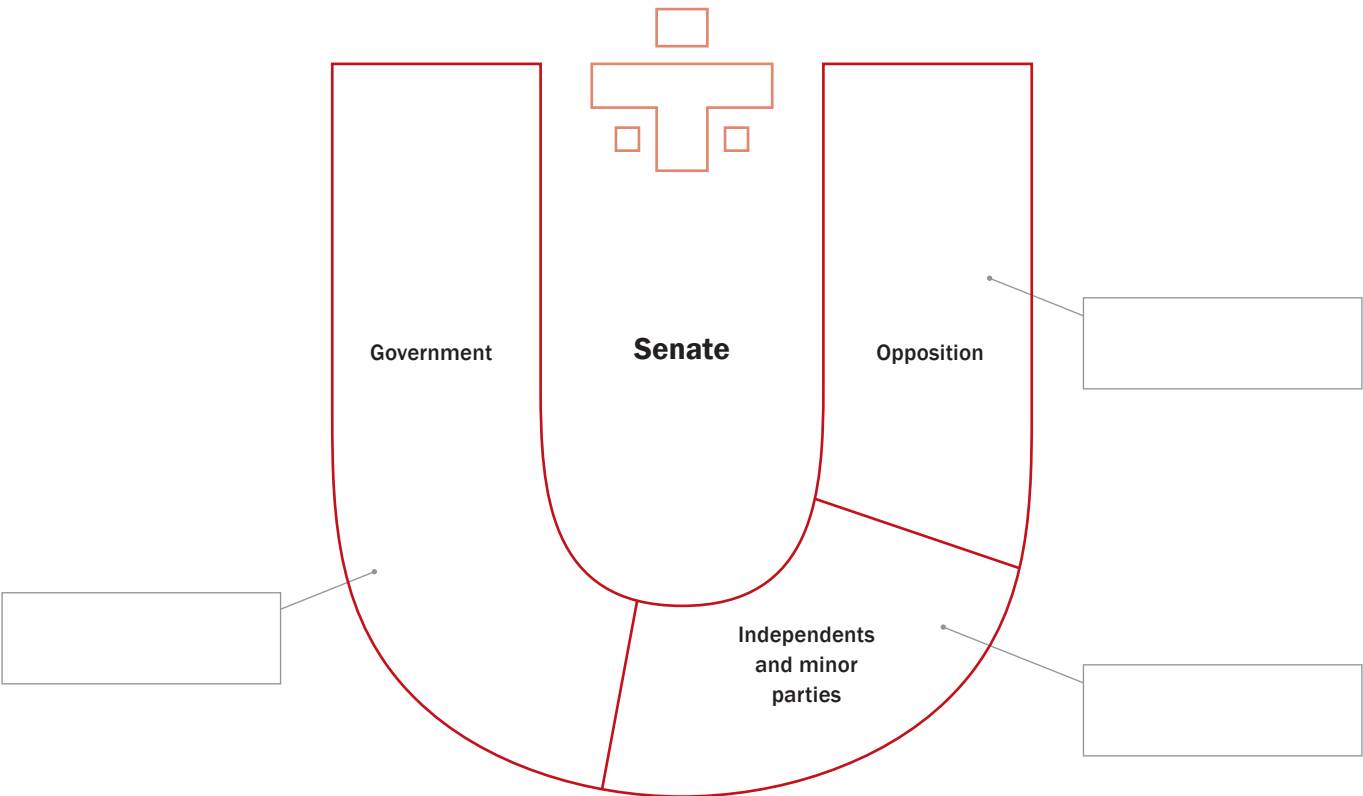
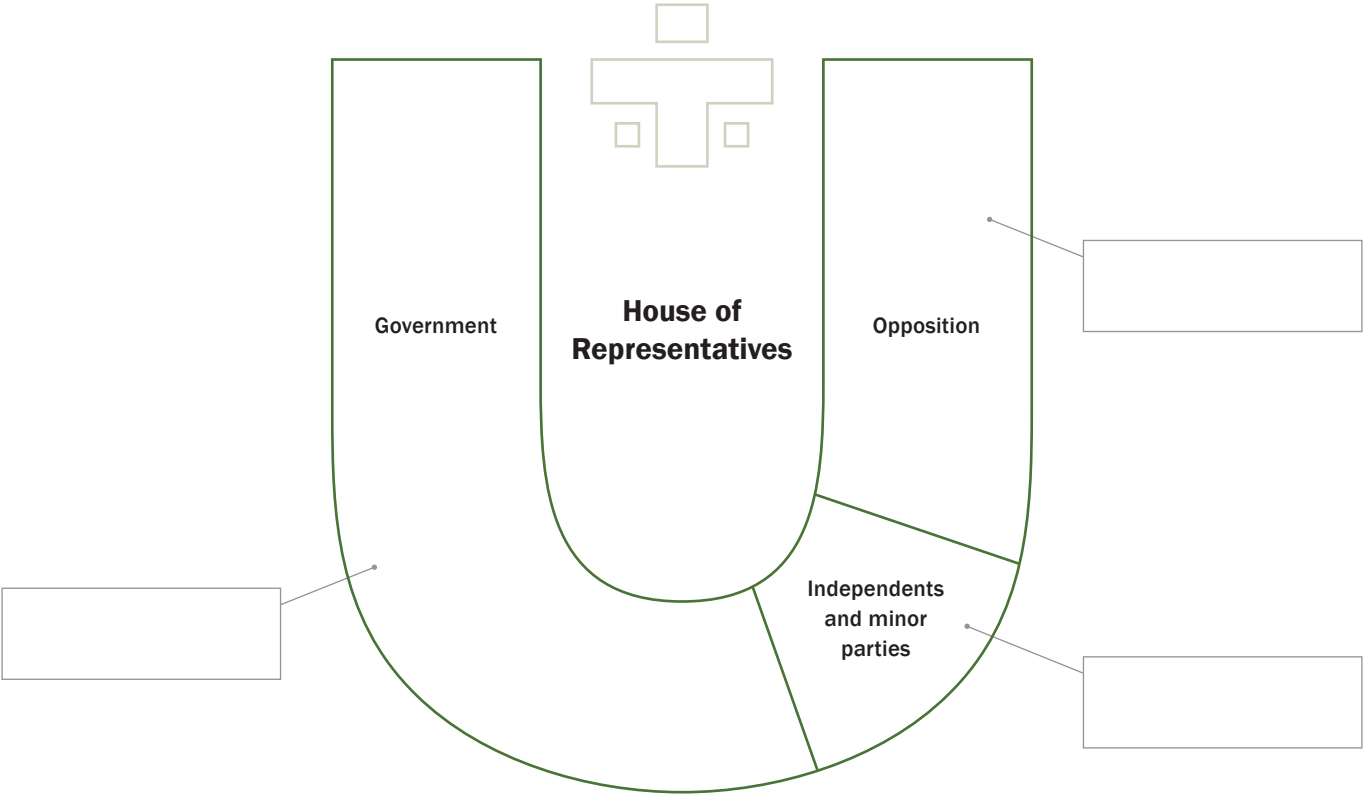
Party	Seats won	Percentage of vote
Australian Labor Party	68	33.3
Liberal Party	44	28.0
Liberal National Party	23	8.7
The Nationals	10	4.5
The Greens	1	10.4
Katter's Australian Party	1	0.5
Centre Alliance	1	0.3
Other	3	14.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>151</b>	

#### 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
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>76</b>

# Parties, policies and elections

What does the Parliament look like?



# 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 first 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 first 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

**You may vote in one of two ways**

**Either**

**Above the line**  
By numbering at least **6** of these boxes in the order of your choice (with number 1 as your first choice).

**Or**

**Below the line**  
By numbering at least **12** of these boxes in the order of your choice (with number 1 as your first choice).

**Party columns (A-G):** Each column has a box for a **LOGO** and a box for a **PARTY**.

**Below the line columns:** Each column has three boxes for **SURNAME Given Names PARTY**. The last column is **UNGROUPED** with two boxes for **SURNAME Given Names INDEPENDENT**.

**SAMPLE**

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)

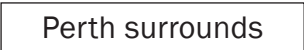
## States' and territories' voting systems

State/Territory	Houses of Parliament	Voting systems
<b>Australian Capital Territory</b> Population: 431 100 Federal Capital Territory was first 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)
<b>New South Wales</b> 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
<b>Northern Territory</b> Population: 246 000 Fully elected Legislative Assembly in 1974. Self-government in 1978.	Legislative Assembly	Full preferential voting
<b>Queensland</b> 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
<b>South Australia</b> 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
<b>Tasmania</b> 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)
<b>Victoria</b> Population: 6.69 million Became a separate colony from NSW in 1851. The first 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
<b>Western Australia</b> 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](http://www.abs.gov.au), 30 June 2020)



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.



# 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.

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

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.

How do electorates change over time?

# 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

- 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)

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

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- Would you describe yourself as generally interested in community affairs?

☐ Yes      ☐ No

Thank you for participating in our research.

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

- 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)

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

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- Would you describe yourself as generally interested in community affairs?

☐ Yes      ☐ No

Thank you for participating in our research.

**Topic 4:**

# **The voice of a vote in a world of change**

- **Investigation A:**  
How did Indigenous Australians  
achieve civic rights? ..... p 93  
Middle secondary
- **Investigation B:**  
How did Timor-Leste take the first  
steps to democracy? ..... p 100  
Middle secondary



**AEC**

Australian Electoral Commission

# Topic 4: The voice of a vote in a world of change

During the 20th century vast changes occurred in attitudes towards human rights – the right to equality for all citizens and the right of nations to determine their own futures.

At the turn of the 20th century, Australia regarded itself as a 'white' society and ignored the rights of Indigenous people in the development of its Constitution. At the same time in the international arena, many African, Pacific and Asian countries were ruled by European nations that denied citizens' rights in their colonial possessions.

Over the course of the 20th century, most of these European colonies gained their independence. An example close to Australia was the former Portuguese colony of Timor-Leste. After centuries of colonial rule, the Portuguese government finally left Timor-Leste in 1975.

'The voice of a vote in a world of change' explores the importance of the democratic vote.

## The topic contains two investigations:

- Investigation A: How did Indigenous Australians achieve civic rights?
- Investigation B: How did Timor-Leste take the first steps to democracy?

## Introductory activity

Explain to students that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drawn up after the Second World War when there was international horror at the gross abuses of human rights under Nazism as well as concern for the future of former European colonies seeking independence and self-determination. Australia was one of the founding members of the United Nations, and one of the original signatories to the Declaration.

The Declaration is available on the [United Nations website](http://www.un.org/en): [www.un.org/en](http://www.un.org/en).

Provide students with a copy of the Declaration either in print or online. Have all students read the preamble to the Declaration, then meet in groups to discuss and report on the following questions:

- What are human rights and what is 'universal' about them?
- What is the purpose of the Declaration, as outlined in the preamble?

- The preamble introduces the words 'dignity', 'justice' and 'equality'. What do these three words signify in your own life?
- What are our responsibilities towards our rights? Is this the same as our responsibilities towards the rights of others?
- How can we make sure our rights are respected?

Divide the listed rights in the Declaration among groups in the class. (There are 30 rights so each group could look at four or five of these.) Students should prepare a brief presentation for the rest of the class that includes:

- an explanation of the meaning of these rights
- examples of how these rights are upheld (or otherwise) in Australia (for example, through universal suffrage or anti-discrimination laws)
- examples of how these rights are upheld or otherwise in relation to global or international issues that they know about. (This might include global issues such as refugees, as well as issues in particular countries.)

Student groups could use the results of the class discussion to develop a working definition of human rights with an explanation of key examples of these rights.

## From the margin

### Timor-Leste

Prior to independence, Timor-Leste (Portuguese for 'East Timor') was known internationally as 'East Timor'. The official name for the country is the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste. Historical sources used in this investigation use the name 'East Timor'. Early United Nations missions, which supported the transition to independence, also use the English name.





# Investigation A

## How did Indigenous Australians achieve civic rights?

Recommended level | Middle secondary

The 1967 Referendum is often considered as a symbolic acceptance of Indigenous Australians as equal citizens to non-Indigenous Australians. The Referendum gave the Commonwealth Government power to make laws for Indigenous Australians, and abolished a constitutional provision that said that Indigenous Australians were not to be counted in the census.

However, advances in gaining the right and responsibility to vote for Indigenous Australians were made well before, and after, this historic date. In 1962 the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* was amended so Indigenous Australians could enrol to vote in federal elections if they wished. In 1984 compulsory enrolment and voting for Indigenous Australians came into effect.

In this investigation students engage in research about Indigenous Australians' civic rights. They also explore the importance of referendums in giving Australians a voice in creating political change.

### The investigation at a glance

#### Background briefings for teacher reference

- Australian Electoral Commission; Constitution; democracy; Indigenous Australians' rights; referendum; Universal Declaration of Human Rights

#### Suggested classroom teaching time

- **Activity 1:** A question of equal citizenship (80 minutes)
- **Activity 2:** How referendums work (80 minutes)
- **Activity 3:** A historic vote (80 minutes)

#### Indicators of student achievement

- Understand the role of constitutional change in a democracy
- Analyse the importance of equality in a democracy
- Identify and analyse the evolution of political rights for Indigenous Australians
- Explain the way the Australian Constitution can be changed by a referendum



**Figure 26:** Indigenous Australians gained the right to vote in Commonwealth elections in 1962. Compulsory enrolment and voting for Indigenous Australians came into effect in 1984.

## Activity 1

# A question of equal citizenship

### Focus questions

- What civil and political rights did Indigenous Australians have before 1967?
- What key events served to change opinions about civil and political rights for Indigenous Australians?
- Why did Indigenous Australians seek to change the Australian Constitution?

### Resources

- BLM 1 Commonwealth laws against Aborigines
- National Museum of Australia, Collaborating for Indigenous rights: [www.nma.gov.au/explore/features/indigenous-rights](http://www.nma.gov.au/explore/features/indigenous-rights)
- Museum of Australian Democracy, Yes, the ongoing story of the 1967 Referendum: [www.moadoph.gov.au/blog/yes-the-ongoing-story-of-the-1967-referendum/](http://www.moadoph.gov.au/blog/yes-the-ongoing-story-of-the-1967-referendum/)
- Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), Electoral milestones for Indigenous Australians: [www.aec.gov.au/indigenous/milestones.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/indigenous/milestones.htm)



### Gathering information

Provide students with a copy of BLM 1. Explain that this was produced by the Aboriginal–Australian Fellowship to encourage people to sign a petition to present to the Federal Government, requesting it to conduct a referendum. This was one of 94 petitions presented to the Federal Government in the 10 years prior to the 1967 Referendum.



### Identifying and analysing

Discuss the following questions with students:

- What action does the writer of the petition want the readers to take?
- What problems does the writer have with sections 51 and 127 of the Australian Constitution?
- Why might there be reference to the United Nations in this document?
- What is meant in this document by the term ‘equal citizenship’?

Ask students to record their impressions of the document, as well as any questions they might have. These will be consulted at the conclusion of this activity.

Divide students into pairs or small groups to research the following historical circumstances and events:

- Indigenous Australians’ voting rights pre-1901
- the *Commonwealth Franchise Act 1902*
- state and territory control of Indigenous Australians 1901–1967
- the Day of Mourning 1938
- Indigenous Australians’ service the Second World War and voting rights 1949
- the right to vote 1962
- the Freedom Rides 1965
- the Wave Hill strike 1966
- compulsory enrolment and voting 1984

The resources listed above can be supplemented by online and library resources. Ask students to consider the following questions in their research:

- What was the nature of the inequalities suffered by Indigenous people?
- How are these compatible with students’ understandings of human rights and citizenship rights?
- How would these inequalities be affected by the changes to the Constitution proposed in the 1967 Referendum?



## Presenting findings

Have students share their research findings with the class and discuss the rights that Indigenous Australians sought in the period before the 1967 Referendum and the ways that Indigenous Australians' rights differed from those of other Australians.

Ask students to refer again to [BLM 1](#).

Using the information gathered through their research, as well as their impressions of the petition, ask students to write an explanation that would help an uninformed Australian decide whether to sign this petition.

## From the margin

### Direct democracy

In ancient Athens the power to make laws was given to citizens (native-born, free men, which excluded women, slaves and migrants) who directly decided on the laws governing their city state.



**Figure 27:** Campaigning for Indigenous Australians' rights; the Freedom Rides, 1965

## Activity 2

# How referendums work

### Focus questions

- How does the Australian Constitution provide for altering the words of the Constitution?
- What role does the Commonwealth Parliament play in altering the Australian Constitution?
- What role does the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) perform?
- Who votes in referendums?

### Resources

- [BLM 2](#) The Australian Constitution – alteration process
- AEC, [Referendums](http://www.aec.gov.au/Elections/referendums/index.htm): [www.aec.gov.au/Elections/referendums/index.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/Elections/referendums/index.htm)
- [Animation: Changing the Constitution](#)
- [Interactive quiz 1: Referendums – do you get it?](#)

### From the margin

#### Voting days

A House of Representatives election must be held every three years. By law, elections for the Commonwealth Parliament are held on a Saturday, while in the United States and the United Kingdom elections are held on weekdays and voting is not compulsory.



### Gathering information

Discuss with students why the Australian Constitution (written before 1900) might need to be altered. What changes have occurred in Australian society that could not have been foreseen by those who wrote the Constitution?

View the animation '[Changing the Constitution](#)' with students.

Discuss the following with students:

- the Australian Constitution provisions in section 128 (which include the role of parliament and the requirement of a double majority for change to occur)
- the role of the AEC in conducting referendums
- voter requirements
- the significance of referendums in changing the Australian Constitution
- the success of the referendum process in changing the Constitution

Have students investigate other examples of referendums from online resources.



### Identifying and analysing

Ask students in groups to discuss and record:

- the reasons why constitutional change appears difficult
- the nature of the questions in referendums that have been passed
- the sorts of changes to the Constitution and powers of government that have resulted from successful referendums
- the ways in which the 1967 Referendum was different from other referendums held since Federation.



### Presenting findings

Instruct the student groups to prepare an artefact entitled 'The referendum process: A voter's guide' in a format of their choice. Remind the groups to include qualifications for voting in referendums.

Alternative or additional presentations could consider the following topics:

- Changing the Australian Constitution: Some examples of success stories
- Changing the Australian Constitution: What issues have been most important?

Have students complete the [interactive quiz 'Referendums – do you get it?'](#) in order to consolidate their understanding.

### Activity 3

## A historic vote

#### Focus questions

- How was the 1967 Referendum 'Yes' case put to voters?
- Why did the results of the Referendum differ across states?
- What was the significance of the Referendum to Indigenous leaders?

#### Resources

- **BLM 3** The case in favour
- AEC, **Referendums**: [www.aec.gov.au/Elections/referendums/index.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/Elections/referendums/index.htm)
- **Australian Biography**, biographies of activists for Indigenous Australians' rights including Charles Perkins, Neville Bonner, Faith Bandler: [www.australianbiography.gov.au](http://www.australianbiography.gov.au)
- **Human Rights Commission**: [www.humanrights.gov.au](http://www.humanrights.gov.au)
- Parliament Australia, **Referendum results**: [www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/FlagPost/2017/May/The\\_1967\\_Referendum](http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/FlagPost/2017/May/The_1967_Referendum)



**Figure 28:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights activist, Faith Bandler

### Gathering information

#### Why vote 'Yes'?

Provide students with a copy of **BLM 3**.

Divide students into groups to analyse the impact of each of the sources in **BLM 3** on Australian voters. The following questions will direct their discussion:

- How might people have responded to sources 1, 2 and 3?
- What messages are contained in the song and the poster? How might they have appealed to voters?

Ask students to consider the arguments used in the official 'Yes' case. How might these have appealed to voters?

Unlike in other referendums, there was no official 'No' case. How might this have influenced voters?

#### What were the results?

Groups should use the Parliament of Australia website to look at the results of the 1967 Referendum. Ask students to graph the results by state and territory.

Ask them to identify electorates or states and territories where there were high 'Yes' votes and high 'No' votes, and to offer explanations for these differences.

#### What was the significance to the campaign's leaders?

Next have student groups analyse the significance of the Referendum to those who led the campaign. Use online resources to view interviews with Chicka Dixon, Charles Perkins and Faith Bandler, as well as print sources.





## Identifying and analysing

Have student groups examine their findings.

In relation to **BLM 3**, ask students to consider the arguments used in the official 'Yes' case. How do these compare with their research in Activity 1, and their 'advice to uninformed Australians'?

- What sorts of appeals were made to the Australian voters and how might Australians respond to them today?
- What would have been the impact on voters of the absence of an official 'No' case?

In relation to the Referendum results, discuss the following with students:

- What was the pattern of results across Australia?
- Which electorates had high levels of 'Yes' votes? What are the characteristics of these electorates?
- Which electorates had high levels of 'No' votes? What might account for this?

In relation to the views of the leaders of the campaign, discuss the following with students:

- What were the key issues for the leaders in the 1967 Referendum?
- How was the 1967 Referendum significant?
- What other issues do they identify as being important for Indigenous Australians to achieve equality in Australia?



## Presenting findings

Have students write an informative feature article for a general audience that analyses the significance of the 1967 Referendum. Their article should include:

- an appropriate heading
- background information on Indigenous Australians' civil and political rights before the 1960s
- information on the referendum process
- analysis of the results
- Indigenous Australians' perspectives including some key quotes
- appropriate charts, diagrams, illustrations and photographs
- a personal reflection on the issues
- a bibliography of sources used.





## Going further

### Citizenship rights and the electoral process

Ask students to research one or more significant issues concerning Indigenous Australians' civil and political rights since 1967. These could include:

- Land rights issues (Mabo and Wik and contemporary cases)
- Stolen Generations
- Aboriginal deaths in custody
- reconciliation
- Prime Minister Rudd's 'Sorry' speech
- Uluru Statement from the Heart
- AEC activities to support informed voting among Indigenous Australians – post 1984.

Have students focus on:

- the ways that elected parliaments have responded to these issues
- the extent to which these issues have been resolved.

As a starting point, students could look at the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity [website](http://www.hreoc.gov.au): [www.hreoc.gov.au](http://www.hreoc.gov.au).

### Successful referendums

Ask students to research another referendum, using the material available on the AEC website and the Parliament of Australia website as well as online and library materials. (The most contentious recent referendum is the Republic referendum.)

The following questions could frame their research:

- What changes were being sought to the Constitution?
- What were the key arguments in the 'Yes' and 'No' cases?
- What do you think of these arguments?
- What were the views of the media at the time (if appropriate)?
- What were the patterns of voting contained in the results – Australia-wide, by state and territory, and in individual electorates?



**Figure 29:** Australian citizens have an obligation to vote – wherever they may be.

## From the margin

### Mobile polling

Geographic remoteness is no barrier to helping electors cast their vote in a federal election. In the 2019 federal election, the AEC created 557 mobile polling teams who visited over 3,000 locations by road, air and sea. They visited Indigenous communities, remote outstations, pastoral properties, small towns, hospitals, nursing homes, tourist resorts and mining camps across Australia. A number of local Indigenous people were recruited to identify, interpret for and assist electors.



# Investigation B

## How did Timor-Leste take the first steps to democracy?

**Recommended level** | Middle secondary

Timor-Leste is one of Australia's nearest neighbours but its experience of democracy could not be more different. After centuries of Portuguese colonial rule and 25 years of Indonesian occupation, the people of Timor-Leste were finally granted the opportunity to decide their own future through a democratic vote in a 'popular consultation'. In subsequent elections in 2001 and 2002 they voted for a representative assembly and president.

In this investigation students will focus on the significance of the vote in achieving momentous change – the status of an independent sovereign nation in Timor-Leste, the first democratic nation of the 21st century. Students will research the background to the independence of Timor-Leste and consider the roles undertaken by Australians through the United Nations. In particular, they will consider the role of the Australian Electoral Commission in assisting Timor-Leste's progress towards democratic government.

### The investigation at a glance

#### Background briefings for teacher reference

- Australian Electoral Commission; democracy; international assistance – Timor-Leste; Universal Declaration of Human Rights

#### Suggested classroom teaching time

- **Activity 1:** A promise of democracy (80 minutes)
- **Activity 2:** International response (120 minutes)
- **Activity 3:** Introducing democracy: The role of the AEC (80 minutes)

#### Indicators of student achievement

- Explain the situation in Timor-Leste under Portuguese and Indonesian rule
- Analyse the reasons for Australian and United Nations involvement in Timor-Leste after 1975
- Examine Timor-Leste's progress towards democratic government and the AEC's role in that process



**Figure 30:** Location of Timor-Leste

## Activity 1

# A promise of democracy

### Focus questions

- What was Timor-Leste like under Portuguese and Indonesian rule?
- What roles did the Timor-Leste resistance play in drawing world attention to the plight of the people of Timor-Leste?
- How have Australians been involved in Timor-Leste?

### Resources

- [BLM 4](#) Timor-Leste under Portuguese and Indonesian rule
- BBC News, [East Timor country profile](#): [www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-14919009](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-14919009)
- US Department of State, [Timor-Leste](#): [www.state.gov/countries-areas/timor-leste/](http://www.state.gov/countries-areas/timor-leste/)
- [Government of Timor-Leste](#): [timor-leste.gov.tl](http://timor-leste.gov.tl)
- [Nobel Prize](#): [www.nobelprize.org](http://www.nobelprize.org)
- [Australian War Memorial](#): [www.awm.gov.au](http://www.awm.gov.au) (In Collections, enter keywords such as 'Sparrow Force' or 'Balibo Five')



### Gathering information

Read through [BLM 4](#) with students. Explain that they will work in groups to further research one of the aspects of Timor-Leste history under the headings: Portuguese rule, Indonesian occupation, Timor-Leste resistance, Australian contact with Timor-Leste.

Divide the class into small groups to research one of the key events, then bring the results back to the class for explanation and discussion. Each group must provide one or more images from their research for this discussion. The resource list is a basic list of websites that can be used. Encourage students to use search engines and library resources to find further material.

Emphasise that students must maintain a bibliography of resources while they are completing this research.



### Identifying and analysing

After students have had an opportunity to conduct some research, bring them together to report their findings to the class, show images they have found and build a timeline of events. This could be done as a digital presentation, constructed on the board or display.

Conduct a class discussion on the following:

- What was the nature of Portuguese colonial rule?
- What impact did Australian experiences with the people of Timor-Leste in the Second World War have on Australian attitudes to Timor-Leste?
- Why did Indonesia invade Timor-Leste in 1975?
- How significant was the Balibo Five incident in Indonesian–Australian relationships?
- Why do you think Australia was the only country to recognise the Indonesian occupation?
- What roles did key Timor-Leste leaders play in drawing attention to the plight of the people of Timor-Leste?



### Presenting findings

Have student groups use their research findings to produce three or four slides or screens that will become part of the timeline. Each group should use key images and brief explanations of events.

Have a class presentation where each group explains their slides.

## Activity 2

# International response

### Focus questions

- What was the purpose of the United Nations missions in Timor-Leste?
- How were Australians involved in the United Nations operations in Timor-Leste?
- What were the results of the Timor-Leste elections?
- How did the people of Timor-Leste respond?

### Resources

- **BLM 5** The United Nations in Timor-Leste
- **Australian War Memorial:** [www.awm.gov.au](http://www.awm.gov.au) (In Collections, enter keywords such as 'INTERFET')
- East and Southeast Asia: An annotated directory of internet resources:
  - **United Nations:** [www.un.org](http://www.un.org)
  - **Inside Indonesia:** [www.insideindonesia.org](http://www.insideindonesia.org) (Under Editions, look for Edition 61, Jan–March 2000 (East Timor special))
  - YouTube, **East Timor – Birth of a Nation:** [www.youtube.com/watch?v=4hxfoVYK6no&app=desktop](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4hxfoVYK6no&app=desktop)

## Gathering information

Read through **BLM 5** with students. Discuss the following with students:

- Why might Timor-Leste need a high level of international support?
- What particular needs might the people of Timor-Leste have?
- Why might Australia be involved in these United Nations missions?

Divide the class into groups to represent the United Nations missions outlined: UNAMET, INTERFET, UNTAET, UNMISSET and UNMIT.

Within their groups students will be responsible for:

- outlining the aims of this mission
- analysing Australian contributions to each of these missions
- explaining the results of these missions, including election results where appropriate.

Select one or two key primary or secondary sources that explain the mission from the point of view of the Timor-Leste or Australian participants. These could be in the form of photographs (such as INTERFET photographs from the Australian War Memorial website), online newspaper articles or reports from Timor-Leste leaders.

Explain to students that they can find a range of materials, including lists of countries involved in these missions, photographs and media reports, from the United Nations website. Have students contribute to a media display of articles about current issues and events. Use listed resources to provide further information to students.



**Figure 31:** Australian soldiers as part of INTERFET, about to patrol an area between Suai and Matai, Timor-Leste



## Identifying and analysing

Allow students two or three lessons to research. Then have each group report on their findings. Use student reports to discuss effective ways of presenting information.

Discuss the focus questions at the beginning of this activity, as well as the following questions:

- How important was democracy to the people of Timor-Leste?
- What difficulties are they encountering on the path to democracy?
- What kinds of support do countries with no experience of democracy need?
- What light can the experience of democracy in Timor-Leste throw on Australian democracy?



## Presenting findings

Have students present their findings to the class in the form of a press conference. (This could be preceded by a short video of a press conference as an example.)

Set up the classroom to represent a press conference: each group takes turns in presenting reports and the rest of the class members are the reporters. A volunteer should mediate the session and allocate questions from the reporters to the panel members.

Each group could decide on a particular angle for their press conference, such as the announcement of election results or the deployment of Australian troops. Other group members could present other aspects based on their research findings – including visual resources or a digital presentation.

The reporters should use the research questions to ask the panel questions and take notes on their answers.

Have students use the material gained in this session to write a media article about one of the issues discussed in the press conference.



### Activity 3

## Introducing democracy: The role of the AEC

### Focus questions

- What was the AEC's role in Timor-Leste?
- What are the challenges involved in establishing democratic institutions in a country that has had no experience with democracy?
- What government and electoral systems did the people of Timor-Leste adopt?
- What were the results of the first Timor-Leste elections?

### Resources

- **BLM 6** Introducing democracy – The role of the AEC in Timor-Leste
- **Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Timor-Leste:** [www.dfat.gov.au/geo/timor-leste/timor-leste](http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/timor-leste/timor-leste)
- **Government of Timor-Leste:** [timor-leste.gov.tl](http://timor-leste.gov.tl)
- AEC, Learn about elections, **Delivering an election:** [www.aec.gov.au/](http://www.aec.gov.au/)



**Figure 32:** Administering an election according to democratic ideals is crucial to elector confidence

### Gathering information

Provide students with a copy of **BLM 6**.

Divide the class into groups and ask them to research the following:

- What processes do people need to understand to conduct elections?
- What skills and resources would people need to conduct democratic elections from scratch?
- What information would be needed by Timor-Leste citizens to participate in democratic elections?
- What institutions and procedures would need to be put into place to implement the requirements as outlined in the Timor-Leste Constitution?

### Identifying and analysing

Discuss with students the notion of 'sustainable government':

- What does this mean and what role did the AEC play in supporting it?
- In what ways are elections a 'complex logistical exercise'?
- What knowledge, skills and resources should an Electoral Administrators Course contain?
- What sort of education program is needed to inform the public of their rights and responsibilities as outlined in the Timor-Leste Constitution?

### Presenting findings

Have students complete one of the following scenarios:

Imagine you were developing a public education campaign to inform the people of Timor-Leste about democratic electoral processes and their rights and responsibilities in elections. Establish a series of brief key messages that would become the focus of your education campaign. Produce a poster or the text for a radio or television advertisement that will explain the key messages.

Using the extract from the Timor-Leste Constitution, write a report to the Timor-Leste minister responsible for elections. Include recommendations about:

- the role of an electoral administration body
- the knowledge and skills needed by people to be employed by this body
- the public education that needs to be implemented.





## Going further

### Timor-Leste today

Using the Timor-Leste **government website**: [timor-leste.gov.tl](http://timor-leste.gov.tl) and other online sources, explain:

- the composition and leadership of the Timor-Leste government after the last democratic elections
- challenges faced by the Timor-Leste government today.

### Supporting democratic elections: the role of the AEC

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) funds the AEC to lead a number of bilateral electoral capacity-building efforts, particularly in the Pacific region.

Coordinating an election is the largest logistics exercise a nation undertakes in peace time and can present challenges for emerging democracies. Elections require:

- accurate records of eligible voters used to ensure everyone is fairly provided the opportunity to participate
- methods to check everyone votes only once
- appropriate legislation and procedures
- staff to count votes
- voters and candidates that trust the result of an election to be a fair representation of the wishes of the people.

Trust in the election processes, the people working on the election and the result is important in maintaining a peaceful democracy.

The AEC has used the funding from DFAT to provide activities of support to many international electoral management bodies. Electoral management bodies that have received support include Bougainville, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tokelau, Vanuatu, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Indonesia and Myanmar.

The AEC also facilitates the Pacific Islands, Australia and New Zealand Electoral Administrators (PIANZEA) network. PIANZEA provides important support for electoral management bodies throughout the Pacific. International assistance provided by the AEC has a focus on capacity building, and activities might include peer support for electoral administrators, training and technical assistance or support to deliver the election.

One of the major programs that the AEC provides is BRIDGE. BRIDGE stands for Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections. BRIDGE is a program designed to assist election delivery by training stakeholders (election delivery staff, media, politicians and others) in electoral processes. BRIDGE is a partnership between the AEC and the following international organisations:

- International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA)
- United Nations Electoral Assistance Division (UNEAD)
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Discuss with students reasons why the Australian Government would wish to promote and support democratic elections in the Pacific.

Have students in groups research the Australian Government support (see DFAT website) and the organisation of the current government of one of these countries: Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands or Tonga.

Discuss why international organisations support elections in emerging countries. Why is trusted election delivery important for a society?

## Commonwealth laws against Aborigines

Petitioning for  
constitutional change

# COMMONWEALTH LAWS AGAINST ABORIGINES

The Commonwealth Constitution says the Federal Parliament can make laws for

**"the people of any race**

**OTHER THAN THE ABORIGINAL RACE in any State"**

(Section 51, Clause xxvi)

and

**"in reckoning the numbers of people . . .**

**ABORIGINAL NATIVES SHALL NOT BE COUNTED".**

(Section 127).

## EVERY STATE HAS DIFFERENT LAWS FOR ABORIGINES

- Federal Parliament has to justify these laws to public opinion at home and abroad, and to the United Nations.
- Since N.S.W. this year ended discrimination in our State Laws, Aborigines have equal rights here but not if they travel interstate.
- CENSUS (Section 127) implies that Aborigines are not worth counting, and this is an insult to the original Australians.

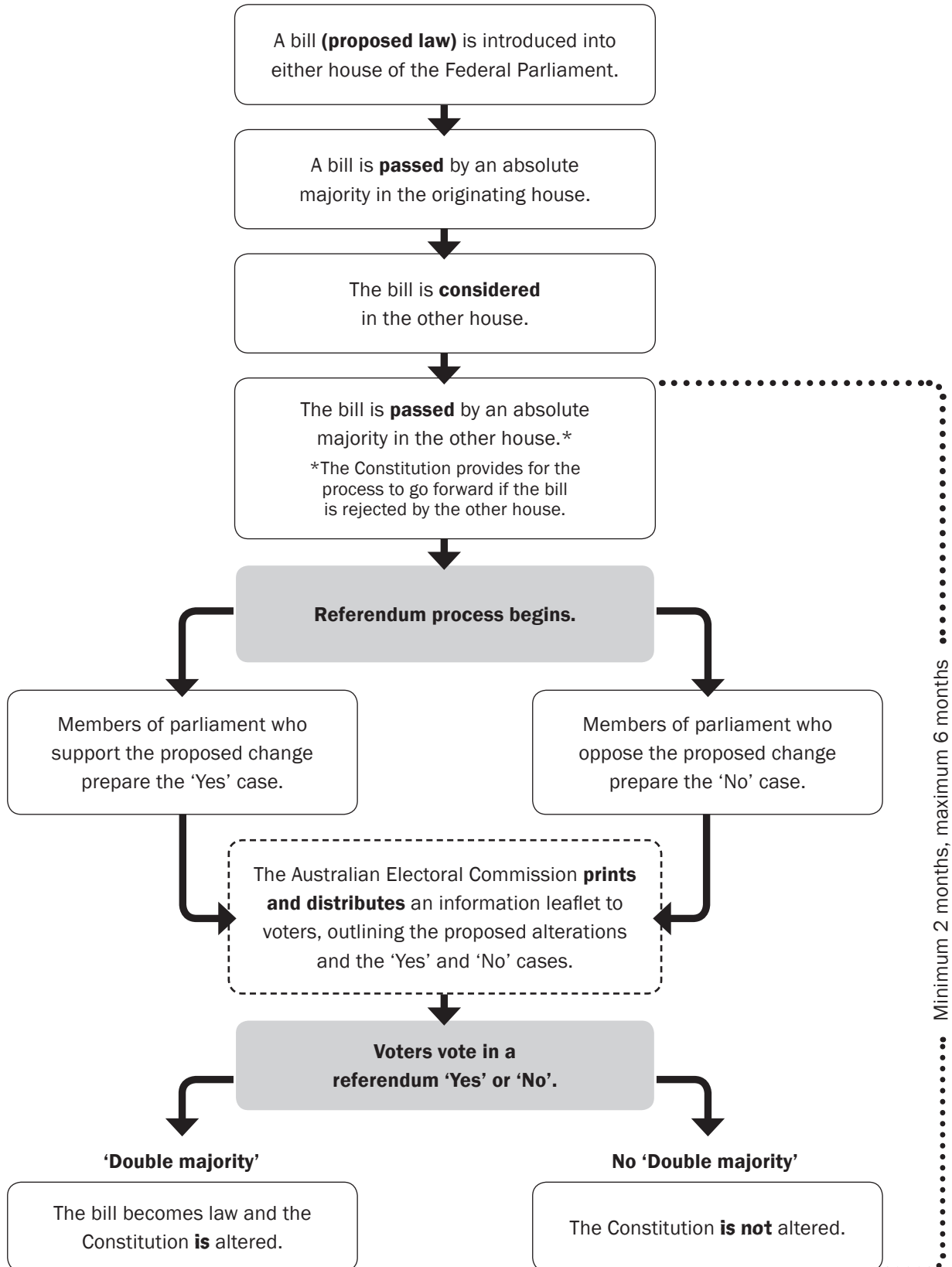
***Please Sign the National Petition***

***for Equal Citizenship for Aborigines***

Authorised by the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship, G.P.O. Box 2672, Sydney

Witton Press, 12 Little Regent Street, Sydney

# The Australian Constitution – alteration process



## The case in favour

### Source 1

#### Vote 'Yes'

*Vote 'Yes' for Aborigines, they want to be Australians too*

*Vote 'Yes' to give them rights and freedoms like me and you*

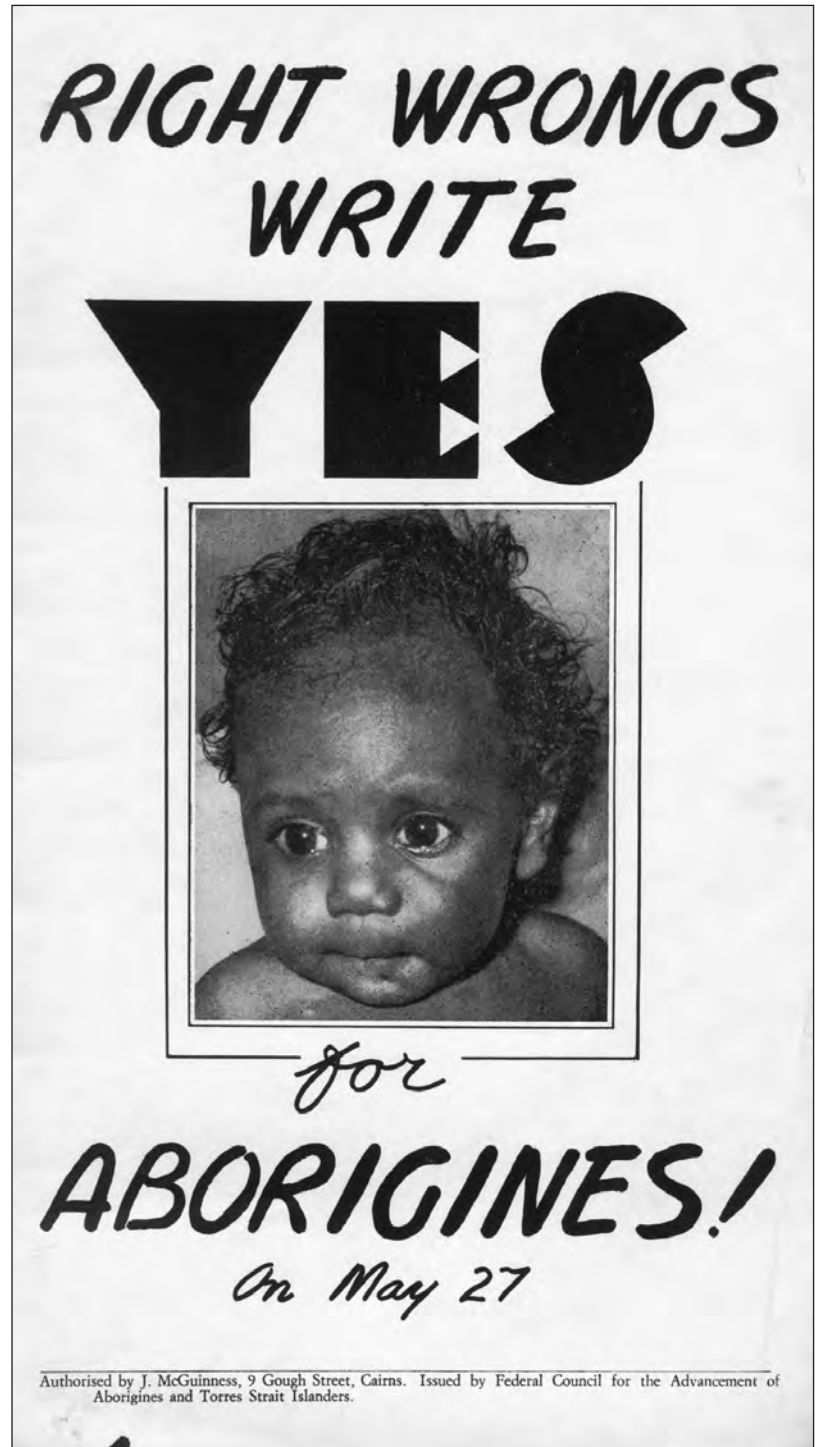
*Vote 'Yes' for Aborigines, all parties say they think you should*

*Vote 'Yes' and show the world the true Australian brotherhood.*

Words of a song sent by the Aboriginal Rights 'Vote Yes' Committee to radio stations and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 May 1967.

(Source: The 1967 Aborigines Referendum, Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Year Book Australia* 2004)

### Source 2



Campaigning for constitutional change in the 1967 referendum

## The case in favour

### Source 3

#### CONSTITUTION ALTERATION (ABORIGINALS) 1967

##### *Argument in favour of the proposed law*

##### **The case for YES**

The proposed alteration of this section will do two things. **First, it will remove words from our Constitution that many people think are discriminatory against the Aboriginal people.**

**Second, it will make it possible for the Commonwealth Parliament to make special laws for the people of the Aboriginal race, wherever they may live, if the Parliament considers it necessary.**

This cannot be done at present because, as the Constitution stands, the Commonwealth Parliament has no power, except in the Territories, to make laws with respect to people of the Aboriginal race as such.

...The Commonwealth's object will be to cooperate with the States to **ensure that together we act in the best interests of the Aboriginal people of Australia.**

The second proposed alteration is the **repeal** of section 127 of the Constitution.

That section reads:

**'In reckoning the numbers of the people of the Commonwealth, or of a State or other part of the Commonwealth, aboriginal natives shall not be counted.'**

Why was this provision included in the Constitution in 1900? Well, there were serious practical difficulties in counting the Aboriginals in those days. They were dispersed, and nomadic. Communications in inland Australia were poor, and frequently non-existent. Today the situation is very different and counting is practicable.

**Our personal sense of justice, our commonsense, and our international reputation in a world in which racial issues are being highlighted every day, require that we get rid of this outmoded provision.**

Its modern absurdity is made clear when we point out that for some years now Aboriginals have been entitled to enrol for, and vote at, federal elections. Yet section 127 prevents them from being reckoned as 'people' for the purpose of calculating our population, even for electoral purposes!

The simple truth is that section 127 is completely out of harmony with our national attitudes and modern thinking. It has no place in our Constitution in this age.

All political parties represented in the Commonwealth Parliament support these proposals ...

**We urge you to vote YES to both our proposals as to Aboriginals by writing the word YES in the square on the ballot paper.**



# Timor-Leste under Portuguese and Indonesian rule

## 1. Portuguese rule

The Portuguese presence in Timor began in the 16th century. It became a colony in 1702 with the arrival of the first governor from Lisbon. In the 18th century, the Netherlands gained a foothold in the western half of the island, and was formally granted West Timor in 1859 through the Treaty of Lisbon. After the Second World War, the Dutch granted independence to its former colonies and West Timor became part of Indonesia.

In 1974, after a coup that overthrew its fascist dictatorship, Portugal granted Timor-Leste the right to self-determination. Elections were held in March 1975. While the APODETI Party (Timorese Popular Democratic Association) in Timor-Leste supported integration with Indonesia, it was the Fretilin (Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor) that won the election. As the Portuguese withdrew, Indonesia made no secret of its plan to invade Timor-Leste. Francisco Xavier do Amaral, the first president of Timor-Leste and president of Fretilin, declared independence on 28 November 1975, hoping that Indonesia would not invade a sovereign state.



Location of Timor-Leste

## 2. Indonesian occupation

Nine days later, on 7 December 1975, Indonesia launched a combined military, naval and airborne invasion of Timor-Leste. President Suharto of Indonesia subsequently claimed Timor-Leste as Indonesia's 27th province in 1976.

Over the next 24 years Timor-Leste was under military occupation. A report presented to the United Nations in 2006 estimated that from a population of 750,000, about 183,000 people of Timor-Leste were killed or died as a result of deliberate starvation between 1975 and 1999. In 1991, the massacre of 200 unarmed civilians at the Santa Cruz Cemetery in Dili and the killings and repression that followed focused international attention on Timor-Leste.



East Timorese refugees arrive in Australia in 1975

In 1998 President Suharto was forced to resign. His successor, Dr BJ Habibie, in the midst of an economic crisis and in need of international support, proposed limited autonomy for Timor-Leste within Indonesia. This resulted in a set of agreements between Indonesia and Portugal, signed in New York on 5 May 1999, entrusting the Secretary-General of the United Nations with organising and conducting a 'popular consultation' in order to determine whether the people of Timor-Leste accepted or rejected a special autonomy for Timor-Leste within the Republic of Indonesia.



## Timor-Leste under Portuguese and Indonesian rule

### 3. Timor-Leste resistance

Fretilin and the resistance army Falintil (Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East Timor) opposed Indonesian occupation and engaged in an ongoing guerrilla war.

Fretilin leader Xanana Gusmão was arrested in 1992 and sentenced to life imprisonment in Indonesia.

The Timor-Leste Catholic Church, under Bishop Carlos Filipe Belo, after 1983 spoke out against human rights abuses.

José Ramos-Horta left Timor-Leste shortly before the Indonesian invasion to bring the country's plight to the rest of the world.

He was involved in the passing of a dozen United Nations resolutions on Timor-Leste.

In 1996, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded jointly to José Ramos-Horta and Bishop Belo.



Nobel Laureate Bishop Carlos Belo with his congregation on Christmas Eve, 1999

### 4. Australian contact with Timor-Leste

Australian troops known as 'Sparrow Force' fought the Japanese in Timor-Leste during the Second World War, from 1942 to 1945. Sparrow Force was supported by the Timorese population – around 70,000 of whom were killed.

In 1975, five reporters working for Channel 9 and Channel 7 in Australia were killed during Indonesian military incursions into the town of Balibo in Timor-Leste. They came to be known as the Balibo Five.

Australia recognised the Indonesian claim to Timor-Leste in 1978, the only country in the world to do so.

Many people from Timor-Leste sought asylum in Australia during the period of Indonesian rule.



Australian Troops in East Timor during the Second World War

## The United Nations in Timor-Leste



A hard-won right: East Timorese waiting to vote in the 2001 elections

The United Nations (UN) set up UNAMET (United Nations Mission in East Timor) to organise and conduct the 'popular consultation' in 1999. The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) provided significant support to this operation, both in the planning and implementation. Timorese residents in Australia also voted. The result of the 'popular consultation' was overwhelming rejection of the proposed status of autonomy in favour of beginning a process of transition towards independence. Although voting was not compulsory, there was a very high voter turnout and 78.5% voted in favour of independence.



Australian soldiers try to stop the violence that erupted after the 'popular consultation'.

During and after the vote, a period of great unrest occurred, including widespread murder, violence, arson and looting by pro-integration militias, at times with the support of elements of the Indonesian security forces. UN personnel were evacuated during the violence that followed the vote.

In view of the urgent situation, the UN authorised an international peacekeeping force, led by Australia. INTERFET (International Force East Timor) comprised 11,000 troops, 5,000 of them from Australia. The force, commanded by Major-General Peter Cosgrove, arrived in Dili on 20 September 1999 and oversaw the withdrawal of Indonesian troops, the disarming of pro-Indonesian militia and the return of refugees from West Timor.

In October the United Nations authorised the UNTAET (United Nations Transitional Authority in East Timor). This became the virtual administration of Timor-Leste and guided Timor-Leste to independent nationhood. The AEC, in collaboration with the UN, undertook a major program of capacity building to enhance the ability of the people of Timor-Leste to organise their own elections after independence.

The UN recognised at an early stage that an independent electoral management body was required in Timor-Leste in order to conduct elections. At the same time UNTAET also announced the establishment of an Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), which would have exclusive electoral authority. The IEC aimed to ensure that the 2001 and 2002 elections were conducted fairly and democratically. The Australian Electoral Commission worked as part of the IEC.

In 2002 a further mission was set up by the United Nations. Called UNMISSET (United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor), it was established to provide assistance to core administrative structures critical to the viability and political stability of Timor-Leste, to provide interim law enforcement and public security and to assist in developing the Timor-Leste Police Service, and to contribute to the maintenance of the new country's external and internal security. Australia contributed civilian and military police to this mission.

In 2006, as a result of continued civil unrest, the United Nations established UNMIT (United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste), which completed its mandate in 2012. UNMIT supported organised elections, and capacity building in governance, justice and security. Free and peaceful democratic elections occurred in 2012.

## Introducing democracy – the role of the AEC in Timor-Leste

‘An election is actually the most complex logistical operation which a country ever faces in peacetime because you are taking the entire adult population in the country and putting them through the process (of voting) in a single day.’

Michael Maley, AEC and also UN-appointed Commissioner of the Independent Electoral Commission, Timor-Leste, established by UNTAET.



Voter information, Timor-Leste elections

In Timor-Leste, the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) provided massive support for the United Nations (UN) organisation of the 1999 ‘popular consultation’, including facilitating the vote for Timorese residents in Australia and organising participation in elections in Melbourne, Sydney, Perth and Darwin. In 2001 and 2002, they supported the elections held for the new national assembly and the presidential election.

A significant challenge for Timor-Leste, a country with no experience of democracy, was addressed by the AEC – that of providing local people with the knowledge, skills and resources in the area of electoral administration. This would allow the people of Timor-Leste to organise and conduct free and fair elections so that democracy could be sustained in the absence of international assistance.

As part of its role in the Independent Electoral Commission, the AEC developed and delivered electoral education including the East Timor Electoral Administrators Course in the weeks leading up to the 30 August 2001 Constituent Assembly elections. The course provided a comprehensive introduction to every aspect of the electoral process that Timor-Leste would be involved in and was instrumental in ensuring the success of those elections.

In 2002 the people of Timor-Leste adopted a Constitution for the new government, mandating the importance of democratic elections.



Michael Maley, UN-appointed Commissioner of the Independent Electoral Commission, Timor-Leste, 2001



People of Timor-Leste being trained to administer elections



# Introducing democracy – the role of the AEC in Timor-Leste

## Extract from Timor-Leste Constitution

### Section 65

#### (Elections)

- 1 Elected organs of sovereignty and of local government shall be chosen by free, direct, secret, personal and regular universal suffrage.
- 2 Registration of voters shall be compulsory and officially initiated, single and universal, to be updated for each election.
- 3 Electoral campaigns shall be governed in accordance with the following principles:
  - a Freedom to canvass
  - b Equality of opportunity and treatment for all candidacies
  - c Impartiality towards candidacies on the part of public bodies
  - d Transparency and supervision of electoral expenses.
- 4 Conversion of the votes into mandates shall observe the principle of proportional representation.
- 5 The electoral process shall be regulated by law.
- 6 Supervision of voters' registration and electoral acts shall be incumbent upon an independent organ, the competences, composition, organisation and functioning of which shall be established by law.

(Source: Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, decreed 22 March 2002)



Singing the registration song. Participants in the Electoral Administrators Course, in Timor-Leste, demonstrate their learning through song.



Timor-Leste election posters

**Topic 5:**

# Young people and the vote

- **Investigation:**  
How engaged are young people  
in voting and elections? ..... p 116

Middle secondary | Upper secondary



**AEC**

Australian Electoral Commission

# Topic 5: Young people and the vote

While there is much evidence that young people are engaged in political issues, the enrolment rate of people between the ages of 18 and 24 is below that of the population at large. This topic allows students to explore the influence that young people can have on governments. Students explore issues important to young people and how they might influence outcomes through voting. They consider who can enrol and vote in Australia and whether the voting age should be lowered to 16. Students explore the importance of critical literacy in evaluating political messages and create a campaign to encourage young people to enrol and vote.

This topic contains one investigation.

## From the margin

### Enrolment rate

At June 2020, the enrolment rate for 18- to 24-year-olds was 85.8% compared to 96.5% for the general population.



## Investigation

### How engaged are young people in voting and elections?

Recommended levels

Middle secondary

Upper secondary

### The investigation at a glance

#### Background briefings for teacher reference

- Australian Electoral Commission, Democracy

#### Suggested classroom teaching time

- **Activity 1:** What issues are important to young people in our community? (50–80 minutes)
- **Activity 2:** Can young people influence governments? (80 minutes)
- **Activity 3:** Should the voting age be lowered to 16? (50 minutes)
- **Activity 4:** Elections, engagement and fake news? (50 minutes)
- **Activity 5:** Your vote, your choice? (80–120 minutes)

#### Indicators of student achievement

- Understand electoral law related to enrolment and voting
- Analyse issues and possible solutions
- Account for different interpretations and points of view about lowering the voting age
- Analyse the importance of critical literacy in evaluating election material
- Develop convincing and accurate arguments on enrolment and voting



## Activity 1

# What issues are important to young people in our community?

### Focus questions

- What issues are young people in our community concerned about?
- What resources can be used to find out about issues?
- How do political parties address issues of concern to young people?

### Resources

- Political party websites, for example:
  - [Australian Labor Party: www.alp.org.au](http://www.alp.org.au)
  - [Liberal Party of Australia: www.liberal.org.au](http://www.liberal.org.au)
  - [National Party of Australia: www.nationals.org.au](http://www.nationals.org.au)
  - [Australian Greens: www.greens.org.au](http://www.greens.org.au)



Figure 33: Young people engaging in community work



## Gathering information

Have students in groups discuss and come up with a list of four or five political issues that they think are most important and why. Have groups report back to the class. What issues are deemed most important by students? Are the issues local, state, national or global?

Have students develop a brief questionnaire to survey other classes or senior groups within the school or local community using the list of issues they found to be important. Allow them to add other issues. The questionnaire could be in the form of a brief tick box survey where people rate issues in order of importance and give reasons for their first choice or choices.

Have student groups compile the results of their surveys. These could be collated in the form of a data chart.

Ask students where they might find out further information about their issues and how the issues might be addressed and resolved. Compile a list of their suggestions, which might include political parties, interest groups or social media groups. Introduce students to the main party websites and point out where they might find out about party policies.

Have each group explore the main party websites for their policies in relation to one of two of their issues. They should also look at proposed resolutions to issues.



## Identifying and analysing

Discuss the following with students:

- Did all groups come up with the same list of issues?
- What issues do they find to be most important? What reasons were given?
- What issues are seen to be most important by the broader student population?
- Is there unanimity about a core group of issues seen as important?
- What do party websites say about the issues important to students?
- How do political parties propose to resolve these issues?
- What similarities and differences are there among parties?
- What might be the best strategy to inform young people about voting for issues they feel strongly about?



## Presenting findings

Have students prepare a short digital presentation about issues important to them and who they feel addresses their issues. Combine the presentations into a class presentation for other students at their year level, staff or parents.

## Activity 2

# Can young people influence governments?

### Focus questions

- How can young people influence governments?
- What role do interest groups with a focus on youth play in educating and engaging young people?
- What roles do interest groups play in influencing governments?

### Resources

- [BLM 1](#) Young people, influence and interest groups



### Gathering information

While citizens under the age of 18 do not have a vote, they may still influence governments and participate in activities that advance ideas and policies, draw attention to issues, enlist community support and make a difference.

Discuss with students examples of ways that students can participate in and advocate for causes they believe in; for example, political rallies, student parliaments, multicultural organisations, Student Representative Council (SRC) activities, volunteering, social media campaigns, contacting local MPs.

Have students share examples of organisations outside of government that support and advocate for particular causes on behalf of groups of people and for issues that may be local, national or global. For example:

- human rights organisations such as Amnesty International
- health organisations such as the Australian Medical Association
- agricultural organisations such as the National Farmers Federation
- trade unions such as the ACTU
- environment organisations such as the World Wide Fund for Nature
- climate concerns such as the Australian Conservation Foundation
- online petition groups such as AVAAZ.

Show students an online example of one interest group and the sorts of information, ideas and advocacy contained on their website.

Discuss with students the roles of these organisations in promoting ideas and policies, representing groups, educating about specific issues, the ways they seek to influence government policy, how they engage with the public to build support and provide opportunities for citizen participation. Discuss the differences between interest groups and political parties. While political parties aim to win seats in parliament, interest groups aim to influence policies.

Provide students with a copy of [BLM 1](#).

Have them complete the checklist with a partner. (Explain that they may need to conduct online research when making some decisions.)

Then have students conduct research on one of the organisations with a focus on young people. (This is not an exhaustive list and there may be alternative youth-focused organisations within your local community.)

Students should focus their research on:

- the name of the organisation
- the target audience of the organisation
- the goals of the organisation
- the issues addressed by the organisation
- the scope of the issue – local, national or global
- how young people can be involved
- how the organisation might influence government
- how the organisation might influence and build support among young people
- the actions taken by the organisation
- the challenges to resolving the issues raised.

### Identifying and analysing

Have student pairs compare their lists with others in the class. Discuss with students the items that pairs have in common, differences between pairs, and what students learnt about influencing government.

Have student pairs present and discuss their research findings. What did they find out about these organisations? What is their scope, support and influence? Do these organisations provide expert advice, educate about issues, seek to influence government or encourage participation?

### Presenting findings

Have students use examples from their research and class discussions to produce a wiki, blog or presentation in response to the question: Do young people have power to influence government?



**Figure 34:** Young people at a protest

### Activity 3

## Should the voting age be lowered to 16?

#### Focus questions

- Who can vote?
- How do you enrol?
- Should the voting age be lowered to 16?

#### Resources

- **BLM 2** The vote at 16?
- AEC, **Enrol to vote**: [www.aec.gov.au/enrol/](http://www.aec.gov.au/enrol/)
- BBC News, Australian election – **Fines, donkey votes and democracy sausages**: [https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=3y\\_xXZ7paVI](https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=3y_xXZ7paVI)



Figure 35: Young people enrolling to vote

### Gathering information

Show students the BBC news video clip on voting in Australia. Remind students that voting is not compulsory in Britain. Discuss with students the aspects of Australian elections this BBC reporter finds unusual, the views about compulsory voting expressed in the video and the impact of compulsory voting on election outcomes. What are their views about compulsory voting?

Have students in groups use the AEC website to briefly answer the following questions:

- Who can vote?
- How do citizens enrol to vote?
- What is the purpose of the electoral roll?
- What are the arguments for and against compulsory voting?

Read through **BLM 2** with students.

Discuss the arguments advanced about lowering the voting age, compulsory and voluntary voting and the maturity of 16-year-olds. Which arguments are most convincing to them?

Have students research voting knowledge of your senior school population as well as attitudes to lowering the voting age to 16. Develop a simple class survey that could be used by all groups in the class.

### Identifying and analysing

Have students report back to the class and discuss the following:

- What arguments are there for and against compulsory voting? Which arguments are most convincing to students?
- How might compulsory enrolment of 16-year-olds encourage increased interest in voting for young people?
- How knowledgeable is our senior school population about enrolling and voting? What are their attitudes to lowering the voting age?

Revisit the material on **BLM 2**.

Discuss the arguments put forward by young people about reducing the voting age:

- What are the arguments for and against voting for 16- and 17-year-olds?
- What are the arguments for and against compulsory voting for 16- and 17-year-olds?
- What are the arguments regarding the maturity of young people?
- What is your opinion?

### Presenting findings

Have student groups use discussion and research to either:

- compose a letter to the editor of a newspaper or create a social media campaign arguing the case for or against voting for 16- and 17-year-olds
- prepare a presentation for senior students about enrolling to vote.



## Activity 4

# Elections, engagement and fake news

### Focus questions

- How do we engage and inform people about enrolling and voting?
- Why is critical media literacy particularly important in the digital age?
- Why is disinformation a challenge to free and fair elections?

### Resources

- **BLM 3** How to vote based on the facts (not spin) this election campaign
- **Animation: Your rights and responsibilities**
- AEC, **Electoral communication**: [www.aec.gov.au/About\\_AEC/electoral-communication.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/About_AEC/electoral-communication.htm)
- Media Literacy in Democracy, **Women's Suffrage in Australia**: <https://education.aec.gov.au/teacher-resources/media-literacy.html>



Figure 36: Young polling official on election day

## Gathering information

View the **animation 'Your rights and responsibilities'**.

Discuss the following with students:

- Who is the key audience for this animation?
- What is the purpose of this animation?
- What are the rights and responsibilities of voters in a democracy?
- What are the responsibilities of the AEC?
- In a democracy, why is it important for voters to have access to voting? In what ways does the AEC create access for people who would normally not be able to get to a polling booth on election day?
- Is the source reliable? Is it current? Is it true? Why might the AEC include advice about checking the content of political communication?

Have students view the Communication page of the AEC website and read the material on 'Stop and consider' and discuss the following in groups:

- Why do you think the AEC included 'Stop and consider' in its 2019 election material?
- What advice is given in relation to the political content of election material?

- What do you think motivates some people to intentionally create or share disinformation (false information or fake news) online?
- How can social media users deal with the problem of disinformation, inaccuracies and missing facts on social media?
- Why is disinformation bad for democracy?

Provide students with **BLM 3**.

Have students in groups list and discuss the challenges and possible strategies to detect and counter disinformation during elections.

## Identifying and analysing

Have groups present and discuss the following:

- What are the key messages that young people need in order to encourage them to enrol and vote?
- Why are truth, complete and factual information particularly important during election campaigns?
- What are the best strategies young people can use to interrogate election material they find on the internet?

## Presenting findings

Have student groups prepare a social media campaign alerting young people to the questions that must be asked of social media election material.

## Activity 5

# Your vote, your choice

### Focus questions

- How might we best encourage young people to enrol?
- How might we best encourage young people to vote?

### Resources

- AEC, [Enrol to vote](http://www.aec.gov.au/enrol/): [www.aec.gov.au/enrol/](http://www.aec.gov.au/enrol/)
- AEC, [Voting options](http://www.aec.gov.au/Voting/ways_to_vote/): [www.aec.gov.au/Voting/ways\\_to\\_vote/](http://www.aec.gov.au/Voting/ways_to_vote/)
- AEC, [Preferential voting](http://www.aec.gov.au/learn/preferential-voting.htm): [www.aec.gov.au/learn/preferential-voting.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/learn/preferential-voting.htm)
- AEC, [Electoral communication](http://www.aec.gov.au/About_AEC/electoral-communication.htm): [www.aec.gov.au/About\\_AEC/electoral-communication.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/About_AEC/electoral-communication.htm)



Figure 37: Enrolling to vote

### Gathering information

Organise students into groups of five to discuss, research and organise a campaign encouraging enrolment and voting among young people in your area. The task is to create a promotional video to encourage young people in your local area to enrol and vote.

The video should be no longer than 2–3 minutes.

Ask students to follow these steps:

- Identify your goals.
- Profile your audience and the issues that will engage them.
- Research your issues – you need to get your facts straight.
- List your key messages – these need to be short and catchy.
- Research the requirements of enrolment and voting to include in your presentation.
- Storyboard your script – consider visual appeal, props as well as messaging.

### Identifying and analysing

Conduct a focus group activity to test your ideas with other groups in the class.

They should consider the following:

- Is the messaging clear and accurate?
- Have you hit your target market?
- Is the content engaging?
- What resonated with them? What missed the mark?

Groups should adjust their storyboards based on the feedback they received before filming.

### Presenting findings

As a class, agree on a set of criteria to assess the videos.

Prepare a simple rubric and distribute to the class. Students will assess each film (except their own) and findings will be collated. Alternatively, use an online survey or polling tool to capture responses immediately.

Have students present their videos to the class.

Consider presenting the videos to other classes or at student assemblies or parent meetings.





## Going further

### Media literacy and democracy

Extend students' understanding of critical media literacy by having them complete activities in the AEC online unit, [Media Literacy in Democracy](#).

Students explore activities to help them recognise bias and a range of persuasive techniques which are commonly used to direct readers to accept a particular point of view. They look at characteristics of the changing media landscape: how algorithms are used to filter and determine information shown to users and the characteristics of online media such as Facebook and Twitter.

Students explore critical media literacy through the historical issue of Women's suffrage in Australia where they examine fictional online news sources, Facebook pages and Twitter feeds.

Teachers can reinforce and apply the understanding of media literacy obtained in this unit by asking students to investigate particular contemporary issues.



Figure 38: Media literacy in democracy resource

## Young people, influence and interest groups

1. Tick the actions that people under the age of 18 can undertake to advocate for issues and influence government.

	Organise or sign a petition
	Write a wiki or a blog about an issue
	Start a social media campaign
	Vote at national elections
	Speak at a public meeting
	Distribute leaflets
	Put up posters
	Contact a member of parliament or councillor about an issue
	Wear a badge or T-shirt supporting a cause
	Write a letter to mainstream media
	Join a street demonstration
	Perform street theatre
	Vote in a referendum
	Provide input to parliamentary committees
	Join a political party
	Stand for parliament or council
	Join a non-government organisation (NGO)

2. Examples of interest groups with a focus on youth.

- **Oaktree:** [www.oaktree.org](http://www.oaktree.org)
- **Australian Youth Climate Coalition:** [www.aycc.org.au](http://www.aycc.org.au)
- **Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network:** [www.myan.org.au/](http://www.myan.org.au/)
- **UN Youth Australia:** [www.unyouth.org.au/](http://www.unyouth.org.au/)
- World Vision, Young Mob – **Leadership Program:** [www.worldvision.com.au/global-issues/work-we-do/supporting-indigenous-australia/sydneys-young-mob-leadership-program](http://www.worldvision.com.au/global-issues/work-we-do/supporting-indigenous-australia/sydneys-young-mob-leadership-program)
- **The Foundation for Young Australians:** [www.fya.org.au](http://www.fya.org.au)
- **VicSRC:** [www.vicsrc.org.au](http://www.vicsrc.org.au)
- **Youth Action (NSW):** [www.youthaction.org.au/what\\_we\\_do](http://www.youthaction.org.au/what_we_do)
- **Student Voice hub:** [studentvoicehub.org.au/forums/t/nsw-src/#](http://studentvoicehub.org.au/forums/t/nsw-src/#)
- **National Schools Constitutional Convention:** [www.ncsonline.com.au/projects/national-schools-constitutional-convention](http://www.ncsonline.com.au/projects/national-schools-constitutional-convention)
- **Youth Coalition of the ACT:** [www.youthcoalition.net](http://www.youthcoalition.net)
- **Queensland Youth Housing Coalition:** [www.qyhc.org.au](http://www.qyhc.org.au)
- **Youth Opportunities (SA):** [www.youthopportunities.com.au/](http://www.youthopportunities.com.au/)
- **YACWA:** [www.yacwa.org.au](http://www.yacwa.org.au)

## The vote at 16?

The voting age in Australia was lowered from 21 to 18 years in 1973. Some people argue that it is time to lower the voting age again – to 16.

There are overseas examples for lowering the voting age. Countries and territories such as Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, Guernsey, Jersey, Isle of Man, Malta, Nicaragua and Scotland have a legal voting age of 16. Our neighbours in Indonesia, Korea and Timor-Leste have a voting age of 17. Still other countries have a voting age of 19 or older.

### Joint Standing Committee of the Australian Parliament and the Vote for 16- and 17-year-olds

In March 2019 the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters published an Advisory Report in response to the proposed amendments to the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* and the *Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Act 1984* proposed by the Greens which included lowering the voting age to 16, allowing voluntary voting for 16- and 17-year-olds and lowering the age that individuals can be added to the electoral roll from 16 to 14. The committee considered a range of submissions covering arguments relating to equality, maturity and compulsory voting before rejecting the proposal.

(Source: Parliament of Australia, Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, [Advisory Report](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Electoral_Matters/VotingAge/Advisory_report), March 2019, [www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Joint/Electoral\\_Matters/VotingAge/Advisory\\_report](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Electoral_Matters/VotingAge/Advisory_report))



The following extracts cover a sample of the information and views put forward.

### Age of majority for selected activities

Responsibility	Age
Age in federal adult court	18
Marriage	18 (16 with parental consent)
Alcohol consumption	18
Military service	17 (requires parental consent)
Sexual consent	16 (17 in some states)
Drivers licence	17 (18 in Victoria)
Consent to medical treatment	18 (16 in NSW and SA; no age restrictions in Queensland and Tasmania)
Leave full-time education	17 (in some states 16 if working; in WA until 17.5 or on completion of Year 10)

(Advisory Report page 9)

## The vote at 16?

“Aligning the franchise with adult responsibilities such as taxation, parenting and medical consent is a compelling argument. However, while 16- and 17-year-olds do take on significant responsibilities, in most cases this is under parental guidance and most social and legal norms do not apply full responsibility until the age of 18 – even young parents remain under the guardianship of their parents until they reach the age of 18. Every state and territory has legislation relating to the age of majority and this is set at 18 in each jurisdiction.

(Advisory Report page 9)

“Little longitudinal research has been undertaken on the community’s attitude towards lowering the voting age to 16. However, the research that has been undertaken indicates limited community support for lowering the voting age.

(Advisory Report page 4)

“Young people aged 16 and 17 are active and contributing members of Australian society, who hold considerable decision-making powers regarding their own lives and who are required to meet a number of legal requirements. Extending the voluntary vote to 16- and 17-year-olds would be an instrumental step in assuring that young people are funnelling their political motivation into traditional civic avenues, that relationships between young people and politicians are strengthened, and that young people are treated as valued citizens. These outcomes would be positive for Australia’s democracy as a whole.

Youth Action NSW, quoted (Advisory Report page 5)

“Young people are frequently excluded from policy discussions in a range of domains affecting their lives, such as employment, education, housing, tax, the environment, welfare and support services. Due to their ineligibility to vote, young people aged 16 or 17 are unable to hold politicians and governments to account through electoral processes, resulting in youth affairs seldom being a priority for the government. Consequently, the challenges that young people experience frequently go unaddressed.

Youth Coalition of the ACT, quoted (Advisory Report page 7)

“Young people have a powerful vision for the world, and have a vital role to play in shaping our future, especially in this critical time for addressing climate change. The tired rhetoric that young people are apathetic is so out of touch with a generation of young people who feel scared about the future they’ll grow up in.

Australian Youth Climate Coalition, quoted (Advisory Report page 8)

“[...] making voting for 16- and 17-year-olds voluntary poses a risk to Australia’s very successful system of compulsory voting. Any arguments that could be made in support of making voting for 16- and 17-year-olds voluntary are equally applicable to voters who are 18 years old, 28 years old or 88 years old. Making voting for 16- and 17-year-olds voluntary would put a hole in Australia’s system of compulsory voting

Associate Professor Luke Back, quoted (Advisory Report page 16)

“At 16, teenagers are still basing decisions off on their emotions and impulse rather than logic and reasoning. Moreover, as teenagers, they are prone to peer pressure and may vote according to their friend group’s votes. Teenagers at this age may not take it as a serious matter of the country, and may regard it as an annoying, compulsory chore. They are likely to be swayed by influential people in their lives, as they have little political view and are likely to adopt those of the people around them.

Calvin Teo, quoted (Advisory Report page 18)

# How to vote based on the facts (not spin) this election campaign

Source: Extracts from ABC Life: [www.abc.net.au/life/federal-election-how-to-vote-based-on-the-facts-not-spin/11025852](http://www.abc.net.au/life/federal-election-how-to-vote-based-on-the-facts-not-spin/11025852) (May, 2019)

[...]

As an engaged voter, one of the hardest tasks is trying to cut through the spin and promises of the campaign. Politicians, commentators and media outlets all have their own biases, which makes getting to the truth a difficult task.

On top of all of that, we have our own preconceptions that can make it hard to separate fact from fiction.

So, here's some tips for using your head, rather than your instincts, to make a better voting decision this election.



## Navigating bias in an election campaign

The first step to becoming more objective when it comes to decisions is accepting that being objective is really, really hard, says Blake McKimmie, Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Queensland.

[...]

Here's a few of the more common biases to be particularly aware of:

We tend to see our beliefs as being typical, which means we often overlook or underestimate those with different perspectives. It's what's called the false consensus effect, Dr McKimmie says.

When we're repeatedly exposed to something, we tend to like it more. This is called the mere-exposure effect. Politicians take advantage of this when they repeat talking points or statements over and over again, Dr McKimmie says.

We tend to only seek out information that confirms or supports our views. This is called confirmation bias. If you want to be objective, you really need to be challenging yourself and thinking about how you might be wrong, or what it would take to change your mind.

We tend to estimate the likelihood of an event occurring based on how easy it is to bring to mind examples. Psychologists call this the availability heuristic. (Heuristic just means 'mental shortcut'.)

[...]

So what can we do about it? Dr McKimmie suggests asking yourself two key questions when evaluating something you read or hear during the campaign:

1. Why is this speaker, writer or commentator telling you what they're telling you? Remember, political campaigns are about advocacy and not about providing accurate information, Dr McKimmie says. Be cautious about taking any claim at face value.

2. What is the evidence to support this claim? And what evidence will undermine the claim? Try to look at both sides of any issue, he says, and ask yourself what it would take to change your mind.

'Political campaigns are filled with noise ... if you want to remain as objective as possible, tune all that out and focus on impartial sources that analyse actual policy,' adds Tim Dean, Honorary Associate at the University of Sydney's Philosophy department.

## How to vote based on the facts (not spin) this election campaign

It's especially important today, when anyone with any motive can publish information or misinformation online. And it goes beyond deception and 'fake news'.

'In order to understand information, you can't simply put it in a fact or fiction bucket ... we need to really understand bias, and agenda, and credibility, and how those things are intertwined,' Michelle Ciulla Lipkin, executive director of the US National Association for Media Literacy Education, told the ABC last year.

[...]

Along with her husband and her late father-in-law, Ms Rosling Rönnlund has worked to promote a 'fact-based worldview'. They wrote a book together aimed at combating some common misconceptions we hold about the world.

[...]

We tend to hear more bad news than good news, which can lead us to think the world is worse off than it really is.

We tend to hear about extreme events — freak weather and terrorist attacks, for instance — but rarely hear about the mundane or the average. We're also prone to making sweeping generalisations.

So how can we overcome this tendency towards the dramatic? It's as simple as remembering two key things, Ms Rosling Rönnlund says.

Try to stay humble about your own abilities and your own knowledge. Most likely, you know less about the world than you think.

Be curious about getting to know what others think and try to fix your own knowledge gaps.

'If people could act more like that, I think we could have more decent debates, and I think people would use their analytical brains in better ways,' she says.

### Focus on the facts, not person

Let's be honest, a lot of us take all kinds of shortcuts when deciding how to cast our vote. Many of us vote for the politician we like the most, or the one who performs well in debates or interviews.

While it's important for our political leaders to be likeable and good communicators, it doesn't necessarily make them better at the job they're applying for: running the country.

This is just one example of how stereotypes can affect our decision-making when it comes to choosing who to vote for.

[...]

'If you break it down issue by issue, and evaluate it issue by issue, then work out which political party is best aligned with your own priorities, that's probably a better way to do it,' Dr McKimmie says.



## Running an election in your school

### Background information

Running an election for your class, year level or across the whole school provides an opportunity for students to participate in the democratic process of choosing representatives for a range of purposes. These can include Student Representative Council, Junior School Council, sports captains, class captains, or representatives for key meetings. Elections can also be held to decide on whole-school or class excursions, camps, and specific class or year-level interests.

It is important that an election is for real positions with real responsibilities. Students need to develop their understanding of an election being multifaceted – the procedural and outcome components of an election and the concept and role of representation. If the election is not for an ongoing position, authenticity of the representative role can be provided by, for example, representatives being elected to attend a meeting with an environment officer at a local council, a meeting with the school principal or year-level coordinator, or attending a School Council meeting on a specific issue.

To ensure the integrity of the election process, staff and students must be willing to respect the outcome of the election and honour the elected representative fulfilling the agreed-to or specified role.

There are many voting systems that can be used for conducting an election in a school, including the 'first past the post' or 'most votes wins' method. However, it is suggested that the **preferential voting system** with an **absolute majority** be chosen as it is the system that students will be using when they vote in federal elections.

The procedures outlined are also those that students will follow when they vote at federal elections. These procedures and formalities are designed to ensure a free and fair election.

### Full preferential voting

In the full preferential voting system, the elector (voter) needs to put a number in each of the squares beside the candidates' names. An explanation of the word 'prefer' will help students understand this concept. The number 1 shows the elector's first choice or preference; 2 indicates the second choice or preference, and so on. All squares must be filled in indicating the full preferences of the elector. This type of voting is called full preferential voting.

### Formal voting

For a ballot paper to be considered as a formal vote, and therefore be counted, all squares must be numbered according to the elector's preferences. Other markings such as ticks and crosses render the ballot paper informal. Informal votes will not be counted in the scrutiny (count). This is because the voter's preference intention is not clear. Also because of the importance of the secret ballot, no marks or names that could identify the elector can appear on the ballot paper. For example, if an elector signs or prints their name on the ballot paper it will be an informal ballot paper.

A 'donkey' vote is a term many students will know. It refers to a ballot paper that has been completed by the supposed demonstration of a preference for each candidate in the order that they appear on the ballot paper. For example, '1' is placed against the candidate listed at the top of the ballot paper, '2' against the second candidate, and so on. In some cases the elector has not made an intentional choice in the ordering of their preferred candidates; they have just 'filled out' the ballot paper. For counting votes in the scrutiny process, the 'donkey' vote is considered a formal ballot, so it is counted. The reason behind this lies in the fact that the order of names on the ballot are allotted by random draw so just because an elector has written sequential numbers does not necessarily mean the sequential order of the numbers was not a well-considered choice.

### Resources

- [BLM 1](#) Ballot paper template
- [BLM 2](#) Scrutiny chart – Full preferential voting
- [Interactive voting tool](#)
- AEC, [Get voting](https://education.aec.gov.au/getvoting/voter-list/): <https://education.aec.gov.au/getvoting/voter-list/>

## Absolute majority

A candidate must receive over 50% of the formal vote to be elected as a representative. This may be decided at the first count if over 50% of the vote has been gained by a candidate, or as the result of further distributions of votes to second preferences, third preferences and so on until one candidate has received more than 50%.

## Scrutiny – counting the vote

The scrutiny continues until a candidate has received over 50% of the vote. This may require a full distribution of preferences to other candidates. The following example explains the process.

A class of 25 students vote and:

- candidate A receives 7 first preference votes
- candidate B receives 8 first preference votes
- candidate C receives 6 first preference votes
- candidate D receives 4 first preference votes.



**Figure 39:** Receiving ballot papers for student elections

To achieve the majority, electors' second-choice candidates are then considered.

The votes from the lowest-polling candidate, who is least likely to be elected and is 'excluded', are distributed to the other candidates, that is to candidates A, B and C in the preference order that the elector has indicated. This process continues with the lowest-polling candidate, after each redistribution of preferences, having their votes distributed until one candidate has over 50% of the vote.

Candidate D's votes are distributed according to the electors' second preferences to the other three candidates like this:

2 to A, 1 to B and 1 to C.

Still no candidate has received over 50% of the formal vote.

Candidate C, who has the lowest number of votes, is excluded and their preferences are redistributed. The six electors whose first preference was candidate C now have their votes moved to their second preference. The second preference votes gained from candidate D in the first distribution are included in this second distribution. This means that on one ballot paper, the elector's third preference is now considered.

## From the margin

### Informal voting

This does not refer to casual clothing.

It's a vote not counted in an election because it has been cast in a way that violates the rules. Using an inappropriate mark, missing a number in a full preferential system or illegibility can make a vote informal. Postal votes that arrive late or without appropriate authentication (such as an envelope signature) may also be considered invalid (informal). In the 2019 federal election, 5.5% of the votes for the House of Representatives were informal.

	1st count	Transfer vote	2nd count	Transfer vote	3rd count
<b>Candidate A</b>	7	2	9	4	13 (elected)
<b>Candidate B</b>	8	1	9	3	12
<b>Candidate C</b>	6	1	7 (excluded)		
<b>Candidate D*</b>	4 (excluded)				
<b>Total number of votes</b>	25		25		25

Formal votes = 25; Informal votes = 0; Absolute majority = 13 (more than 50%)

\* If during the exclusion process after first preferences are distributed, there are two candidates with an equal number of least votes, then a name is drawn from a hat and the name drawn is excluded from the count. If this happens at the second round for exclusion, the candidate with the least number of votes at the first preference stage is excluded.

Thus, 4 votes go to candidate A (including 1 vote of candidate D's third preference) and 3 votes to candidate B.

Candidate A would be elected as they have received over 50% of the formal vote.

Interestingly this candidate would not have been elected under a 'first past the post' system. This highlights the importance of emphasising to students to seriously consider the allocation not only of their first preference but their subsequent ones as well. The allocation of second and third preferences decided the result of this election.

### Secret ballot

The secret ballot is an important part of the Australian electoral system. It was first introduced in Australia in 1856, in the colony of Victoria. Other countries have followed this example and it is known as the 'Australian ballot' overseas. The secret ballot allows voters to make their choice in private, without pressure or intimidation.

School elections need to provide screens to ensure that voting can be secret.

### Enrolment

Australia has compulsory enrolment for elections. It is important that students are enrolled to vote in the election. Class rolls based on school enrolment may be used as the qualification or students could be provided with an enrolment form to formally enrol for the election.

### Candidates

Procedures for the nomination of candidates and qualifications for nomination must be made clear prior to running the election as any attempt to make changes after the vote will compromise the election. Nomination forms could include both student and teacher endorsement if there is concern about the calibre of candidates.

Interestingly, some students given the opportunity to take on roles of responsibility really rise to the occasion, so exclusion should be considered carefully. Often schools are concerned that nominations of candidates are motivated by popularity, or even a wish to mock the election, rather than a consideration of representatives' qualities.

The election of an 'unsuitable' candidate, although not a desired outcome, can actually be instructional for all students, reinforcing the need for careful consideration in the future. At one Student Representative Council election a final-year student assisting with the election was heard to comment:

The Year 7s vote for the popular kids but they soon learn that they are not necessarily the best students for the job. The older kids vote for who will represent them best, those who take the role seriously.

## From the margin

### Longest ballot paper

In 1992 when the former prime minister Bob Hawke resigned from the parliament, a by-election was held for the seat of Wills. This by-election attracted an army of candidates – 22 in all. This was the longest House of Representatives ballot paper since Federation.

Criteria and qualifications are ultimately up to the school to decide on, but must be clearly defined prior to the call for nominations for the election.

Students need to be aware of the purpose of the election and have a clear understanding of the expectations of the representative's role. Commitment to the number of meetings, facilitation of class/group discussions prior to representative meetings, and the knowledge that they are representing the whole group rather than their own agenda need to be clearly spelt out to both nominators and potential candidates.

### Compulsory voting

Australia has had compulsory voting since 1924 when the Parliament passed an amendment to the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* to make it law. In line with federal elections, it is important that compulsory voting is part of school elections. There are certain groups of the population who have a valid and sufficient reason for failing to vote, for example, on religious grounds (such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Christian Brethren), and these students should also be allowed to be exempt from school elections.

Provision should be made for students who are going to be absent on the day of the election to cast a pre-poll vote prior to election day.

## Terminology

It is important to use correct terminology when running an election in your school.

For example, you are *elected*, you do not win an election; absolute majority is over 50% of the formal vote, not 50% + 1.

Other election terminology includes ballot box, ballot box guard, ballot papers, ballot paper distribution, campaign, candidates, certified list of electors, issuing tables, preferential voting, polling officials, queue controllers, scrutineers, and scrutiny. These are elaborated on in the 'Prior to election day' and 'School election day' sections as well as in the 'Glossary'.

## Prior to election day

To ensure a free and fair election and to assist with the smooth running of an election, you need to address the following.

The time intervals are suggestions only.

## One month prior

### Purpose of election

It is important to have a clear purpose for the election and ensure that the 'voters' are also clear about what they are voting for.

Are electors voting for class representatives, year representatives or in a whole-school election? How many representatives are to be elected?

### Timeline of events

A timeline for the election will assist in the smooth running of the election and allow the school as a whole to be aware of the upcoming process. The information on these pages is a good start. Provide a copy of the timeline to all staff involved in the election process.

### Announcement of the election

This could be announced in class, at year level or at a whole-school assembly, depending on who is to be involved. The purpose of the election, candidate qualifications and the timeline for processes should be outlined. These should include:

- date for close of nominations
- dates for campaign period
- date of election day
- date election result will be announced.

A request for polling officials could also be announced at this time. Polling officials must not be candidates or members of the campaigning team.

## From the margin

### Screens and pencils

Under the *Commonwealth Electoral Act* (Section 206) voters must be provided with 'separate voting compartments and each must have an implement or method for voters to mark their ballot papers'. The voter can, however, use their own writing implement if preferred.

## Two weeks prior

### Enrolment

There should be an enrolment procedure, which will provide the official electoral roll for the election. Set a suitable deadline by which electors must enrol. This roll will be used to create the 'certified list of voters' used on election day.

### Candidate nominations, qualifications and campaigning

The procedure and qualifications for candidate nominations need to be decided prior to the election and need to be discussed at school leadership level.

A nomination form can streamline the nomination process, with accompanying qualifications outlined. If a campaigning period is to be included, it is important to have the support of staff and make necessary changes to timetables or assembly time to enable the campaign to take place.

### Ballot paper draw

After the nomination of candidates has been finalised, the order of their names on the ballot paper needs to be decided by a random draw, which should be conducted in public to ensure neutrality.

## One week prior

### Timetable of election day

A timetable for election day will assist in the smooth running of the election. Designating specific voting times for classes, groups and year levels will assist others to know when students are required to attend the polling place. Provide a copy of the voting timetable to all staff involved in supervising students on election day.

### Election material

Print a specific number of ballot papers – at least one for each enrolled voter and some spares to replace 'spoilt' ballot papers. Use 'special' paper and keep the printed ballot papers secure until election day. Go to the Get Voting website and use the [ballot paper generator](#).

Multiple certified lists of electors (these could be copies of class rolls or year-level lists) need to be printed.

Go to the AEC's Get Voting website and use the [Voter list generator](#).

### Polling officials and scrutineers

Polling officials assist with running the election and counting the vote. Ensure that there are enough students to act in these roles. Organise a short training session for polling officials, clearly outlining their roles on election day. Scrutineers add to the credibility of the process.

Allow candidates to nominate scrutineers to oversee the process and the count. Provide students with role-play badges identifying their delegated election day roles and duties, such as polling official or scrutineer.

### Election equipment

Ballot boxes, ballot box seals, polling official badges and posters are provided free to schools by the AEC Education Section. To order your election equipment pack, visit the [AEC's Get Voting](#) website to register. Allow at least two weeks for processing and postage.



## Checklist: running an election in your school

	Ballot box seals
	Ballot boxes (labelling will assist in identifying the class or year group)
	Ballot papers
	Candidate name signs
	Certified list of electors
	Chairs
	Pencils
	Polling official badges
	Scrutineer badges
	Tables
	Voting screens

### Three days prior

#### Classroom mock election

Conduct a 'mock election' in the classroom. This will provide students with the opportunity to develop their understanding of the formalities of the voting process, and to practise actually filling out the ballot paper.

The ensuing scrutiny will enable students to understand the importance of their preference allocation and how votes are distributed. Ensure that the mock election reflects the procedures and processes outlined for a real election.

You could choose from the following scenarios.

#### Scenario 1: Fruit

The class is having a barbeque lunch and a piece of fruit is being included in the lunch pack. To avoid wastage, only one type of fruit will be provided. The teacher wants to know which fruit is preferred by the class: apples, bananas, oranges or pears.

**BLM 1** and **BLM 2** will assist with this scenario.

### Scenario 2: Camp activity

The class is going on camp, and there is time for an extra activity. Members of the class have indicated they would like to go swimming, canoeing, bushwalking and bike riding. There is only time for one of these activities so a choice needs to be made.

### One day prior

#### The polling place

Ensure that the area chosen for the polling place is large enough to enable a good 'traffic flow' in and out of the polling place.

Allow space for electors to vote in secret. Ensure some structure is used to provide privacy.

### School election day

#### Before the polling place opens

Assemble polling officials and review tasks allocated at the training session. Answer any queries regarding roles and responsibilities. Scrutineers should observe that the ballot boxes are empty before the polling official seals them.

#### Polling official

- 1 Open the polling place for voting to begin.
- 2 Distribute the ballot papers.

There is an official procedure for handing out ballot papers:

- a Ask the voter's name and address, check that they are on the certified list of electors and mark their name off (this could mean giving name, year level and class if school rolls are being used).
- b Ask the voter if they have voted already in today's election. If the voter answers no, the ballot paper is given to the voter.
- c Mark each ballot paper with the polling official's initials.
- d Direct the voter to the voting screens and ask them to place their ballot papers in the ballot box after filling them in.

To assist in distribution, two polling officials at one table can share these duties – one official asking the questions (name, address, previous voting) and the other official initialling ballot papers, handing out ballot papers and directing voters to screens.

### From the margin

#### Closing of the rolls

For federal elections the electoral roll closes at 8 pm, seven days after the writ for an election is issued.



## From the margin

### Imprisonment and the vote

People who are serving a sentence of three years or more for a crime committed against the laws of the Commonwealth or a state or territory are not entitled to enrol or vote in elections for the House of Representatives or Senate.

### Ballot box guard

This polling place official makes sure that:

- 1 no one tampers with the ballot box
- 2 all voters place their ballot paper in the correct ballot box.

### Queue controllers

These polling place officials are responsible for keeping queues orderly and directing people to ballot paper distribution points.

### The voters

Voters go to the issuing table, answer the three questions asked by the polling official and then move to a voting screen to fill out their ballot papers. They follow instructions to fill out the ballot correctly and deposit their ballots in the ballot box. Remember all polling officials, candidates and scrutineers also have to vote.

### Vote counters

When the poll closes, all the polling officials count the votes. This involves emptying the ballot box; checking to see if ballot papers are formal and removing informal ballot papers from the count; and placing ballot papers in first preference piles and counting them. In federal elections, all voters do not witness the count, but in your classroom you may prefer to do it this way as a valuable learning experience.

### Scrutineers

Scrutineers are people nominated by the candidates to watch (scrutinise) the voting and counting process to ensure all procedures are followed correctly. They may not touch the ballot papers.

### Other roles

Provide a small group of students with a timetable allocating voting timeframes for each class or level to vote. These students can call each group to the polling place at the appropriate time, preventing a backlog of students waiting to vote.

## From the margin

### Cool voting

Penguins cannot vote, but eligible electors living and working at Australia's Antarctic research bases do! In the 2019 federal election, the AEC emailed ballot papers to Antarctica. After the close of polls, the results were phoned through to the AEC's Hobart office. Voting is not compulsory for Antarctic electors because the process used cannot assure a secret ballot.



Figure 40: Voters, polling officials and a ballot box guard in a school election

## After the close of the polling place

- Assemble polling officials and scrutineers. The scrutineers' role is to observe only.
- Show them where they can stand to see clearly.
- Select as many polling officials as there are candidates on the ballot paper.
- Tell each polling official which candidate's votes they will be counting.
- Set up a large table on which to conduct the scrutiny.
- Place candidate name signs on the table in the order in which they appear on the ballot paper.
- Open the ballot boxes and empty the contents on the table.
- Count the votes and record on Scrutiny chart **BLM 2**. The scrutiny/count is a public procedure and should be conducted in front of the voters.

## Scrutiny (count) procedures

- Check all ballot papers for formality. Put aside informal ballot papers as they are not included in the count.
- Count the total number of formal ballot papers. This total is used to calculate the absolute majority of votes (more than 50% of formal votes).
- Calculate the absolute majority required and record this on a scrutiny chart.
- Sort ballot papers into first preference piles, that is candidates with the number 1 in the square next to their name. (Candidate name signs will assist.)
- Check piles for correct first preference allocation.
- Count each vote one by one and record totals in the first count column on the scrutiny chart (this also provides an opportunity to check that the total number of ballots initially recorded matches the preference piles – a check for misplaced ballot papers).
- If a candidate receives more than 50% of the formal votes on the first count, the candidate is elected and no further counting is necessary. This is a rare occurrence.

If no candidate receives an absolute majority in the first count, the counting process continues.

The next step is to begin the transfer of votes to find the candidate preferred by more than 50% of the voters. The candidate with the least number of votes is identified, 'excluded' and crossed off the scrutiny chart. Explain that this candidate is least likely to be elected but the voters who voted for this candidate are then given their second choice candidate. The votes are transferred according to their second preference marked on each ballot paper.

Each ballot paper from the 'excluded' candidate pile is looked at and one by one they are 'transferred' to the candidate who was the voter's second choice, as indicated by the number 2. Record each vote on the scrutiny chart next to the candidate's name in the transfer vote column. When all ballots have been transferred, add these transferred votes to the original vote totals to see if an absolute majority has been reached. This is the total in the second count column of the scrutiny chart. If a candidate has received more than 50% of the votes they are elected.

If no candidate has more than the majority of votes after this transfer, the next step is a repeat of the last – the candidate with the least number of votes is excluded\* and their votes transferred according to preferences to the remaining candidates. This means on these ballot papers the voter's second choice needs to be identified – indicated by the number 2. Importantly, if the second candidate has already been excluded, the number 3 choice candidate is used. The vote is moved to the appropriate candidate's pile and votes are recorded on the scrutiny chart in the transfer vote column. Again votes are totalled to see if an absolute majority is achieved. At this stage, one candidate usually achieves an absolute majority. With small numbers of votes and candidates it is rare for the scrutiny to go beyond three transfer rounds.

\* If there is an 'equal least' candidate at this stage, the candidate who had the least votes in the previous rounds is excluded.

If two candidates receive 'equal least' votes during the first distribution of preferences, for example two candidates with 20 votes each, a draw takes place. Both candidates' names are placed on a piece of paper of equal size and placed in a container. The candidate whose name is drawn becomes the candidate who is excluded from the next count and their votes are distributed to the remaining candidate(s). Explain to the group that the name taken out is 'excluded', the opposite of the usual 'winner drawn from a hat'.

## From the margin

### Overseas voters

In the 2019 federal election voters who were travelling, working or living overseas could vote at one of 85 Australian overseas voting centres, or could apply for a postal vote. Pre-poll voting was available for up to two weeks prior to election day. There were more than 61,000 votes cast at Australian overseas voting centres including 13,000 in London, 5,500 in Hong Kong and 3,300 in New York City.

## Announcement of the results

This may take place at the classroom level or at school assembly, depending on the type of election. It is important not only to congratulate the elected representatives on their achievement, but also to acknowledge those who were not elected. Effective and robust democracies are dependent on active citizens who are willing to stand as candidates and give electors choice.

## Plenary

Provide an opportunity for all staff, polling officials, candidates and interested participants to meet to discuss the running of the election. A simple PMI activity may assist. This enables the successes of the election to be acknowledged and provides an opportunity for any suggestions for the smooth running of further elections to be noted, providing valuable background information for your next election.

## Further assistance

Contact the AEC Education Section by emailing [education@aec.gov.au](mailto:education@aec.gov.au) or check out the AEC for Schools website and our [Get Voting resources](#) at <https://education.aec.gov.au/>

Information can also be obtained on the [AEC website](#) at [www.aec.gov.au](http://www.aec.gov.au) or by phoning 13 23 26 for more information on topics such as:

- elections
- voting
- enrolment
- electoral roll
- redistributions
- candidates.

## Further resources for classroom elections from the AEC

### Voting in Australia – classroom magazine

This colourful 22-page magazine provides a comprehensive overview of the Australian electoral system. It covers the development of our democracy in Australia, and explains how representatives are elected to the Federal Parliament.

### Get Voting – website

If you are planning to conduct a school election, this self-serve website offers a step-by-step guide to running an election – complete with ballot paper templates, election equipment pack and tools to support student participation.


## From the margin

### In the mail

Electors who have difficulty getting to a polling place are able to apply for a postal vote. For the 2019 election 1,538,139 postal vote applications were processed, and of these 1,291,564 postal votes were returned completed by voters. This was a 2% increase from the 2016 election.

# Ballot paper template

Sample  
House of Representatives  
Ballot Paper



National Electoral Education Centre

Number the boxes from 1 to 4 in the order of your choice

☐ Orange

☐ Apple


☐ Pear

☐ Banana

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

SAMPLE  
AEC EDUCATIONAL USE ONLY

Sample  
House of Representatives  
Ballot Paper



National Electoral Education Centre

Number the boxes from 1 to 4 in the order of your choice

☐ Orange

☐ Apple


☐ Pear

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

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

SAMPLE  
AEC EDUCATIONAL USE ONLY

138

Democracy Rules

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Scrutiny chart – Full preferential voting

	First count	Transfer vote	Second count	Transfer vote	Third count
Orange					
Apple					
Pear					
Banana					
Total number of votes					

Absolute majority 50%+

Formal votes

Informal votes

# Background briefings

These briefings, arranged alphabetically, provide additional information about the electoral system.

## Australian Electoral Commission

The Australian Electoral Commission is an independent statutory authority that is empowered by the Electoral Act (See *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 (Cth)*) to maintain the Commonwealth electoral roll, and to organise and conduct federal elections and referendums. As such it plays a crucial role in ensuring that elections operate according to democratic principles and values and are independent of politics. For example, the AEC supports the process of redistributing electoral boundaries.

The AEC administers election funding and financial disclosure and has the responsibility to conduct electoral education programs. While the AEC's primary responsibilities are carried out in Australia, it also assists in the conduct of foreign elections and referendums as approved by the Minister for Foreign Affairs.



**Figure 41:** A polling official initialling a ballot paper

## Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 (Cth)

Although the Constitution provides the basic legal framework for representative government at the federal level, the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 (Cth)* (the Electoral Act) provides supplementary machinery for the conduct of federal elections. In effect, the Electoral Act provides the legal basis for the administration of elections, including:

- the creation and maintenance of the electoral roll
- the distribution of electoral divisions (electorates) for the House of Representatives in each state and territory
- the registration of political parties and election funding
- the election timetable
- the rules relating to the marking of ballot papers and the counting of votes
- the rules regulating electoral advertising
- the rules governing challenges to election results.

## Constitution

The *Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act* (the Constitution) is the basis of the Australian Federation (see Federation) and broadly defines the relationship between the Commonwealth and the states, as well as the structure and powers of the Commonwealth Parliament and the High Court. The Constitution provides the legislative basis for the Commonwealth Parliament's law-making powers, and laws made by the Commonwealth Parliament must be in accordance with the Constitution.

The Constitution also establishes the basis of representation and the terms of the two houses of parliament: the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Some of the laws governing representation in the House of Representatives and the Senate are laid down in the Constitution, and these are given effect and supplemented by the provisions of the Electoral Act and its subsequent amendments.

## Democracy

Democracy comes from the Greek words *demos*, meaning 'the people', and *kratos*, meaning 'power'. Effectively, the word 'democracy' means 'people power' – the right of people to make decisions on how they are governed. In modern democracies citizens elect representatives to govern on their behalf, and these representatives remain answerable to electors at periodic elections.



## Electoral division

A fair electoral system ensures that each citizen's vote has equal value and that voters have, as near as possible, equal representation. For House of Representatives elections (see House of Representatives), each Australian state and territory is divided into electoral divisions (also called electorates) which each elect one member to the house. Each member of the House of Representatives therefore represents an individual electorate.

The number of House of Representatives electoral divisions for each state and territory is based, as near as possible, on the total population of that state or territory as a proportion of the Australian population. The exact quota is arrived at using the formula in section 24 of the Constitution. Within a given tolerance, each electorate in a particular state or territory contains the same number of electors.

Population changes affect electoral division boundaries, which are altered to ensure that electorates have, as near as possible, equal enrolments (see Redistribution).

The Senate (see Senate) differs from the House of Representatives in that it is not a single-member system. A proportional system of representation applies and electors of a state or territory, voting as a single electorate, elect the relevant number of senators to represent them.

## Electoral roll

The Commonwealth electoral roll is a list of the names and addresses of all people who have enrolled to vote at Australian elections. You cannot vote unless you have enrolled. Australian citizens aged 18 years or over must enrol to vote and must also notify any change of address in order to stay on the roll. Sixteen- and 17-year-olds can also enrol so that they're ready to vote when they turn 18.

## Federation

In 1901 the six British colonies in Australia joined to form the Commonwealth of Australia, and became the six states of the new federation. The colonies had formerly been self-governing. The rights of the new states were protected by the Constitution in the new federation, creating two levels of government: state and Commonwealth.

## Full preferential voting

Australia uses the full preferential voting system for both House of Representatives and Senate elections. Electors number the candidates in the order of their preference. For the House of Representatives, a valid ballot paper contains a preferential order that includes all candidates. This is also true for 'below the line' voting on the Senate ballot paper. However, electors for the Senate can also vote 'above the line' for particular parties or groups, by placing the numbers 1 to 6 in the squares.

In the House of Representatives – a single-member system – electors in an electoral division vote using the full preferential system and elect one Member of Parliament to represent them. To be elected, a candidate must gain an absolute majority (more than 50%) of the formal vote in an electorate or division.

While the Senate also uses a full preferential voting system, a proportional system applies to counting the votes. This means that candidates must gain a proportion of the electorate's votes (a quota) to be elected. Each state or territory forms a single electorate and voters elect the relevant number of senators.

## House of Representatives

Under the Constitution, the House of Representatives (or 'people's house') represents the people of the Commonwealth. It is the house where government is formed and where most legislation is initiated. The party (or coalition) that commands a majority of members in the House of Representatives forms the government, and the leader of that party or coalition becomes the prime minister. The House of Representatives is elected for a term of not more than three years.

## Indigenous Australians' rights

In Australia, Indigenous Australians have progressively been granted citizenship rights, including the right to vote in 1962. During the 1960s there were calls for the Australian Constitution to be changed. Although Indigenous Australians were mentioned in the Constitution, these references were to their exclusion, as under section 51 the Commonwealth Government had no power to make laws for them and, under section 127, they were excluded from being counted in the census.

These provisions meant that Indigenous Australians, who at the time were subject to a range of differing laws and regulations in various Australian states and territories, were denied the status of equality of citizenship with other Australians.

These anomalies resulted in calls to amend the Constitution. The referendum of 1967 had enormous symbolic significance for Indigenous Australians, and was passed by an overwhelming majority of Australians with 90.77% voting in favour of change. In 1984, compulsory enrolment and voting in Commonwealth elections for Indigenous Australians came into effect, bestowing on them the same responsibilities as other citizens under the Electoral Act.



**Figure 42:** Indigenous Australians received the right to vote in Commonwealth elections in 1962

## International assistance – Timor-Leste

Timor-Leste was the first democratic nation formed in the 21st century, but the path to democracy was not smooth. Nine days after a unilateral declaration of Timor-Leste's independence in 1975, Indonesian forces invaded Timor-Leste, later claiming it as the 27th province of Indonesia. The United Nations, however, did not recognise Indonesian sovereignty over Timor-Leste.

By the late 1990s, increased international attention to human rights abuses, as well as pressure on the Indonesian government, led the United Nations to organise a 'popular consultation'. The vote was to allow the people of Timor-Leste to decide whether to remain part of or separate from Indonesia. They voted not to remain part of Indonesia.

Australia led the international peacekeeping efforts during the period of violence that followed the popular consultation in Timor-Leste in 1999, and contributed to an international contingent of police. This peacekeeping role included supporting the establishment of democratic institutions and conducting democratic elections. Australia has continued to provide support for democratic governance since, through education programs and capacity building.

The AEC assisted with electoral planning, conducting the ballot for the Timor-Leste diaspora in Australia, and providing voter registration equipment kits and ballot papers. The AEC also helped with the development of registration, polling and counting procedures and the training of United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) electoral staff for subsequent democratic elections in 2001 and 2002.

## Parliament

The Commonwealth Parliament was created under the Constitution. It consists of two houses: the House of Representatives and the Senate (see House of Representatives and Senate).

The law-making powers and functions of each house, as well as the bases of their election, are described in the Constitution.

## Redistribution

The rearrangement of an electoral divisional boundary is called a redistribution. The AEC is responsible for regular redistributions of electoral boundaries for the House of Representatives.

A redistribution is needed when there is a change in the number of members in the House of Representatives to which a state or territory is entitled, or if a redistribution has not taken place for a period of seven years. A redistribution is also undertaken when the difference in the number of electors across divisions is outside a given tolerance. This is defined as a variation of more than one third of the divisions within a state or territory from the average divisional enrolment for that state by more than 10% for two consecutive months.

The AEC uses population data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

## Referendum

The Constitution contains provisions that allow for its alteration. Section 128 allows for the Constitution to be altered by referendum. In a referendum to alter a provision of the Constitution, the proposed change must be approved by a double majority: a majority of voters in Australia as a whole *and* a majority of voters in a majority of states (at least four of the six states). Citizens eligible to vote must participate in a referendum and vote 'Yes' or 'No' to the proposed change. Since Federation, 44 proposals for constitutional change have been put to the Australian electors but only eight referendums have been successful.

## Representation

In modern democracies electors elect representatives to parliaments, or other representative institutions, at periodic elections. These representatives, who are usually members of political parties, participate in the legislative process, and are entrusted to make decisions on behalf of electors for which they are accountable at elections. In the Australian democratic system, citizens elect representatives to make decisions on their behalf. Because voting is such an important part of a democratic representation, electoral laws and the systems that are used to elect representatives are critical in ensuring that democratic principles and values are upheld – and the worth of each citizen's vote maintained.

## Senate

Under the Constitution, each state has equal representation in the Senate (currently 12 senators per state, and two senators per territory). To be elected to the Senate, candidates must receive a specific proportion of the votes. This is called a 'quota'.

The term of office for senators for the states is six years. In 1974, parliamentary legislation granted Senate representation to the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory. However, the term of office for senators from the territories is contingent on the term of the House of Representatives, a maximum of three years, unless dissolved earlier.

The Senate reviews legislation passed in the House of Representatives and must approve it before it becomes law. The Senate has equal powers with the House of Representatives, except that it cannot initiate money bills.

## Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Australia was a founding member of the United Nations, which was formed in 1945 a few months after the end of the Second World War. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed by all United Nations member nations in 1948, obliging them to promote its ideals among their peoples and aspire to its principles in the areas over which they had jurisdiction. The Declaration outlines civil and political rights, as well as economic, social and cultural rights, and it has significant symbolic and moral importance for all people. Article 21 of the Declaration is an example of its democratic principles:

Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives ...  
The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote ...

(Universal Declaration of Human Rights: [www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/](http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/))

# Glossary

<b>absolute majority</b>	In an Australian House of Representatives election, a candidate must receive more than 50% of the formal votes to be elected. This is called an absolute majority.
<b>Australian Electoral Commission</b>	The independent statutory authority established in 1984 to maintain and update the Commonwealth electoral roll and conduct federal elections and referendums.
<b>ballot</b>	A method of voting, normally in a written form.
<b>bicameral</b>	A parliament with two houses.
<b>by-election</b>	An election to fill a vacancy which has occurred between general elections.
<b>candidate</b>	A person who stands for election to parliament. In Australia candidates can be nominated by political parties or stand as independents.
<b>citizen</b>	A member of a national community who shares the same entitlements and legal status as others of that community.
<b>coalition</b>	A collection of individuals or parties who have come together to achieve a specific purpose. Political parties may form coalitions to advance their position in parliament.
<b>compulsory enrolment</b>	A legal obligation to enrol to vote at elections.
<b>compulsory voting</b>	A legal obligation to vote at elections.
<b>constitution</b>	The set of basic laws by which a country or state is governed. The Australian Constitution can only be amended through a constitutional referendum.
<b>democracy</b>	Government on behalf of the people by their elected representatives.
<b>double random draw</b>	The method of deciding the order of candidates on the ballot paper. Candidates' names are randomly selected and matched to randomly drawn numbers to determine their position on the ballot paper.
<b>election</b>	The choosing of representatives by the voters.
<b>electoral division</b>	Geographical areas containing approximately equal numbers of voters as defined for electoral purposes.
<b>electoral roll</b>	A list of the names and addresses of all the people who are entitled to vote in an election.
<b>electorate</b>	See 'electoral division'.
<b>Federation</b>	The unification of Australian Colonies which formed the Australian nation on 1 January 1901.
<b>first past the post</b>	An election in which the candidate with the most votes is elected after one round of counting. A simple majority is all that is required, as there is no requirement for an absolute majority.
<b>formal vote</b>	A ballot paper which has been correctly completed and accepted as valid.

<b>franchise</b>	The right to vote.
<b>full preferential voting</b>	A system of voting in which the elector is required to demonstrate a preference for each candidate on the ballot paper.
<b>government</b>	In Australia, the political party or coalition of parties which has won a majority of the seats in the House of Representatives forms the government.
<b>House of Representatives</b>	The House of Representatives (or lower house) is one of two houses of the Australian Parliament. Members of the House of Representatives (sometimes referred to as the 'people's house') are chosen directly by the people of the Commonwealth and in each state and territory the number of members elected is proportional to the number of people in that state or territory, except that at least five members must be chosen in each original state. The House of Representatives currently has 151 members.
<b>human rights</b>	A universally recognised, basic set of entitlements which are owed to all human beings by virtue of their humanity.
<b>hung parliament</b>	A term used to describe 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.
<b>independents</b>	Candidates for election to parliament, or members of parliament, who do not belong to a political party.
<b>informal vote</b>	A ballot paper which has been incorrectly completed or not filled in at all. Informal votes are not counted towards any candidate but are set aside.
<b>multi-member electorate</b>	An electorate which has more than one representative. A proportional representation system usually applies.
<b>one vote, one value</b>	An ideal which holds that electoral systems should strive to ensure the equal worth of individual votes.
<b>parliamentary democracy</b>	A system of government where the people exercise their political power by electing representatives to parliament to make laws. Australia is a parliamentary democracy.
<b>party</b>	A group of people with similar ideas or aims, some of whose members nominate as candidates at elections in the hope that they will be elected to parliament. A political party can register with the Australian Electoral Commission for federal elections. This is to fulfil legislative requirements under the funding and disclosure provisions of the <i>Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918</i> and to enable party names to appear on the ballot paper.
<b>petition</b>	A formal grievance which is presented on behalf of its signatories.
<b>preferential voting</b>	A system of voting in which the voter completes the ballot paper by putting the number 1 in the box beside their first choice candidate, the number 2 beside their second choice, and so on. Partial and optional preferential voting do not require the numbering of all boxes (see full preferential voting).

<b>proportional representation</b>	A system of voting designed to elect representatives in proportion to the amount of support each has in the electorate.
<b>quota</b>	<p>The term 'quota' is used in reference to the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Senate – the proportion of votes required by a candidate to be elected.</li> <li>2 Redistribution (entitlement) – the calculation used to determine the number of parliamentary representatives to which a state or territory is entitled (i.e. the number of divisions).</li> <li>3 Redistribution (enrolment) – the current and projected average divisional enrolment for the state or territory.</li> </ol>
<b>redistribution</b>	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.
<b>referendum</b>	A proposal to alter the Constitution put to the vote. The Australian Constitution can only be altered with the approval of a national majority of electors in states and territories and a majority of electors in a majority of states.
<b>representative</b>	A person who is formally empowered to act on behalf of others.
<b>scrutineer</b>	A candidate's nominee who witnesses the counting of the votes after polling has closed.
<b>scrutiny</b>	The process following the close of polling. Formality of votes is determined and the votes are sorted and counted to determine the outcome of the election.
<b>seat</b>	Another term for electoral division; used because the candidate elected then has a seat in parliament.
<b>secret ballot</b>	A vote made in secret – first introduced in Victoria in 1856.
<b>Senate</b>	One of the two houses of Federal Parliament. It is often called the 'States' house' or House of Review, as these are two of the Senate's major functions. There are 76 senators: 12 from each of the six states and two each from the ACT and NT.
<b>single-member electorate</b>	An electorate for which there can only be one representative.
<b>suffrage</b>	The right to vote (see franchise).
<b>vote</b>	The formal act of an elector in an election to choose the candidate the elector most wants to be the representative for that division. Australia has a secret vote, and enforces compulsory voting.



For further information visit the AEC website

**[www.aec.gov.au](http://www.aec.gov.au)**