

TOPICS AND INVESTIGATIONS

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 and state and territory parliaments. It also examines why voting is important, the democratic principles which underpin a democratic electoral system and the role of redistributions in ensuring the equality of citizens' votes.

Introductory activity

RESOURCES

BLM 1 Hypothetical – student election

FROM THE MARGIN

VOTER TURNOUT

Approximately 94% of eligible electors voted in the 2013 Australian federal election. In the USA, where voting is not compulsory, approximately 55% of eligible electors turned out for the 2012 presidential election. In the UK in 2015 60% of eligible electors voted.

In a 'think, pair and share' exercise, ask students to consider their experiences of voting, especially in relation to interactive television programs, which 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



Fig 22: Voting in an election

it to the process they described for voting in an interactive television program. This comparison may be made using a Venn diagram, or by ticking the shared features on the list.

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.

Investigation

How and why do Australians vote?

In this investigation students explore compulsory voting, the importance of participation in a democracy and the reasons why it is important for people to enrol to vote. They 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.

RECOMMENDED LEVELS

- UPPER SECONDARY
- MIDDLE SECONDARY
- LOWER SECONDARY
- UPPER PRIMARY

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: Profiles of Parliament (80 minutes) Activity 3: Voting systems (80 minutes)
Indicators of student achievement	Understand electoral law relating to voting in Australia 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

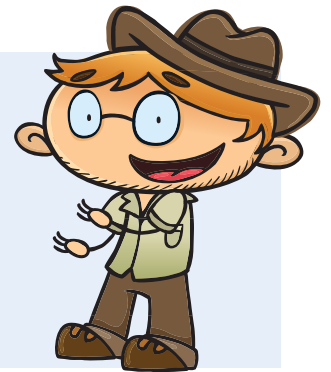
The value of a vote

FOCUS QUESTIONS

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

RESOURCES

- **BLM 2** Young people and the vote
- **Enrolment**
- **Voting**
- **Animation History of Voting**
- **Interactive The History of Voting Game**



Gathering information

Read through **BLM 2** with students. Explain to them that they will be researching information about voting in order to evaluate the material on the BLM.

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?

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 reasons for and against compulsory voting.

Have students research voting knowledge and the voting attitudes 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 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?
- > How do you enrol?
- > What is provisional enrolment?
- > How does provisional enrolment encourage increased participation of eligible voters?



Fig 23: Mobile polling makes voting accessible to all electors

Revisit the material on **BLM 2**. Discuss the arguments put forward by young people about voting. Consider the following:

- > How do the 'Yes' arguments differ from the 'No' arguments?
- > What reasons are offered for lowering the voting age?
What is your opinion about this issue?
- > What suggestions do you have that might convince young people to enrol to vote?

Presenting findings

Have student groups use the knowledge gathered through local research to develop:

- > a report to the AEC on attitudes to voting among students at your school
- > a letter to the newspaper arguing the case for or against voting for 16-year-olds
- > an advertising campaign to inform students at school about voting.

ACTIVITY 2

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 3** Voting for the House of Representatives and the Senate
- www.aph.gov.au (House of Representatives>Introduction)
- www.aph.gov.au (Senate>Introduction)
- **Counting the Votes**
- **Election Results**

RESOURCES (Cont.)

- **Animation Counting Your Vote**
- **Animation Election Day**
- **Interactive Quiz 2 – The Constitution** – Are you a whiz?
- **Interactive History Challenge** – Test your knowledge
- **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. 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.

Provide students with a copy of **BLM 3** and the spreadsheets of party federal election results from the AEC website.

Read through **BLM 3** 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:

- > 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?

Presenting findings

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

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

Students should include charts, diagrams, photographs and illustrations to explain and analyse each of the voting systems, including the ways that votes are counted.

FROM THE MARGIN

HUNG PARLIAMENT

Capital punishment was abolished in Australia so this does not refer to hanging parliamentarians! It's 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.



Fig 24: The Australian Senate

ACTIVITY 3

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 4** States', Territories' and New Zealand voting systems
- **Electoral Council of Australia**
- State and Territory electoral authority websites:
 - ACT: www.elections.act.gov.au - SA: www.ecsa.sa.gov.au
 - NSW: www.elections.nsw.gov.au - Tas: www.tec.tas.gov.au
 - NT: www.nt.gov.au/nteo - Vic: www.vec.vic.gov.au
 - Qld: www.ecq.qld.gov.au - WA: www.waec.wa.gov.au
- **Animation History of Voting**
- **Animation Counting Your Vote**
- **Interactive The History of Voting Game**
- **Interactive Voting Challenge** – What do you know?

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 4**. 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 typing in search terms such as 'Northern Territory Parliament'.

Ask students to find out the following:

- > a brief history of the parliament
- > symbols of government (such as coats of arms, colours, bird and flower emblems)
- > length of parliamentary terms
- > numbers of representatives in house(s) of parliament
- > numbers of electorates and the ways they are organised
- > 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 on a series of posters 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

How do electorates change over time?

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

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

RECOMMENDED LEVELS

UPPER SECONDARY

MIDDLE SECONDARY

LOWER SECONDARY

UPPER PRIMARY

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?

In what ways do electorates vary across Australia?

What is taken into account when determining electoral boundaries?

RESOURCES

- **BLM 5** Analysing the data
- Copies for each student of the **map** and description of the electorate in which your school is located
- **Animation Counting Your Vote**

FROM THE MARGIN

OVERSEAS VOTING

Eligible Australians living, working or holidaying overseas can still vote in a federal election. In the two weeks leading up to election day, Australians overseas are able to visit their nearest Australian embassy, consulate or high commission and vote in person.



Gathering information

Provide students with a copy of the electorate map and AEC information about the electoral division in which your school is located.

Discuss with students the sorts of information that can be obtained about electorates in Australia. These include size (area), enrolment (numbers of electors), demographic rating (see table), products and industries, and seat status. Ensure that they understand the meaning of each of these terms.

Students then examine the map of the electorate. Discuss with them the considerations that appear to have been made in drawing up the electoral boundaries (such as major roads or geographic features, suburb boundaries).

Have students in pairs construct a spreadsheet or table with the following column headings:

- > Electoral division
- > State or Territory
- > Size (area)
- > Enrolment
- > Demographic rating
- > Products and Industries
- > Seat status
- > Characteristics of boundaries.

Using the AEC website, the pairs complete the spreadsheet or table columns for six or seven individual electorates. Use the alphabetical list of House of Representatives electorates from the AEC website to allocate groups of electorates to students. Ensure a variety of electorates from all states and territories and that all student pairs examine different electorates.

Once students have completed their spreadsheet or table, arrange for them to aggregate their information into a master database, which can then be given to all students. This can be used electronically by all students to sort information.

DEMOGRAPHIC RATINGS FOR ELECTORATES	
Inner metropolitan:	Situated in capital cities and consisting of well-established built-up suburbs
Outer metropolitan:	Situated in capital cities and containing large areas of recent suburban expansion
Provincial:	Outside capital cities, but with a majority of enrolment in major provincial cities
Rural:	Outside capital cities, and without a majority of enrolment in major provincial cities

Identifying and analysing

Provide students with a copy of **BLM 5** and a copy of the aggregated student data.

Use the questions on **BLM 5** as the basis for discussion with students about their own findings and the findings of other students.

Discuss with students the correlations found in the data.

For example, how does the size of an electorate correlate with the other characteristics such as enrolment, demographic rating, products and industries, and seat status?

Where students offer generalisations, encourage them to use the spreadsheet or table to come up with evidence and examples.

For example: 'Electorates with the largest size (area) have the demographic rating "Rural". This can be seen in the electorates of X, Y and Z.'

Presenting findings

Place students in small groups to develop and present a poster, an electronic presentation or a report to inform an audience about the characteristics of their electorate and other Australian electorates.

Reports should discuss each of the characteristics on the database. Students should sort information on the database to provide evidence for their report and they should provide examples of particular electorates in their presentations, as well as charts, images and diagrams if appropriate.



Fig 25: Schools and other public buildings are used as polling places on election day

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
- **Redistributions**
- **Animation Counting Your Vote**



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.

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

Divide students into groups where they can read and discuss the BLM and access computers to obtain further information from the AEC website. Their task is to explain to the rest of the class:

- > 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.



Fig 26: Polling official checking for the voter's name on the electoral roll for his division

Identifying and analysing

Have student groups report back to the class.

Discuss with students:

- > rules covering redistributions
- > meanings of the factors that redistributions must take into account, for example: What is meant by 'community of interest'?
- > 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 a 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
- **Division Profiles**
- Farm on Line: www.farmonline.com.au (portal for rural newspapers)
- Newspapers: www.onlinenewspapers.com

Gathering information

Using the AEC website, download a range of division profiles for two electorates as per the following demographic ratings: inner metropolitan, outer metropolitan, provincial and rural. Students may choose to concentrate on electorates in their state or territory or choose any electorates Australia-wide.

Provide copies of these profiles to students in groups. Have them look at the demographic rating and products and industries in these electorates. For each type of electorate ask students 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 local newspapers of one of these electorates.

Each group should collect and analyse four newspaper articles and record them in **BLM 7**.

Identifying and analysing

Have student groups report on their findings to the class and discuss:

- > 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.



Fig 27: Voters' interests can be determined 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 or email interviews as well.) Talk with students about the ways they can locate interviewees and the protocols of interviewing – such as politeness, guarantees of anonymity, and so on.

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 which 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.



Fig 28: Voters' interests can be determined by their age, gender and occupation

Consider having the class compile their combined results into a class booklet. 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.

Hypothetical – student election

ONE VOTE, ONE VALUE

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

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

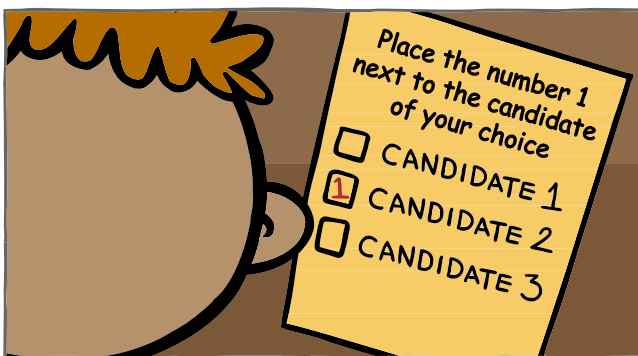
Discuss and record your answers:

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

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

CLASS A: FIRST PAST THE POST AND SECRET BALLOT

There are three students in Class A who want to be elected as the class representative. They use a voting method called first past the post. In this voting system the candidate who gets the most votes is elected. All members of the class are given a ballot paper with each candidate's name on it. They are asked to put number 1 next to the name of the candidate they wish to represent them. They are also given the opportunity to vote privately. That is, there is no opportunity for any other student to see how anyone votes. (This is called a secret ballot.)



The results of the election are:

John	6 votes
Gabriella	7 votes
Huyn	11 votes
Total	24 votes

- > Which candidate has been elected?
- > How many students voted in favour of that candidate? How many students voted against that candidate?
- > Does the elected person have the support of an **absolute majority** (more than 50%) of the class?
- > Why do you think this is called a **first past the post** method of voting?

CLASS B: HANDS UP AND FIRST PAST THE POST

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

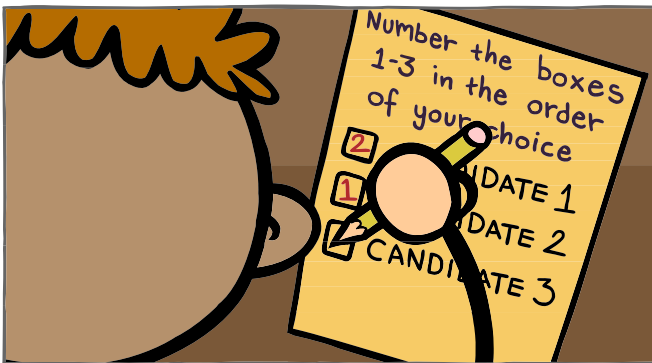
- > What are the advantages and disadvantages of this method of voting?

Hypothetical – student election

CLASS C: FULL PREFERENTIAL VOTING AND SECRET BALLOT

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

Class C is asked to number the three candidates in order of preference (1, 2, 3) on the ballot paper. This is called a full preferential voting system. Class C students are also given the opportunity to vote in private (called a secret ballot).



- > How many votes would a candidate in Class C need to get in order to have absolute majority support in the class?

The results of the election are:

First preference count

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

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

As Frank has the fewest votes, he is excluded from the count and, according to the order of the preferences on the ballot papers, his votes are distributed to the other candidates. The candidates who were listed second (numbered 2 on the ballots) receive the votes. Once this distribution of preferences is complete, the totals for the remaining two candidates can be determined. If one voter who originally voted for Frank indicated David as their second preference, then David's tally of votes would increase to 12. If six voters who originally voted for Frank put Susan second, then Susan would receive a total of 14 votes. The final count would look like this:

Final count

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

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

Discussion

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

Young people and the vote

WHY VOTE?

The following comments come from a four-year national investigation led by a team of researchers from the University of Sydney and the Australian National University working in partnership with the Australian Electoral Commission. The research was funded by the Australian Research Council. The survey was commissioned to determine why young people do not enrol to vote. In 2004, approximately 82% of young Australians (17–25 years of age) were on the electoral roll compared with 95% of other Australians.

Voting YES

‘So I can have a say in the current government.’

‘Because unless you vote, you cannot say you have no influence! You can try to have an influence by voting.’

‘Because I think it’s really important that we all get our say, because we’re voting for who will run our country.’

‘Because I will. Everybody needs to vote. If you don’t vote, you don’t have the right to complain about the government.’

Voting NO

‘Because the government doesn’t affect my day-to-day life. Therefore, I don’t care who gets elected.’

‘Because if it isn’t required by me, then I wouldn’t bother finding out about it. I would leave it to those who know and are passionate about it.’

‘Why would you do anything you don’t like if you didn’t have to?’

‘Waste of a Saturday, time consuming, and I am too lazy. Although I would vote on important issues, such as becoming a republic.’

(Source: Print, M, Saha, L & Edwards, K, *Youth Electoral Study, Report 1*, 2004. Available on the AEC website).



Making it count. A young person lodging a vote

Young people and the vote

The voting age?

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

There are examples overseas for lowering the voting age. Brazil and Nicaragua have a voting age of 16, as do Germany and Austria for some local elections. Our neighbours in East Timor and Indonesia have a voting age of 17. The Isle of Man has decided to lower the voting age to 16. Also, a Member of the British Parliament has backed the idea of reducing the voting age to 16.

Two minor parties in Australia, the Greens and the Australian Democrats, have supported the idea of lowering the voting age in recent times.

A vote for 16 year olds say the Greens

The Greens say 16 and 17 year olds should be able to vote in Victorian elections, and that they will work to introduce optional voting for 16 and 17 year olds.

At the launch of the Victorian Greens Youth Policy, Youth Spokesperson Jim Reiher said: 'One of our key policies is for optional voting in State elections for 16 and 17 year olds. We don't want to make voting compulsory from a younger age, but we want teenagers to build an interest in politics and become involved in the political process.'

The Greens are committed to giving young people a real voice in Victorian politics. The Greens have nine candidates 25 years or under.

'Youth do get a raw deal in too many areas,' said Jim Reiher. 'We must face up to this and unlike the old parties, the Greens will actually do something about it.'

'The old parties say a lot about what they will do for youth,' said Jim Reiher. 'The trouble is, that once the men and women from the old parties get their seats in Parliament House the promises seem to quickly disappear.'

(Source: www.vic.greens.org.au>Media>Media Releases 2006> A Vote for 16 Year Olds Say the Greens 13/11/2006)

16 is too young to vote

Lowering the voting age to 16 will not encourage young people to enrol to vote. Sixteen year olds are too immature and too distracted by adolescent interests to become responsible and informed voters. They are still growing up and need more time to learn about the world before they take on the responsibility of voting.

Such learning must come from life experience, not formal education. Theoretical knowledge does not always translate to good practice. We already teach students about healthy eating but Australian youth suffer soaring levels of obesity.

Furthermore, just because some rights are acquired at 16 does not mean that other, unrelated, rights should be. We do not ask 16 year olds to serve in the defence forces or on juries, and we do not allow them to gamble or purchase alcohol and tobacco. Appropriately, different ages apply to different rights and that is the way it should remain.

(Source: Adapted from a contribution (Geoff) to the Bartlett Diaries: www.andrewbartlett.com/blog/?p=150)

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 which 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 6 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

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 from 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
10.8%	9.9%	4.7%	3.4%	2.6%	3.5%	3.2%	3.9%	3.8%	2.5%	3.8%	3.0%

(Sources: Jaensch, Dean, *Elections!: How and Why Australia Votes*, Allen and Unwin, 1995, p 88; *Electoral Pocketbook*, Australian Electoral Commission, 2007, p 56, 2010, p 60, 2013, p 49)

States' and Territories' voting systems

State/Territory	Houses of Parliament	Voting systems
<p>Australian Capital Territory Population: 387 000 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.</p>	Legislative Assembly	Optional preferential voting Proportional representation count (Hare-Clarke system)
<p>New South Wales Population: 7.54 million The oldest State in Australia with the oldest parliament. Had a Westminster-style government by 1856.</p>	Legislative Council Legislative Assembly	Partial preferential voting Proportional representation count Optional preferential voting
<p>Northern Territory Population: 246 000 Fully elected Legislative Assembly in 1974. Self-government in 1978.</p>	Legislative Assembly	Full preferential voting
<p>Queensland Population: 4.74 million First Queensland Parliament, 1860. The only State Parliament with one House. Its Upper House was abolished in 1922.</p>	Legislative Assembly	Full preferential voting
<p>South Australia Population: 1.69 million Settled by Europeans in 1836 and was a settlement without convicts.</p>	Legislative Council House of Assembly	Full preferential – ticket voting above the line Proportional representation count Full preferential voting
<p>Tasmania Population: 515 000 Became a separate colony from NSW in 1825. Named Tasmania in 1856.</p>	Legislative Council House of Assembly	Partial preferential voting Partial preferential voting Proportional representation count (Hare-Clarke system)
<p>Victoria Population: 5.87 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.</p>	Legislative Council Legislative Assembly	Partial preferential voting Proportional representation count Full preferential voting
<p>Western Australia Population: 2.59 million First settled in 1829. The last colony to join the Federation of Australia.</p>	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, September 2014)

Analysing the data

SIZE OF ELECTORATES

How does the size (area) of our school's electorate compare with that of other electorates in our state or territory and electorates in other states and territories?

What differences or similarities exist?

What are the correlations between the size (area) of electorates and:

- > enrolment?
- > demographic rating?
- > products and industries?

Suggest reasons for these correlations.

ENROLMENT

How does the enrolment of our school's electorate compare with that of other electorates in our state or territory and those in other states and territories?

What is the extent of the variation?

DEMOGRAPHIC RATING

What is the demographic rating of our electorate?

How does it compare with that of other electorates in Australia with the same demographic rating?

Do electorates with the same demographic rating have other characteristics in common (such as size, enrolment, products and industries, and seat status)?

PRODUCTS AND INDUSTRIES

What products and industries are important in our electorate?

How do they compare with those of other electorates in Australia with the same demographic rating?

Do electorates with similar products and industries have other characteristics in common?

SEAT STATUS

What is the seat status of our electorate?

How does it compare with that of other electorates in Australia with the same seat status?

Do electorates with a similar seat status have other characteristics in common?

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES

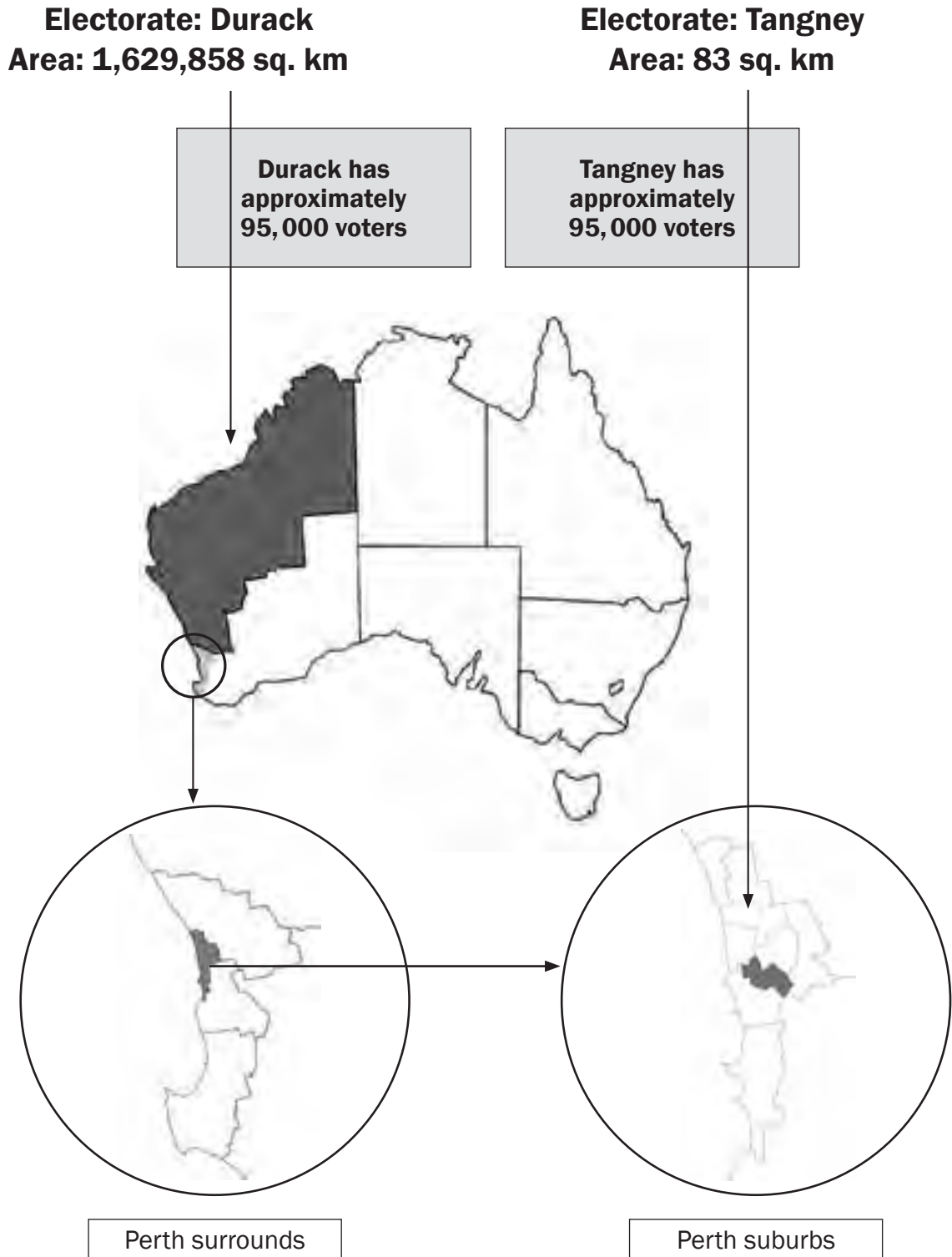
What considerations appear to be taken into account when drawing electoral boundaries?

What built and natural boundaries define electorates?

What are the characteristics of electorates where there are no discernible built and natural boundaries?

Federal redistributions

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



Federal redistributions

Until 1983 a redistribution of seats in the Australian electoral system was a decision for the party in government.

Since 1983 a redistribution occurs in a state or territory when:

- > it has been seven years since the previous redistribution in that state or territory.
- > there is a change in the number of members to which a state or territory is entitled. This occurs when there has been a greater relative population increase or decrease than occurs in another state or territory.
- > more than one-third of the divisions within a state vary from the average divisional enrolment for that state by more than 10% for three consecutive months.

THE PROCESS

A Redistribution Committee is appointed in the state or territory where a redistribution is to occur.

Individuals and groups in the community are encouraged to make suggestions to this committee.

The Electoral Commissioner calculates the average number of electors for each division.

This is called a quota. It is worked out according to the following formula:

$$\text{Quota} = \frac{\text{Number of people enrolled in the state or territory}}{\text{Number of members of the house of representatives to which the state or territory is entitled}}$$

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, three and a half years after the redistribution.

Factors the Redistribution Committee takes into account

The Redistribution Committee has a map drawn showing proposed new divisional boundaries.

Factors taken into account include:

- > the quota
- > community of interest
- > geographical features
- > means of communication and travel.

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 final decision of the augmented Electoral Commission cannot be appealed.

Electorate issues

Electorate name	Newspaper name	Date	Issue	Arguments for and against

Voting issues survey

Student name/s: _____

Place, date and time of interview: _____

Interviewee number: _____

The respondent

Gender (circle): M F

Age group: 18–25 26–35 36–45

46–55 56–65 66–75 75+

Occupation: _____

Questions

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

Issues

Health Education

Economic issues (such as interest rates)

Immigration issues Employment

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

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

Yes No

Thank you for participating in our research.

Student name/s: _____

Place, date and time of interview: _____

Interviewee number: _____

The respondent

Gender (circle): M F

Age group: 18–25 26–35 36–45

46–55 56–65 66–75 75+

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