

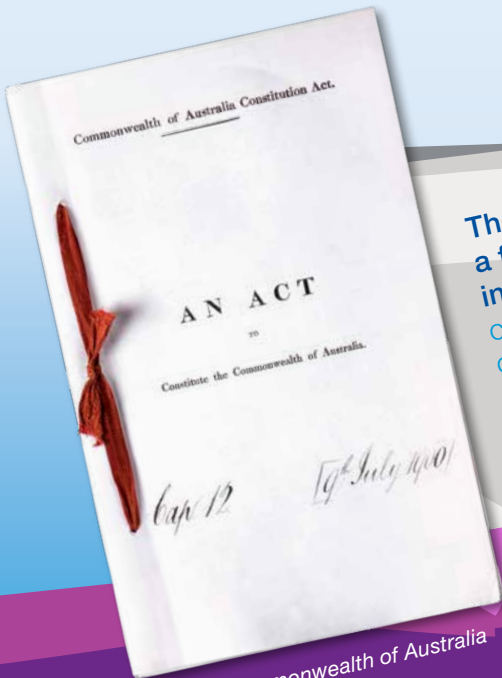


**AEC**

Australian Electoral Commission

# Constitutional Referendums

Classroom activities for students  
based on Bloom's Taxonomy



The Constitution provides a framework for government in Australia. The only way it can be altered is by the citizens of Australia voting to change it. Results of a constitutional referendum must be carried out by the Parliament.

**ABOVE:** Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act, 1900



## Knowing

- Draw and label a pie graph to show how many referendum questions Australians have voted on since 1901, and how many were passed. Were they all conducted at the same time as a federal election?
- Illustrate a timeline for the development of the Australian Constitution.
- Compile a glossary of terms related to constitutional referendums. Eg. writ, plebiscite, constitution.



## Understanding

- Design a poster to support the 'yes' or 'no' argument for a previous referendum question.
- Explain why the referendum votes of people in the territories are considered differently to those in the states. Do you agree/disagree? Why?
- Examine why Australia has held plebiscites or national polls in the past. Explain the difference between these processes and referendums.



## Applying

- Design a cover for the Australian Constitution.
- Develop a dynamic digital presentation to show the process of voting in a referendum.
- Choose a previous referendum topic, or devise your own. Choose music for an advertising campaign to support the 'yes' or 'no' argument.



## Analysing



- Make a cartoon strip to show the process for changing the Australian Constitution.
- Imagine you are the editor of your local newspaper. Write an editorial on how a double majority can be achieved in a referendum.
- Construct a PMI (plus, minus, interesting) chart to compare direct and indirect participation in making laws.





## Creating

- Design an attractive booklet highlighting the 'yes' and 'no' cases for a previous change to the Australian Constitution, or devise your own referendum topic.
- Research the Constitutional Convention held in Canberra in 1998. Write and perform a role-play highlighting the arguments for and against a constitutional monarchy.
- In an Australian referendum 4 out of 6 states must achieve an absolute majority yes vote to change the constitution. Hypothesise on whether the territories should be included with the states in the double majority.



## Evaluating

- 'Australians are resistant to change.' Discuss this statement in relation to the referendum results over the last century.
- As a member of the general public you have an idea for a change to the Australian Constitution. Discuss the process you could undertake to instigate such a change.
- Compare and contrast the Australian Constitution to that of another democracy. Eg. United States of America, Great Britain. What, if any, provisions are included in their constitutions to allow constitutional change?
- The last two pages of this booklet outline Australia's voting history in brief. Write a similar 'in brief' summary of the referendums you consider to be the most significant in telling the story of Australia's civic history.

# Running a referendum in your school?

Your school may wish to hold a referendum to approve or change important rules.



Resources are available on our website  
<https://education.aec.gov.au/>

For more information about referendums  
[www.aec.gov.au/Elections/referendums/](http://www.aec.gov.au/Elections/referendums/)

# AUSTRALIAN VOTING HISTORY IN BRIEF

Australia is a federal, representative, parliamentary democracy. How did our system of government take shape?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have lived in Australia for tens of thousands of years. Laws, customs and rules came from tradition, not parliaments.

When the British arrived in 1788 they brought their own traditions and culture. Captain Arthur Phillip was appointed by the British government as the first Governor of the prison colony.

Subsequently free settlers came to the colonies and felt entitled to have a say in who governed them. In 1842, a small group of male residents were enfranchised to elect a proportion of the Colony's Legislative Council.

## Eureka Stockade



**During the 1850s**, people from around the world flocked to the Australian goldfields. They had to purchase licences in order to earn money from prospecting for gold. In 1854, a miners' protest about the licence fee and their political rights resulted in a rebellion in which both soldiers and miners died. Following the rebellion, a number of the miners' demands were met, including their right to vote.

## Male suffrage



**In 1856**, South Australia extended the vote to male residents aged 21 years and over. Two years later, Victoria followed their lead, with the remaining colonies following suit.

## The Secret Ballot



**Until the 1850s**, people voted publicly, and were vulnerable to intimidation and coercion. To rectify this situation, an independent electoral body was established during the 1850s. It ensured elections were run fairly, and the secret ballot, sometimes referred to as the 'Australian ballot', was implemented.

## Women's suffrage



**During the 1880s**, the women's suffrage movement gained momentum. This movement was based on the belief that democracy, in its truest form, could not be achieved until women had the same electoral rights as men. In 1894 South Australia was one of the first places in the world to grant women the right to vote in elections and stand for Parliament. The remaining colonies gradually came to the same view. Australia helped pioneer the recognition of women's suffrage internationally.

## Federation



**In 1898**, South Australia, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania passed a referendum to federate under an Australian Constitution. In 1899, Queensland supported the federation, and the following year, Western Australia followed suit.

On 1 January 1901, the nation of Australia was born, with a federal parliament to govern it.

## Compulsory voting



**In 1924**, to improve the low rates of voter turnout, amendments to the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 were made. Compulsory voting was introduced and this resulted in a dramatic increase in voter turnout at the following election.

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders



For many years Indigenous Australians were excluded from enrolment and voting unless they already had the franchise in their states. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples campaigned for many years to achieve full voting rights in state and federal elections.

These rights were granted in 1962, and were made compulsory in 1984.

## Voting age



**During the 1960s and 1970s**, several Western parliamentary democracies began to support lowering of the eligibility age to enrol and vote. Young people paying taxes, driving cars, and serving their country during times of conflict, believed they were entitled to have a say in the composition of their government.

In 1973, the Australian Parliament amended the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 and lowered the minimum voting age to 18 years.

## Today



Australia is a federal, representative, parliamentary democracy where citizens have the power to elect their representatives in parliament. Enrolling and voting is a right and a responsibility of each Australian citizen.

The effectiveness of our democracy depends on the active participation of all Australian citizens.



**WANT TO  
KNOW  
MORE?**

## **AEC FOR SCHOOLS**

The AEC produces a range of products and resources to support teaching and learning about Australian civics and citizenship.

## **RUNNING A SCHOOL ELECTION?**

Go to our website and order Get Voting for everything you need to run a free and fair election for your class or school.

Visit the Parliamentary Education Office for resources about the Australian Parliament.

Visit the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House to investigate the history of Australia's democracy.

**EDUCATION.AEC.GOV.AU**