

Mathematics Level 7

Chapter 1 — Government and democracy

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Australia's democracy: representation and elections

In Years 3 and 4 you looked at how groups make decisions together, and how rules help a community work well. This section builds on that. It looks at how the whole country of Australia chooses the people who run it — and the rules that keep those choices free and fair.

Theory

What does democracy mean?

The curriculum asks you to discuss the meaning of **democracy**, but it does not give one fixed definition. Reasonable people use the word in slightly different ways. In this section we will use **democracy** to mean: *a system of government in which the people of a country choose who makes decisions for them, through elections that are free, open and fair.*

Australia's democracy works by **representation**: the people do not vote on every decision themselves. Instead, they elect people to speak and make decisions in parliament for them. The Australian Electoral Commission describes Australia in these words:

a representative democracy in which it is compulsory for all Australians over 18 years of age to enrol and vote for people to represent them (AEC, 'The three levels of Government')

The people chosen in this way are called **members**, and each member represents the people of one electorate.

Parliament and laws

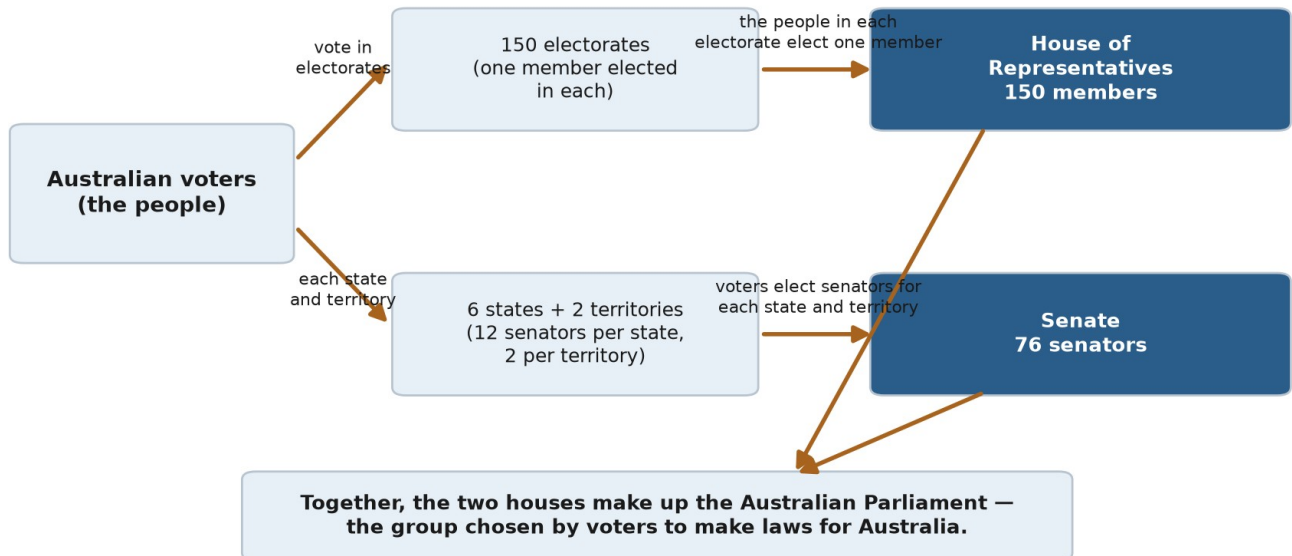
The **Parliament** is the group of people chosen by voters to make laws for Australia. The Australian Parliament has two houses:

- The **House of Representatives** has 150 members. Australia is divided into 150 areas called **electorates** (also called divisions at federal elections). The people in each electorate elect one member to the House of Representatives.
- The **Senate** has 76 senators: 12 for each of the six states, and 2 for each of the two territories (a territory is a part of Australia that is not a state).

When parliament passes a new law, that law is called **legislation**. Every new law starts as a **bill** — a written plan for a law. The two houses of parliament read the bill, discuss it and vote on it before it can become a law.

Representation in the Australian Parliament

How voters choose the people who make decisions for them



A diagram showing how Australian voters are represented. On the left, a large group of people labelled “Australian voters”. An arrow points to small groups of voters in each of 150 electorates, and each electorate elects one member to the House of Representatives, which has 150 members. A second path shows the Senate, which has 12 senators for each state and 2 senators for each territory, making 76 senators.

Figure 1. Representation in the Australian Parliament: 150 members in the House of Representatives and 76 senators in the Senate (source: PEO, ‘Federal elections’ factsheet).

The values behind Australian democracy

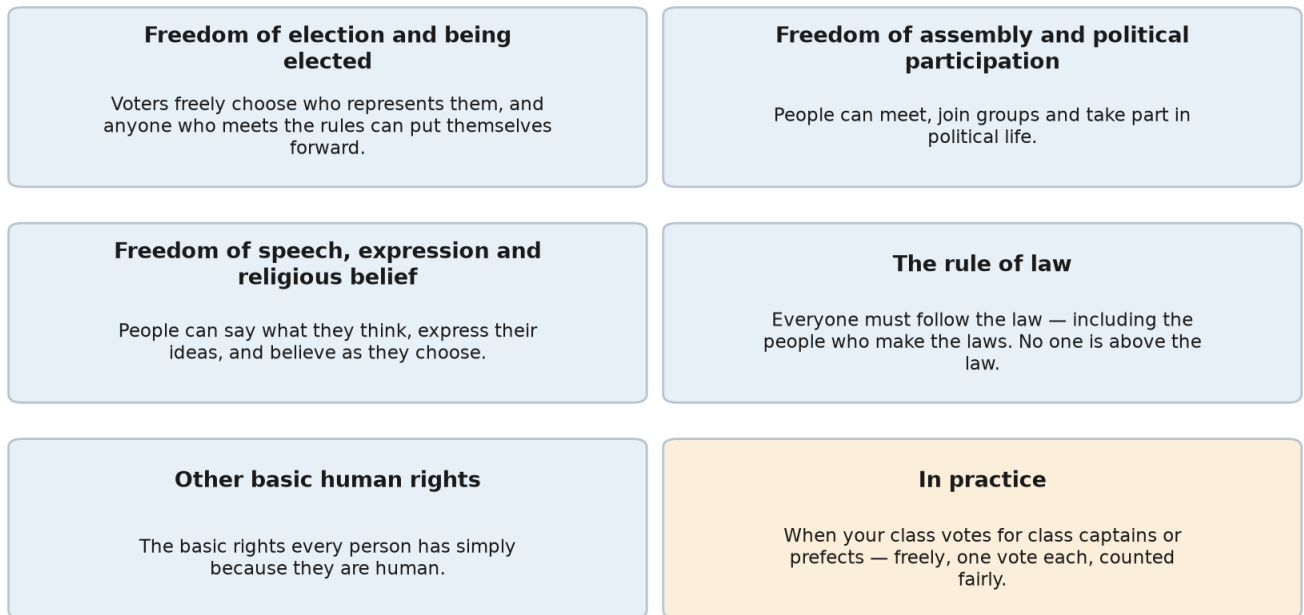
Australia’s democracy rests on a set of key values. These are the freedoms and principles that make the system work:

- **Freedom of election and being elected.** Voters are free to choose who represents them, and anyone who meets the rules can put themselves forward to be chosen.
- **Freedom of assembly and political participation.** People can meet, join groups and take part in political life.
- **Freedom of speech, expression and religious belief.** People can say what they think, express their ideas, and believe as they choose.
- **The rule of law.** Everyone must follow the law — including the people who make the laws. No one is above the law.
- **Other basic human rights.** The basic rights every person has simply because they are human.

You already use these values at school. When your class votes for **class captains** or **prefects**, you are free to choose your leaders, everyone gets one vote, and the count is fair. That is democracy at work on a small scale.

The values behind Australian democracy

The freedoms and principles that make the system work



Six cards in two rows showing the values behind Australian democracy. Row one: freedom of election and being elected; freedom of assembly and political participation; freedom of speech, expression and religious belief. Row two: the rule of law; other basic human rights; and a card labelled “In practice” showing a class voting for its class captain.

Figure 2. The values behind Australian democracy.

The Australian citizenship pledge

When a person becomes an Australian citizen, they make a public promise called the **citizenship pledge**. The pledge is written into Australian law: it is set out in the *Australian Citizenship Act 2007* (Cth). The law gives two forms of the pledge. They are exactly the same, except that one form includes the words “under God”. A new citizen chooses which form to say. The choice itself shows a democratic value: freedom of religious belief.

Figure 3 reproduces the pledge from the Act.

The Australian citizenship pledge
Set out in the Australian Citizenship Act 2007 (Cth)

SCHEDULE 1 — THE PLEDGE OF COMMITMENT

Form 1

From this time forward, under God,
I pledge my loyalty to Australia and its people,
whose democratic beliefs I share,
whose rights and liberties I respect,
and whose laws I will uphold and obey.

* * *

Form 2

Form 2 is exactly the same, but leaves out the words “under God”.

A person becoming an Australian citizen may choose either form (Australian Citizenship Act 2007, s 27). The choice itself shows a democratic value: freedom of religious belief.

The Australian citizenship pledge, reproduced from the Australian Citizenship Act 2007, with a note that new citizens may choose between two forms of the pledge.

Figure 3. The citizenship pledge, as set out in the Australian Citizenship Act 2007 (Cth) (source: Federal Register of Legislation, current as at 4 June 2026).

What can we learn from the pledge? It tells us what new citizens promise to share with all Australians:

- to stand by Australia and its people;
- to share democratic beliefs;
- to respect the rights and freedoms of others; and
- to follow Australia’s laws.

Australia’s official values statement

The federal government also publishes an **official values statement**. It appears in the citizenship booklet *Australian Citizenship: Our Common Bond*. The statement opens with these words:

Australian values based on freedom, respect, fairness and equality of opportunity are central to our community remaining a secure, prosperous and peaceful place to live. Our values define and shape our country and they are a reason why so many people want to become Australian citizens. (Australian Government, *Australian Citizenship: Our Common Bond*, 2020)

The booklet groups Australian values under eight headings, shown in Figure 4.

Notice the links with what you have already read:

- the **rule of law** appears as one of the eight headings, and matches the pledge’s promise to follow the law;
- the statement says that **voting is compulsory in Australia**, and that this shows how important it is to take part in elections;
- freedom of speech and freedom of religion sit among the values behind Australian democracy you saw above.

Australia's official values statement

Australian Government, Australian Citizenship: Our Common Bond (15 November 2020), Part 4

How the statement opens

“Australian values based on freedom, respect, fairness and equality of opportunity are central to our community remaining a secure, prosperous and peaceful place to live. Our values define and shape our country and they are a reason why so many people want to become Australian citizens.”

The statement groups Australian values under eight headings:

Commitment to the Rule of Law	Parliamentary democracy
Freedom of speech	Freedom of association
Freedom of religion	Equality of all people under the law
Equality of opportunity and a ‘fair go’	Mutual respect and tolerance for others

What the statement says about voting

“Voting is compulsory in Australia. This shows the importance of participating in elections.”

Australia’s official values statement from the federal government booklet Australian Citizenship: Our Common Bond, showing the opening sentence of the statement and eight value headings arranged in two columns.

Figure 4. Australia’s official values statement (source: Australian Government, Australian Citizenship: Our Common Bond, 15 November 2020 edition, Part 4).

How Australia votes: three key features

Australia’s voting system has three key features: the **secret ballot**, **compulsory voting** — every enrolled voter must vote — and **preferential voting**. Together they help keep elections open, free and fair.

1. The secret ballot. A **ballot** is a vote. The secret ballot means that no one can see how you vote. On election day you:

1. have your name checked off the electoral roll (the list of people enrolled to vote);
2. receive your ballot paper;
3. mark your paper alone, in a private booth;
4. fold the paper so no one can read it; and
5. put it into a sealed box.

The law protects this privacy. Under the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*, each voter must mark their paper alone, in a booth that no one else is using (s 233, as described by the AEC).

Why does secrecy matter? Because no one can pressure you, reward you or punish you for your vote. You are free to make your own choice.

The secret ballot in practice: five steps on election day

No one can see how you vote



Five steps of voting on election day: having your name checked off the electoral roll, receiving a ballot paper, marking it alone in a private booth, folding it so no one can read it, and putting it into a sealed box.

Figure 5. The secret ballot in practice on election day (source: AEC, Electoral Backgrounder ‘Compulsory voting’, 3 March 2025).

2. Compulsory voting. **Compulsory** means required by law. Compulsory voting means every enrolled voter must vote. If you are an Australian citizen who is 18 or over, you must enrol to vote — and once you are enrolled, you must vote. Sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds can enrol early so they are ready, but they cannot vote until they turn 18 (AEC, ‘Compulsory voting’).

Compulsory voting came in step by step: enrolment became compulsory in **1912**, and voting itself became compulsory in **1924**. Parliament made the 1924 change for two stated reasons:

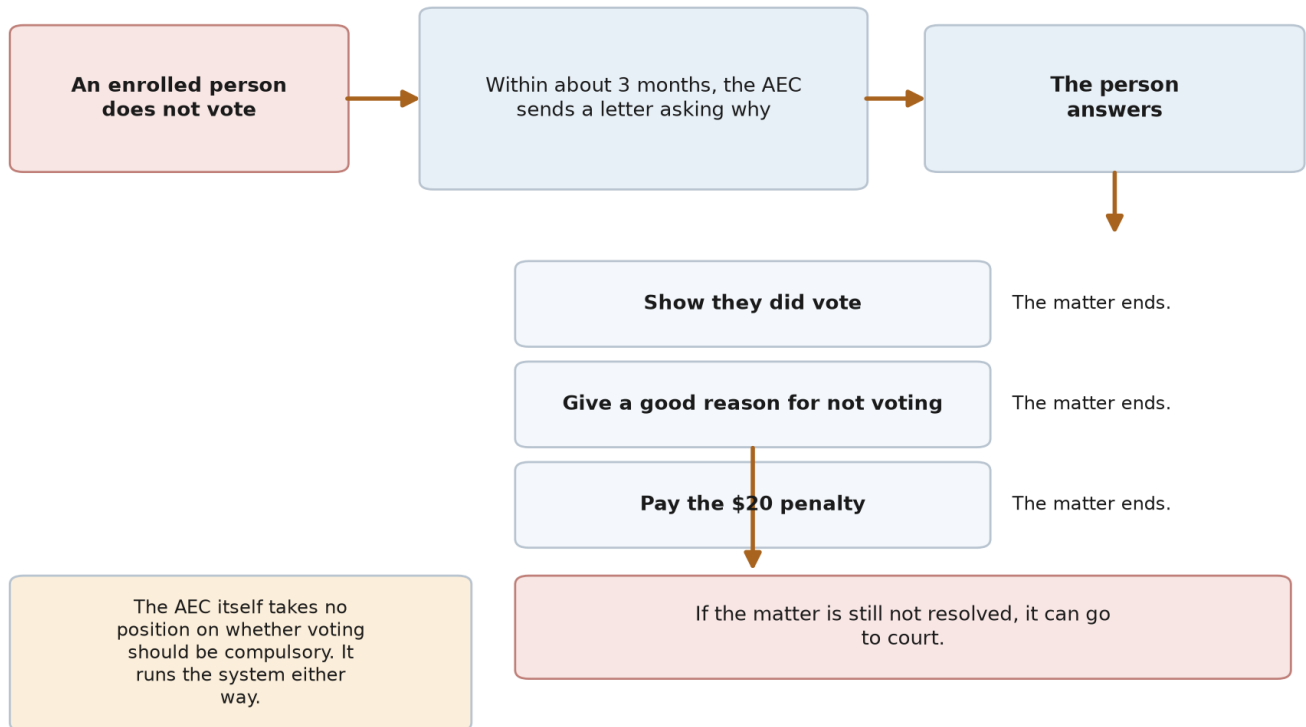
to increase voter turnout and reduce party campaign expenditure
(AEC, Electoral Backgrounder: ‘Compulsory voting’, 3 March 2025)

The word **turnout** means the share of enrolled voters who actually vote. The PEO’s history timeline gives the same story in plainer words: compulsory voting was introduced “to address low participation numbers in federal elections”.

What happens if an enrolled person does not vote? The AEC writes to them and asks why. The person can show that they did vote, or give a good reason for missing the vote. If they cannot, they pay a **\$20** penalty. If the matter is still not resolved, it can go to court (AEC, ‘Compulsory voting’).

What happens if an enrolled person does not vote?

The steps after a federal election (AEC, Electoral Background 'Compulsory voting')



The steps after an enrolled person does not vote: a letter from the AEC asking why, three ways to answer, and a possible court step. A note says the AEC takes no position on the question.

Figure 6. The steps when an enrolled person does not vote (source: AEC, Electoral Background 'Compulsory voting', 3 March 2025).

People disagree about compulsory voting — and both sides have real reasons.

For:

- Everyone's voice gets counted, not only the voices of people who feel strongly. Parliament is chosen by nearly all adults, so it speaks for the whole community.
- Parties can spend less money getting their own supporters to vote, and can campaign on the issues instead.
- Taking part is itself a democratic value: the official values statement says compulsory voting shows the importance of taking part in elections.

Against:

- Some say voting is a freedom, like free speech — and a freedom should include the freedom not to take part. A forced choice, they say, is not really free.
- Some forced voters may know little about the choices in front of them, which can make votes less thoughtful.

Notice that the AEC itself does not take a side on this question. Its job is to run the system well, either way. When you discuss compulsory voting in class, what counts is how well you reason — not which side you land on.

3. Preferential voting. In Australia's preferential voting system, you do not just pick one person. You number **every** box on the ballot paper in the order you prefer: 1 for your first choice, 2 for your second choice, and so on. A **candidate** is a person who puts themselves forward to be elected.

Why number every box? Because of how the count works. To win a seat in the House of Representatives, a candidate needs an **absolute majority** — that is, more than half of the formal votes. (Formal votes are the ballot papers filled out correctly.) If no candidate has more than half after the first count, the candidate with the fewest votes is knocked

out. Each of their ballot papers is read again, and the vote moves to the voter’s next choice. This repeats until one candidate has more than half of the formal votes.

This is different from a system called first-past-the-post, where the candidate with the most votes wins even when that is less than half. Preferential voting makes sure the winner is supported by more than half of the voters.

A model preferential ballot paper

Model paper for practice — a real ballot paper is given out at a polling place

STUDENT COUNCIL ELECTION — ELECTORATE OF ROOM 6

Number every box from 1 to 3 in the order you prefer: 1 for your first choice, 2 for your second, 3 for your third.

Candidates	Voters' boxes
Alex LEE	2
Priya SHARMA	3
Sam CHEN	1

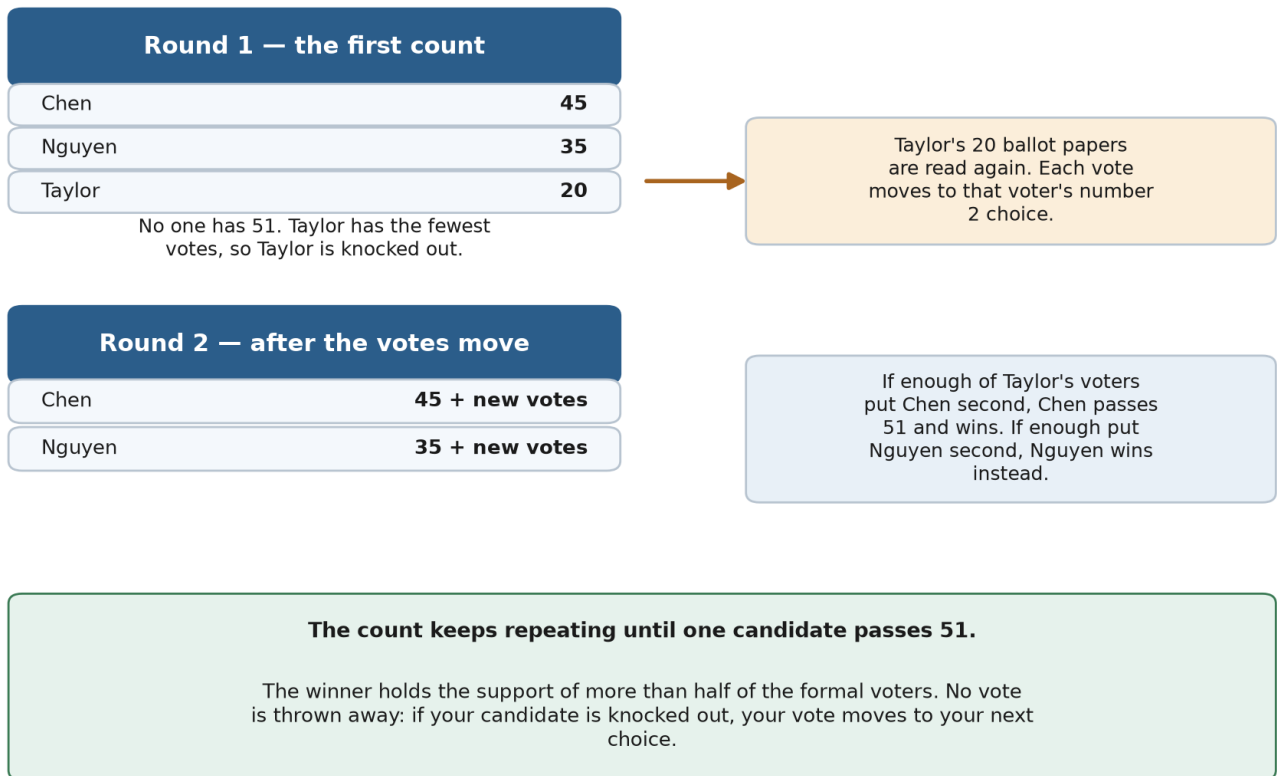
This voter's first choice is Sam Chen (1), then Alex Lee (2), then Priya Sharma (3). In a House of Representatives election, the rule is the same: number every box.

A model ballot paper for a school election, with the instruction to number every box from 1 to 3 in the order you prefer. Three rows show the candidates Alex Lee, Priya Sharma and Sam Chen, each with an empty box to number, and a sample column showing one voter’s choices: 2, 3 and 1. A note says this is a model paper for practice.

Figure 7. A model preferential ballot paper. A real House of Representatives ballot paper works the same way: number every box (source: AEC, ‘Preferential voting’, 22 April 2026).

A preferential count, step by step

100 formal votes · 3 candidates · an absolute majority (more than half) is needed to win



Adapted from the worked example in the PEO 'Federal elections' factsheet.

A worked example of a preferential count with 100 formal votes and three candidates. Round 1 shows Chen 45, Nguyen 35 and Taylor 20. No one has the 51 votes needed, so the candidate with the fewest votes is knocked out and those votes move to each voter's next choice, until one candidate passes 51.

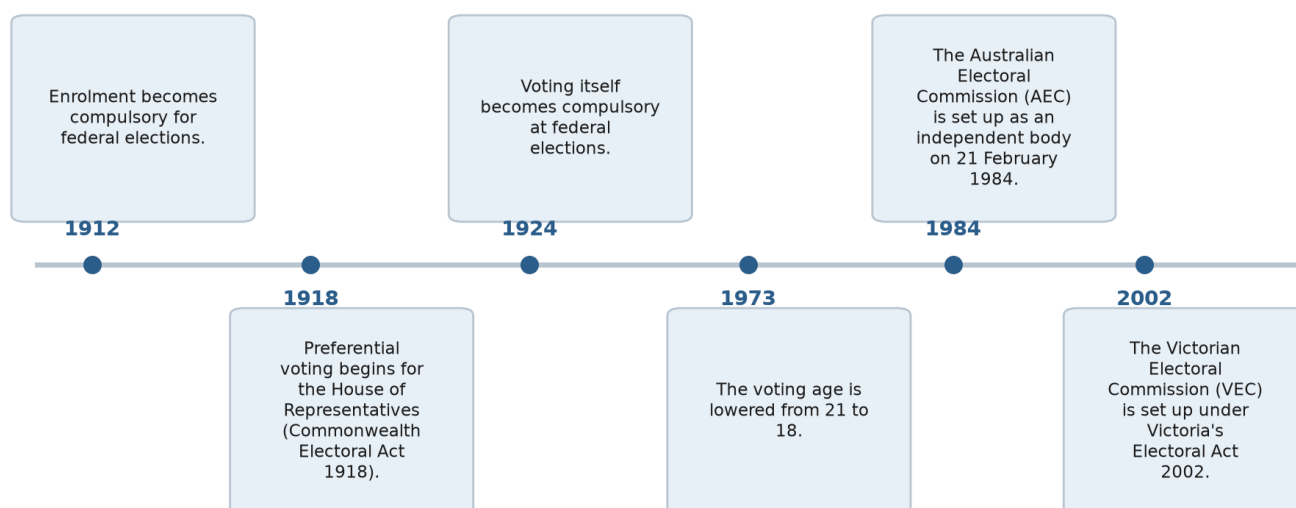
Figure 8. How a preferential count reaches an absolute majority (adapted from the worked example in the PEO 'Federal elections' factsheet).

Australia's voting system grew over time

The features above were not all there from the start. They were added one by one, as Australians changed their laws through their parliament.

Australia's voting system grew over time

Six key changes, added one by one through Australia's parliaments



Sources: AEC, 'A short history of federal electoral reform' and Electoral Backgrounder 'Compulsory voting'; PEO, Australian Parliament history timeline; VEC, 'About us'.

A timeline of six changes to Australia's voting system. 1912: enrolment becomes compulsory for federal elections. 1918: preferential voting begins for the House of Representatives. 1924: voting becomes compulsory. 1973: the voting age is lowered from 21 to 18. 1984: the Australian Electoral Commission is set up as an independent body. 2002: the Victorian Electoral Commission is set up under Victoria's Electoral Act 2002.

Figure 9. Six key changes to Australia's voting system (sources: AEC, 'A Short History of Federal Electoral Reform' and Electoral Backgrounder 'Compulsory voting'; PEO, Australian Parliament history timeline; VEC, 'About us').

Who runs the elections: independent electoral commissions

Elections need an umpire who takes no side. In Australia, elections are run by independent **electoral commissions**. Independent here means the commission is not part of the government of the day, and does not work for any party or candidate.

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) runs federal elections: elections for the House of Representatives and the Senate. The AEC says its role is to deliver the **right to vote** — every Australian citizen's right to vote. The formal name for that right, and the AEC's own description of its work, are in the quote below.

The AEC keeps the federal electoral roll, delivers polling services on election day, and runs education programs about how voting works. It describes itself this way:

The AEC's role is to deliver the franchise: that is, an Australian citizen's right to vote. The AEC maintains an impartial and independent electoral system for eligible voters through active electoral roll management, efficient delivery of polling services and targeted education and public awareness programs.

(AEC, 'The AEC's role', updated 10 June 2026)

The quote uses two words worth defining. In it, *Impartial* means treating every side the same way, and *independent* means not being part of the government of the day and not working for any party. The AEC was set up as an independent body on 21 February 1984, after changes to the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (AEC, 'The AEC's role'). It is led by the Electoral Commissioner.

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) runs elections in Victoria. It runs state elections for the Parliament of Victoria, local council elections, and some other official votes. Victoria's next state election is on **Saturday 28**

November 2026, and state elections happen every four years, on the last Saturday in November (VEC, ‘State elections’). The VEC also acts as a watchdog: it checks that everyone follows the rules during an election, to keep elections free and fair (VEC, ‘About us’). Like the AEC, the VEC is an independent body that takes no side, set up under Victoria’s *Electoral Act 2002*.

Two independent electoral commissions

Australia's elections are run by bodies that take no side

Australian Electoral Commission (AEC)	Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC)
Runs federal elections — for the House of Representatives and the Senate	Runs Victorian state elections and local council elections
Keeps the federal electoral roll	Keeps the Victorian electoral roll
Set up 21 February 1984, after changes to the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918	Set up under Victoria's Electoral Act 2002
Also runs education programs about how voting works	Also checks that everyone follows the rules during an election
Last federal election: Saturday 3 May 2025	Next state election: Saturday 28 November 2026
What they share Both are independent and impartial: they are not part of the government of the day, they treat every side the same way, and they work to keep elections open, free and fair.	

A comparison of two independent electoral commissions in two columns. Left column, Australian Electoral Commission: runs federal elections for the House of Representatives and the Senate; keeps the federal electoral roll; set up in 1984; works under the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918. Right column, Victorian Electoral Commission: runs Victorian state elections and local council elections; keeps the Victorian electoral roll; set up under Victoria’s Electoral Act 2002; next state election Saturday 28 November 2026. A shared row reads: both are independent and take no side, and both work to keep elections open, free and fair.

Figure 10. The AEC and the VEC: two independent electoral commissions (sources: AEC, ‘The AEC’s role’; VEC, ‘About us’ and ‘State elections’).

What do the words **open**, **free** and **fair** mean for an election?

- **Open.** The roll is up to date, polling places are open to voters, and the count can be watched by the public and by people sent to watch for each candidate.
- **Free.** People can enrol, vote and stand for election without being forced or stopped. Voting is secret, so choices are truly free.
- **Fair.** Every vote counts once, the rules are the same for every candidate and party, and an independent body runs the whole process.

Democracy in your classroom

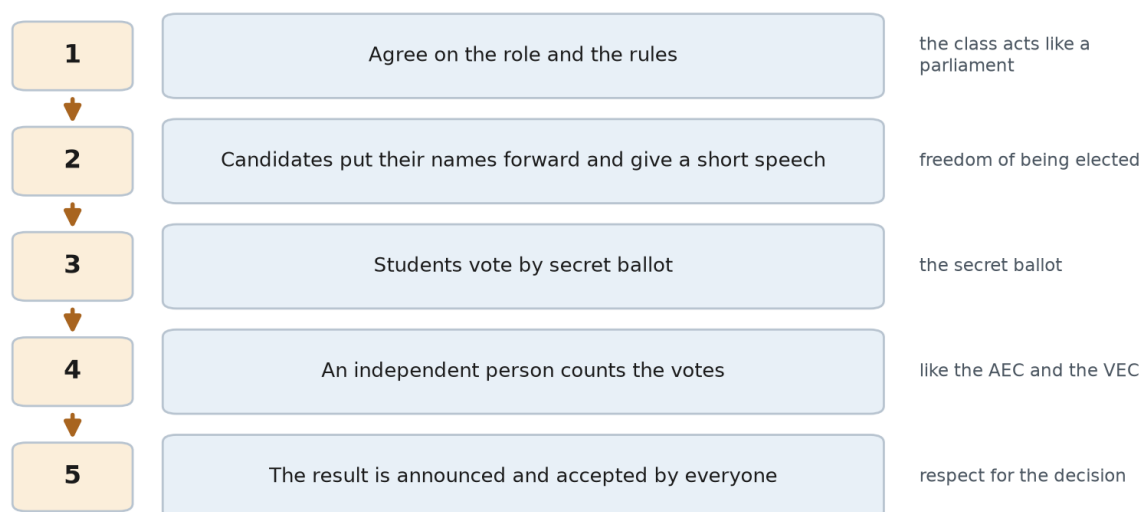
Democratic habits start before you can vote. Schools use elections for student leaders such as class captains, prefects and school captains. A class election can copy the real system:

- every student gets one vote — like the electoral roll, everyone on the list votes once;
- candidates put their names forward and say why they would do the job well;
- voting is by secret ballot;
- the count is done by an independent person, such as a teacher or students from another class; and
- everyone accepts the result, including the candidates who did not win.

Classes also make decisions in other democratic ways. One is **deliberate** discussion — talking options through carefully, listening and weighing reasons before deciding. Another is **consensus** — working together until most of the group can support a choice. Voting is the tool a group turns to when consensus cannot be reached.

Democracy in your classroom: a class election

A student-leader election can copy the key features of Australia's voting system



A class election run like a real one, shown as five steps. Step 1: the class agrees on the role and the rules. Step 2: candidates put their names forward and give a short speech. Step 3: students vote by secret ballot. Step 4: an independent person counts the votes. Step 5: the result is announced and accepted by everyone.

Figure 11. A class election that copies the key features of Australia's voting system.

Bringing it together

Australia's democracy rests on its values (freedom, fairness and the rule of law), on members chosen by the people, and on the way its elections work. Four features do most of the work:

Four features that keep Australian elections open, free and fair

Feature	What it means
The secret ballot	No one can see how you vote, so your choice is truly free.
Compulsory voting	Every enrolled voter must vote, so parliament speaks for the whole community.
Preferential voting	Voters number every box in the order they prefer. The winner has more than half of the formal votes.
Independent electoral commissions	The AEC (federal) and the VEC (Victoria) run elections and take no side.

These features rest on the values behind Australian democracy: freedom, fairness and the rule of law.

A summary table with four rows, one for each key feature of Australian elections: the secret ballot; compulsory voting; preferential voting; and independent electoral commissions, with a short description of each.

Figure 12. Four features that keep Australian elections open, free and fair.

In Years 7 and 8 you will build on this section by looking at political parties and how elections decide who forms the government.

Sources for this section

Retrieval date for all online sources: **26 August 2026.**

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8. *Australian Citizenship Act 2007* (Cth), compilation no. 37, compilation date 4 June 2026 (citizenship pledge, as set out in the Act), Federal Register of Legislation, legislation.gov.au.
9. Australian Government, *Australian Citizenship: Our Common Bond*, 15 November 2020 edition (the citizenship pledge and Australia's official values statement).
10. Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC), 'About us', 'State elections' and 'History of elections in Victoria', vec.vic.gov.au.
11. PEO (the Parliamentary Education Office), 'Federal elections' factsheet and Australian Parliament history timeline, peo.gov.au.

Worked examples

Example 1 — with help

Question. The PEO shows how a preferential count works using a simple example, adapted here. Three candidates stand for one seat: Chen, Nguyen and Taylor. There are 100 formal votes. The first count stands at: Chen 45, Nguyen 35, Taylor 20. Who wins the seat?

Working	Comment
Step 1: Find the number needed to win. An absolute majority is more than half of the 100 formal votes, so a candidate needs at least 51 votes.	The count keeps going until one candidate passes half of the formal votes.
Step 2: Check the first count. The top score is Chen with 45 votes. 45 is less than 51, so no one has won yet.	With three or more candidates, no one may have more than half at first.
Step 3: Knock out the candidate with the fewest votes. Taylor has the fewest (20), so Taylor is knocked out.	Preferential voting does not throw Taylor's votes away.
Step 4: Read Taylor's 20 ballot papers again. Each vote moves to that voter's number 2 choice — Chen or Nguyen.	This is why voters number every box: the vote keeps counting.
Step 5: Add the moved votes and check again. If enough of Taylor's voters put Chen second, Chen passes 51 and wins. If enough put Nguyen second, Nguyen wins instead. Keep repeating until one candidate passes 51.	The winner holds the support of more than half of the formal voters.

Answer: the candidate who passes 51 votes once Taylor's votes move — either Chen or Nguyen, depending on the voters' number 2 choices.

Example 2 — with help

Question. In 1924, the Australian Parliament made voting compulsory at federal elections. Explain why Parliament made this change, and connect your answer to the values of Australian democracy.

Working	Comment
Step 1: Work out what the question asks. There are two parts: (a) the reasons for the change; (b) the values it connects to.	Answer both parts.
Step 2: Find the evidence. The AEC says the change was made to increase voter turnout and cut what parties spend on campaigns (its exact words are quoted in the Theory section). The PEO timeline says it was introduced "to address low participation numbers".	Name your sources. Both sources say the same thing in different words.
Step 3: Connect cause and effect. Fewer people voting → the result may not speak for the whole community → Parliament made voting a duty for every enrolled voter.	Turnout means the share of enrolled voters who vote.
Step 4: Connect to values. Compulsory voting links to political participation (everyone takes part), to fairness (everyone shares the duty), and to the idea that parliament speaks for all Australians.	You could also note that strong reasons exist on both sides — see the discussion in the Theory section.

Practice questions

With help

Q1. What does democracy mean?

- (a) Write the working definition of democracy used in this section.
- (b) Name one thing about Australia's system of representation that makes it democratic.
- (c) Why is it all right for a word like democracy to be used in slightly different ways?

Q2. The values behind Australian democracy.

- (a) List four key values of Australian democracy.
- (b) Choose one value and give an example of how students at your school use it.
- (c) Why does the rule of law matter to people who do not hold power?

Q3. The citizenship pledge. Read the pledge in Figure 3.

- (a) State two promises a new citizen makes in the pledge.
- (b) How are the two forms of the pledge different, and why do you think citizens get a choice?
- (c) Which key value of Australian democracy matches the choice between the two forms? Give a reason.

Q4. Australia's official values statement. Look at Figure 4.

- (a) According to the statement, what does compulsory voting show?
- (b) Choose one value heading from Figure 4 and explain what it means in your own words.
- (c) Name one value that appears in both the pledge and the values statement.

Q5. The secret ballot. Read Figure 5.

- (a) At which step does a voter mark their paper alone?
- (b) Give two reasons why the vote is kept secret.
- (c) How might elections be different if people voted in front of others?

Q6. Preferential voting. Look at Figure 7.

- (a) Copy the model ballot paper and show the votes of a person who prefers Sam Chen first, then Alex Lee, then Priya Sharma.
- (b) Why must the voter number every box?
- (c) In Example 1, what happens to a vote when its candidate is knocked out?

On your own

Q7. Explain compulsory voting to someone who is new to Australia. In your answer, say what it means, when it started, and give one strong reason for it and one strong reason against it.

Q8. Elections need an umpire who takes no side. Explain why electoral commissions must be independent, and describe two things that could go wrong if the government of the day ran its own election.

Q9. The next Victorian state election is on Saturday 28 November 2026. Name the body that runs it, describe two of its jobs, and explain how its work differs from the AEC's work.

Q10. Your class will elect a new class captain. Design the election by writing five rules for it. For each rule, say which feature or value of Australia's democracy it copies.

Q11. Source-based inquiry. Read the source below, then answer the questions.

The AEC maintains an impartial and independent electoral system for eligible voters through active electoral roll management, efficient delivery of polling services and targeted education and public awareness programs.

Australian Electoral Commission, 'The AEC's role', updated 10 June 2026

- (a) Find two words in the source that tell you the AEC does not take sides.
- (b) According to the source, name three things the AEC does.
- (c) For each of the three things in part (b), explain how it helps keep elections open, free and fair.

Answers

Q1. (a) A system of government in which the people of a country choose who makes decisions for them, through elections that are free, open and fair. (b) Australians elect people to make decisions for them in parliament. (c) Accept any thoughtful reason; for example, democracy covers many ideas and many countries, so people stress different parts of it.

Q2. (a) Any four from: freedom of election and being elected; freedom of assembly and political participation; freedom of speech, expression and religious belief; the rule of law; other basic human rights. (b) Answers will vary; for example, students use freedom of speech when they share ideas in a class debate. (c) Because it means the powerful must follow the same laws as everyone else, so no one can use power unfairly.

Q3. (a) Any two from: to stand by Australia and its people; to share democratic beliefs; to respect the rights and freedoms of others; to follow Australia's laws. (b) One form includes the words "under God" and the other does not; citizens get a choice because Australia respects freedom of religious belief. (c) Freedom of religious belief (accept freedom of speech, expression or belief with a reason).

Q4. (a) It shows how important it is to take part in elections. (b) Answers will vary. (c) For example: respect for the rights and freedoms of others; following the law (the rule of law); sharing democratic beliefs.

Q5. (a) Step 3. (b) For example: so no one can pressure or frighten a voter; so no one can reward or punish a person for their vote. (c) Answers will vary; for example, people might be pressured to vote a certain way, so votes would not be free.

Q6. (a) Sam Chen: 1; Alex Lee: 2; Priya Sharma: 3. (b) So the vote keeps counting until a candidate has more than half of the formal votes. (c) It is read again and moves to the voter's next choice.

Q7. Compulsory voting means every enrolled voter must vote. Enrolment became compulsory in 1912 and voting became compulsory in 1924. For: parliament speaks for the whole community, not only the people who feel strongly. Against: some say a forced vote is not really a free choice. Accept other reasons from the Theory section.

Q8. Answers will vary. The commission must be independent so the rules are applied the same way to every candidate and party, and so voters can trust the result. If the government of the day ran its own election, it could make rules that help itself win, and voters might not trust the count.

Q9. The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC). Any two jobs from: runs state elections; runs local council elections; keeps the Victorian electoral roll; checks that election rules are followed. The AEC runs federal elections (for the House of Representatives and the Senate) and keeps the federal electoral roll.

Q10. Answers will vary. Example rules with matching features: every student on the roll gets one vote (fairness — one vote each); candidates put their names forward and speak to the class (freedom of election and being elected); votes are cast by secret ballot (the secret ballot); a student from another class counts the votes (an independent count); everyone accepts the result (respect for the decision the group makes).

Q11. (a) Impartial and independent. (b) Any three from: keeps the electoral roll active and up to date; delivers polling services; runs education and public awareness programs. (c) The roll lets every eligible voter take part (open and free); polling services give voters a real, private chance to vote (free and fair); education programs help voters understand the system (open and fair).

Fully-worked solutions

Q1.

- (a) The working definition in this section is: a system of government in which the people of a country choose who makes decisions for them, through elections that are free, open and fair.
- (b) Answers will vary; for example, the people elect members to make decisions for them in parliament, rather than voting on every decision themselves. The AEC describes it this way: Australians over 18 must enrol and vote for the people who represent them.
- (c) Democracy is a big idea used in many countries and situations, so people can stress different parts of it — such as voting, freedoms, or the rule of law. What matters in class is that you say what you mean by the word and give reasons. That is why this section gives a working definition before using the word.

Q2.

- (a) Four key values are: freedom of election and being elected; freedom of assembly and political participation; freedom of speech, expression and religious belief; and the rule of law. (Other basic human rights is also accepted.)
- (b) Example: freedom of assembly and political participation. Students use this value when they form a group to ask for a change at school, such as better playground equipment, and collect signatures from other students.
- (c) The rule of law matters most to people who do not hold power because it means the powerful must follow the same laws as everyone else. A minister, a police officer and a student all stand under the same law. Without the rule of law, people in power could make up rules to suit themselves, and ordinary people would have no fair way to complain.

Q3.

- (a) In the pledge, a new citizen promises to stand by Australia and its people, and to follow Australia's laws. (The pledge also speaks of sharing democratic beliefs and respecting the rights and freedoms of others.)
- (b) The two forms are exactly the same, except that one includes the words “under God”. Citizens get a choice because Australians hold different religious beliefs, and a democracy that values freedom of religious belief does not force everyone to use the same words.
- (c) The choice matches the value of freedom of religious belief: each citizen can say the pledge in a way that fits their own beliefs.

Q4.

- (a) The statement says voting is compulsory in Australia, and that this shows the importance of taking part in elections.
- (b) Example: equality of opportunity and a “fair go”. This means every person should have a fair chance to do well — at school, at work and in life — no matter where they start from.
- (c) Respecting the rights and freedoms of others appears in the pledge and in the values statement (as several of the headings, such as freedom of speech and freedom of religion). Following the law in the pledge matches the heading commitment to the rule of law.

Q5.

- (a) Step 3: the voter marks their paper alone, in a private booth.
- (b) Two reasons: first, so no one can pressure or frighten a voter into voting a certain way; second, so no one can reward or punish a person based on their vote. Secrecy keeps each voter's choice truly their own.
- (c) If people voted in front of others, voters could be watched, pressured or paid for their vote, and some people might be afraid to vote against what a powerful person wanted. The result might not show what people really chose.

Q6.

- (a) The voter writes 1 beside Sam Chen, 2 beside Alex Lee and 3 beside Priya Sharma. Every box is numbered, with no repeats.
- (b) The voter must number every box so the vote can keep counting. If the voter's first-choice candidate is knocked out, the vote moves to number 2, then number 3, until a candidate has more than half of the formal votes.
- (c) In Example 1, when Taylor is knocked out, each of Taylor's ballot papers is read again and the vote moves to that voter's number 2 choice — Chen or Nguyen. The vote is not thrown away.

Q7.

Model answer: In Australia, voting is compulsory. That means every enrolled voter must vote at elections. If you are an Australian citizen who is 18 or over, you must enrol, and once enrolled you must vote. This came in step by step: enrolment became compulsory in 1912, and voting itself became compulsory in 1924.

A strong reason for compulsory voting is that parliament then speaks for the whole community, because nearly every adult takes part. The official values statement says compulsory voting shows the importance of taking part in elections.

A strong reason against it is that voting is a freedom, and some say a freedom should include the freedom not to take part. They say a forced choice is not really free.

The AEC itself does not take a side on this question — it runs the system either way.

Q8.

Model answer: Electoral commissions must be independent because their job is to apply the same rules to every candidate, party and voter. If they took sides, voters could not trust the result, and the election would not be fair.

Two things that could go wrong if the government of the day ran its own election:

1. The government could change the rules to help itself — for example, by choosing election dates, boundaries or voting rules that help its own candidates.
2. Voters could lose trust in the count. If the people counting the votes work for one side, the losing side may not accept the result, and that weakens the whole democracy.

That is why Australia uses independent bodies — the AEC for federal elections and the VEC for Victorian elections.

Q9.

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) runs the next Victorian state election.

Two of its jobs are: running state elections for the Parliament of Victoria (and local council elections), and keeping the Victorian electoral roll. It also checks that everyone follows the rules during an election.

The VEC's work differs from the AEC's work because the VEC runs Victorian elections — state and local council elections — while the AEC runs federal elections, for the House of Representatives and the Senate, and keeps the federal electoral roll. Each body works under its own laws: the VEC under Victoria's Electoral Act 2002, and the AEC under the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918.

Q10.

Model answer — five rules for a class captain election:

1. Every student in the class gets exactly one vote. This copies fairness and the idea of the electoral roll: one vote each, no one left out.
2. Any student who wants the job can put their name forward and give a short speech. This copies freedom of election and being elected.
3. The vote is by secret ballot, marked alone. This copies the secret ballot, so no student is pressured.
4. A teacher, or students from another class, collect and count the votes. This copies the independent electoral commissions — the AEC and the VEC.
5. Everyone accepts the result, including the candidates who did not win. This copies the rule of law: the group follows the rules it agreed to, whatever the outcome.

Q11.

- (a) The two words are the pair the source uses to describe the electoral system: *Impartial* means treating every side the same way, and *independent* means the AEC is not part of the government of the day and does not work for any party.
- (b) According to the source, the AEC: (1) keeps the electoral roll active and up to date; (2) delivers polling services; and (3) runs education and public awareness programs.
- (c) How each keeps elections open, free and fair:
 1. The electoral roll makes sure every eligible voter can take part, and only eligible voters take part. That keeps the election open and fair.
 2. Polling services give every voter a real, private chance to vote on the day — including the secret ballot. That keeps the election free and fair.
 3. Education and public awareness programs help voters understand how voting works, so they can take part with confidence. That keeps the election open.

The ideas and institutions that hold up Australian democracy

Chapter 1 · Government and democracy · Section 1B · Content description VC2HC6K02 · Draws on elaborations VC2HC6K02.E01, VC2HC6K02.E02, VC2HC6K02.E03, VC2HC6K02.E04

Australia is a democracy. But democracy is more than just voting on election day. It rests on a set of **values** and **principles** that people agree to live by, and on **institutions** — the important groups that put those values into action. In this section you will find out what those values and principles are, where Australia’s system of government came from, and how institutions such as parliaments and courts keep democracy working.

Before we start — what do these words mean here? Some big words in civics can be used in more than one way. So that everyone is answering the same question, here is the sense this book uses.

- **Democracy** — a way of making decisions and running a country in which the people have a say. Australians choose representatives to make laws and decisions for them. (This is the sense used in the Victorian Curriculum.)
- **Value** — something a society believes is important and good, such as fairness or freedom.
- **Principle** — a basic rule or idea that guides how something works.
- **Institution** — an important group that plays a part in running the country, such as a parliament or a court.
- **Rule of law** — the principle that everyone must obey the law, including the government, and that the law applies the same way to all people.

Other people may use these words in slightly different senses. In this section, every question can be answered using the meanings above.

Theory

1. The values and principles that underpin democracy

A democracy needs more than elections. It needs shared values and principles that protect people and keep the system fair. The table below lists the main ones for Australia and what each one means.

Values and principles behind Australia's democracy

What each one means

Value / principle	What it means
Democracy	The people have a say in how the country is run. They choose representatives to make decisions and laws.
Rule of law	Everyone must obey the law, including the government. No one is above the law.
Freedom	People can think, speak and meet together. This includes freedom of speech and freedom of religion.
Equality	All people are treated the same by the law and have the same rights.
Fairness	People are treated in a just way, and rules are applied the same to everyone.
Free and fair elections	Everyone's vote counts the same, and voting is done in secret.
Participation	People take part by voting, joining groups and sharing their views.
Representation	Elected members speak and decide for the people who chose them.

These values support one another. For example, the rule of law helps to uphold equality.

A table listing the values and principles behind Australia's democracy, such as democracy, rule of law, freedom, equality, fairness, free and fair elections, and participation, with a short meaning for each

These values support one another. For example, you cannot have true **participation** unless elections are **free and fair**, and you cannot have **equality** unless the **rule of law** treats every person the same way.

2. The rule of law

The **rule of law** is one of the most important principles in Australia. It means that:

- **Everyone must obey the law** — people, businesses, police and the government itself.
- **No one is above the law** — being rich, famous or powerful does not let someone ignore the law.
- **The law applies equally** — the same rules apply to all people, and courts decide cases based on the law, not on who a person is.

Because of the rule of law, Australians can trust that disagreements are settled in a fair way and that the government cannot just do whatever it likes. The rule of law is a big reason why Australia's democracy is strong.

3. Where Australia's system came from: the Westminster system

Australia's way of running its government did not appear from nowhere. Much of it was inherited from **Britain**. The British system of government is called the **Westminster system**, named after the Palace of Westminster in London, where the British Parliament meets.

When the Australian colonies joined together to form one nation in 1901, they kept many Westminster ideas. The table below shows some of these ideas and how they appear in Australia today.

Westminster ideas in Australia's system of government

Australia inherited these ideas from Britain

Westminster idea	How it appears in Australia
An elected parliament	The people choose representatives to make laws for them.
Two houses of parliament	Parliament is made up of two groups of members, and both must agree to a new law.
Responsible government	Ministers must answer to Parliament and keep its support.
A head of state	Australia's head of state is the King, who is represented by the Governor-General.
A public service	Government departments carry out the day-to-day work of running the country.

Named after the Palace of Westminster in London, where the British Parliament meets.

A table showing features of the Westminster system that Australia inherited from Britain, including an elected parliament, responsible government, two houses of parliament, a head of state, and a public service, with a note on each

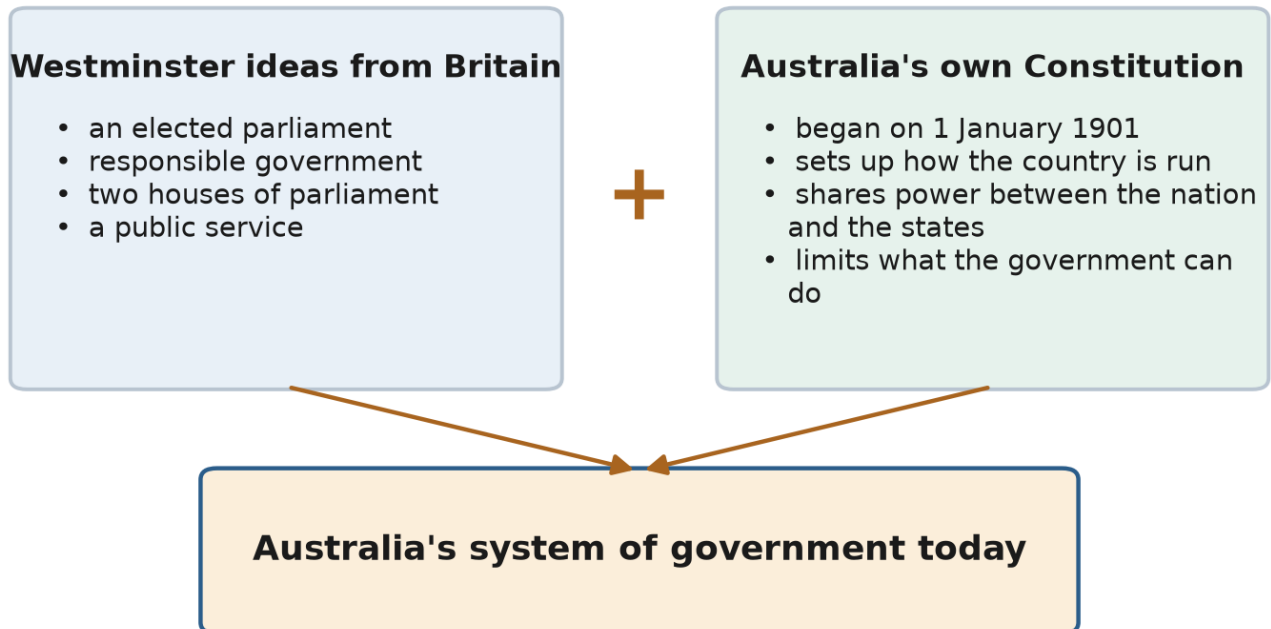
Two of these ideas are worth knowing well. **Responsible government** means that the people who run the government (called ministers) must answer to Parliament and keep its support. **Two houses of parliament** means that Parliament is made up of two separate groups of elected members, and both must agree before a new law is made.

Australia also made its own changes. When the nation began in 1901, Australians wrote a **Constitution** — a set of rules that sets up how the country is run and shares power between the whole nation and the individual states. So Australia's system blends the Westminster ideas from Britain with a written Constitution of its own.

A word to know: Australia's **Constitution** came into effect on 1 January 1901, when the Australian colonies became one nation.

The diagram below shows how these two parts — Westminster ideas and the written Constitution — fit together in Australia's system.

Two parts make up Australia's system of government



Australia kept Westminster ideas and added a written Constitution of its own.

A diagram showing that Australia's system of government is made of two parts: Westminster ideas inherited from Britain, and its own written Constitution that began in 1901

4. Australia's democratic institutions and their roles

Values and principles need real groups to carry them out. Australia's key democratic institutions are its **parliaments** and its **courts**.

- A **parliament** is where elected representatives meet to make laws, speak for the people and check the work of the government.
- A **court** is where judges **interpret** (work out the meaning of) the law and apply it to settle disagreements and decide cases.

Australia has a federal parliament for the whole country, and each state has its own parliament. The table below lists four important institutions that the Victorian Curriculum asks you to know, where they are, and what they do.

Four key democratic institutions in Australia

Where they are and what they do

Institution	City	Its role
Parliament House (federal Parliament)	Canberra	Where Australia's federal Parliament meets to make national laws.
High Court of Australia	Canberra	Australia's highest court. It interprets the Constitution and national laws.
Parliament of Victoria	Melbourne	Where Victoria's parliament meets to make state laws.
Supreme Court of Victoria	Melbourne	Victoria's highest court. It hears serious cases and interprets state law.

You can investigate these places in person or with a virtual tour online.

A table listing four Australian democratic institutions — Parliament House and the High Court of Australia in Canberra, and the Parliament of Victoria and the Supreme Court of Victoria in Melbourne — with each one's location and its role

You can visit or learn about these places without leaving the classroom. Both Parliament House in Canberra and the Parliament of Victoria offer virtual tours and information online, so you can investigate how they work **in situ** (that is, in their real place) or from school.

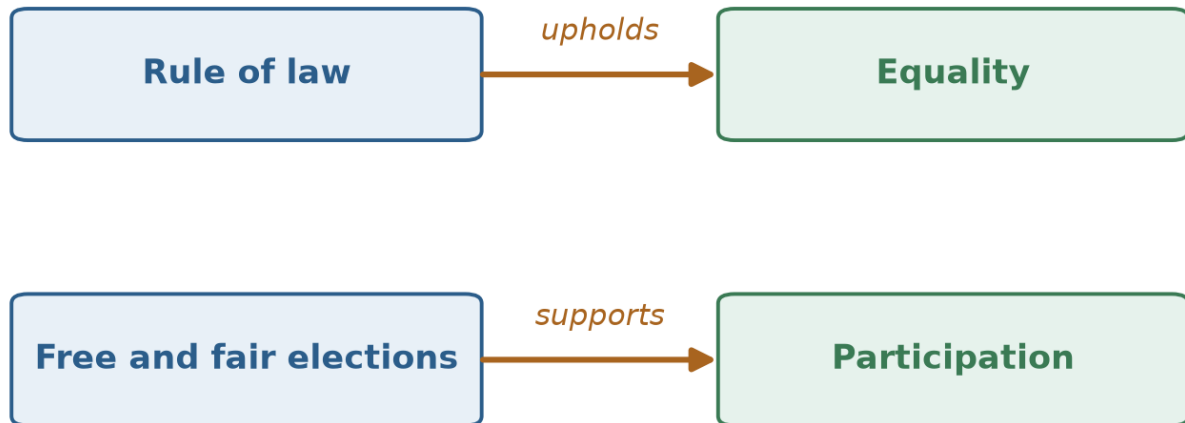
5. How values work together

Democratic values do not stand alone. They connect and support each other. The Victorian Curriculum asks you to look at these connections. Two important examples are:

- **The rule of law upholds equality.** Because everyone must obey the same laws and courts treat all people the same, the rule of law helps to make sure people are treated **equally**. Without the rule of law, equality is only a nice idea, not a real protection.
- **Free and fair elections support participation.** Because elections are free and fair — everyone's vote counts the same, and voting is done in secret — all citizens can take part. If elections were not fair, people would have no reason to **participate**.

The diagram below shows these two connections.

How democratic values support one another



Values connect: one value helps to make another value real.

A simple diagram showing how one value supports another: the rule of law supports equality, and free and fair elections support participation

Think about it The rule of law says the law should treat everyone the same. But some people point out that treating everyone exactly the same is not always fair — for example, is it fair to give a child and an adult the same punishment for the same mistake? Other people say that changing the rules for some people can lead to some being treated better than others, and that the law works best when it treats everyone the same. Both sides want a fair system, but they see fairness in different ways. With a partner, talk about what you think “being treated equally by the law” should mean.

6. Human rights and how they are upheld

A **human right** is a basic right that every person has simply because they are human. Australians have a range of human rights, such as the ones in the table below.

Human rights that Australians have

A human right is a basic right every person has

Human right	What it means
Right to vote	Citizens can vote to choose their representatives.
Freedom of speech	People can say what they think.
Freedom of religion	People can hold and follow any religion, or no religion.
Freedom of association	People can meet together and join groups.
Right to a fair trial	Courts hear both sides and treat people the same.
Equality before the law	The law treats all people the same way.

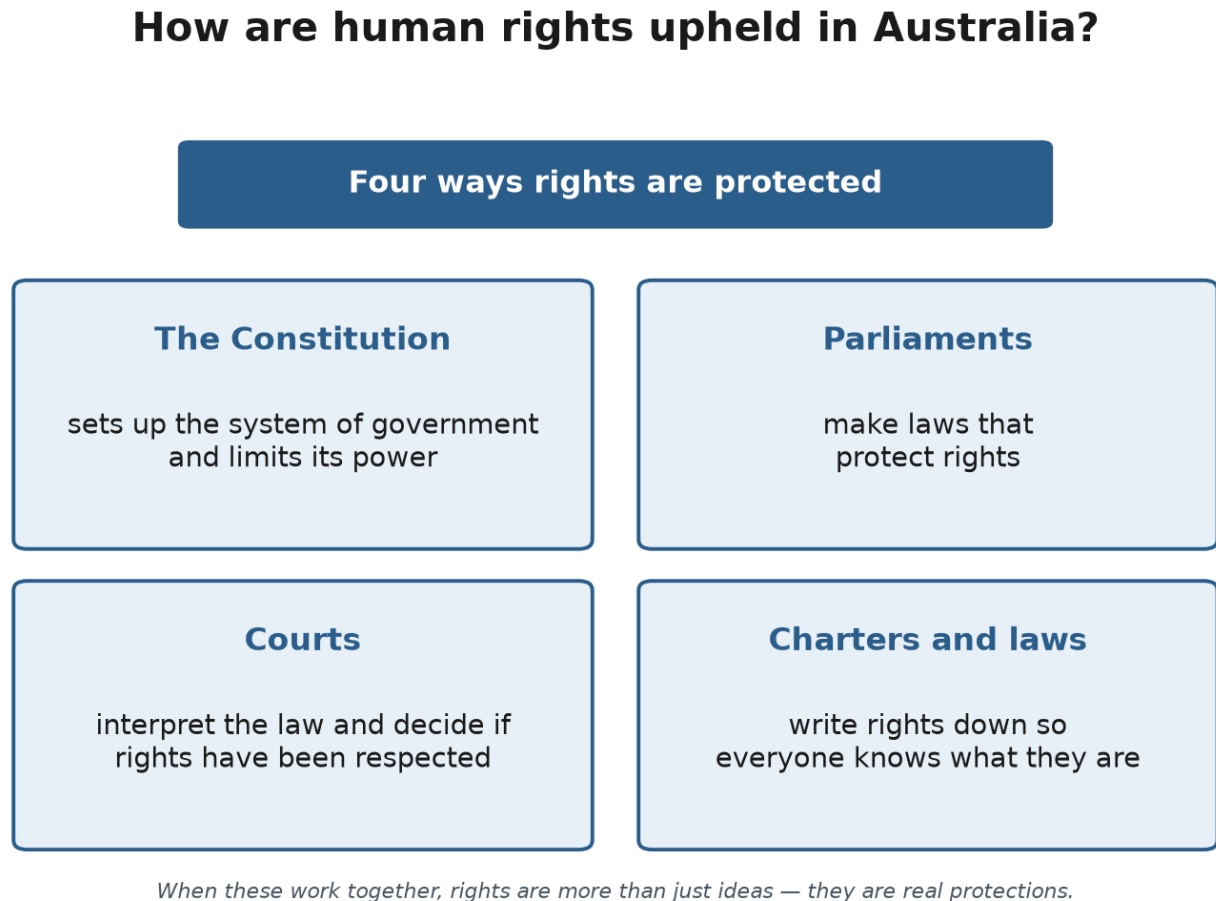
These rights are upheld by the Constitution, parliaments, courts, and charters and laws.

A table listing human rights that Australians have, such as the right to vote, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of association, the right to a fair trial, and equality before the law, with a short meaning for each

Rights are only real if something **upholds** them — that is, protects them and makes sure they are respected. In Australia, rights are upheld in several ways:

- **The Constitution** sets up the system of government and limits what the government can do.
- **Parliaments** make laws that protect rights.
- **Courts** interpret the law and can decide that a person's rights have not been respected.
- **Charters and laws** write down the rights people have, so everyone knows what they are.

The diagram below puts these four ways of upholding rights together.



A diagram showing four ways human rights are upheld in Australia: the Constitution, parliaments making laws, courts interpreting the law, and charters and laws that write rights down

7. The Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities

In Victoria, one important law that protects rights is the **Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities**. This is a Victorian law, passed in 2006, that lists the human rights that people in Victoria have. The diagram below gives the key facts.

The Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities

Key facts

Question	Answer
What is it?	A Victorian law that lists the human rights people in Victoria have.
When was it made?	2006.
How many rights does it protect?	20 human rights.
Who must follow it?	Public authorities, such as government departments, the police and public schools.
What does it ask Parliament to do?	Think about how new laws affect human rights before passing them.

A charter is a written statement of rights or principles.

A fact box about the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, including that it is a Victorian law passed in 2006, that it protects 20 human rights, and that public authorities must act in line with those rights

The Charter matters because it tells **public authorities** — such as government departments, the police and public schools — that they must act in ways that respect these rights. It also means that when the Victorian Parliament makes new laws, it must think about how those laws affect human rights.

Worked examples

Example 1 — worked step by step

Parliament House in Canberra opened on 9 May 1987 and is where Australia's federal Parliament meets. Explain how Parliament House, and the Parliament that meets there, helps to uphold the value of **representation**.

Step	Working	Comment
1. Name the institution and what it is	Parliament House in Canberra is where Australia's federal Parliament meets.	Identify the institution.
2. Say what the value means	Representation means that elected members speak and make decisions for the people who chose them.	Define the value.
3. Connect the two	Australians vote to choose members of Parliament. Those members meet in Parliament House to make laws for the people.	Show how the institution puts the value into action.

Step	Working	Comment
4. Finish with a clear point	So Parliament House upholds representation because it is where the people's elected members meet to make decisions for them.	State the conclusion.

Source: Parliament House, Canberra, opened 9 May 1987 (Parliament House, Canberra; retrieved 26 August 2026).

Example 2 — worked step by step

The Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities is a Victorian law passed in 2006 that protects 20 human rights. Explain how the Charter helps to uphold human rights in Victoria.

Step	Working	Comment
1. Say what the Charter is	The Charter is a Victorian law that lists 20 human rights that people in Victoria have.	Identify the law.
2. Say who it applies to	It applies to public authorities, such as government departments, the police and public schools.	Name who must follow it.
3. Explain what it makes them do	These public authorities must act in ways that respect the rights in the Charter.	Explain the duty.
4. Finish with a clear point	So the Charter upholds human rights because it writes them down in law and makes public bodies respect them.	State the conclusion.

Source: Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic) protects 20 human rights (Victorian Government; retrieved 26 August 2026).

Practice questions

Guided questions

Q1. Match each word to its meaning. Use the meanings in the “Before we start” box.

Word	Meaning
(a) democracy	(i) an important group that helps run the country
(b) institution	(ii) the principle that everyone must obey the law
(c) rule of law	(iii) a way of running a country in which the people have a say
(d) principle	(iv) a basic rule or idea that guides how something works

Q2. Name the principle that means “no one is above the law”, and give two things it means in practice.

Q3. Complete the table about the Westminster system.

Feature of the Westminster system	What it means
An elected parliament	The people choose ...
Two houses of parliament	Parliament is made up of ...
Responsible government	Ministers must ...

Q4. Fill in the missing information about the four institutions in the table in part 4 of the Theory.

Institution	City	What it does
Parliament House (federal Parliament)	...	Makes national laws
High Court of Australia	...	...
...	Melbourne	Makes Victorian laws
Supreme Court of Victoria	...	The highest court in Victoria

Q5. Explain, in two sentences, how the rule of law upholds equality.

Q6. Name the Victorian law passed in 2006 that protects human rights, and say how many rights it protects.

Independent questions

Answer each question in one or two full sentences.

Q7. Choose one value from the values table and explain why it is important for Australia's democracy.

Q8. Explain the difference between what a parliament does and what a court does.

Q9. "Free and fair elections support participation." Explain what this statement means.

Q10. Pick one institution from the institutions table and explain how it helps to uphold a democratic value. Name the institution, the value, and how the institution upholds it.

Source inquiry

Read the short source below, then answer the questions that follow.

Source 1 — A short guide to the rule of law

The rule of law is a key principle in Australia. It means that everyone must obey the law. This includes everyday people, businesses, the police, and even the government. No one is above the law, so being rich or powerful does not let a person ignore it. The law applies equally to all people, and courts decide cases based on the law, not on who a person is. Because of the rule of law, Australians can trust that disagreements are settled in a fair way.

(Written for this workbook.)

SQ1. According to the source, who must obey the law? List three groups named in the source.

SQ2. The source says "no one is above the law." In your own words, explain what this phrase means.

SQ3. Explain how the rule of law, as described in the source, helps to uphold the value of equality.

SQ4. The source is written for this workbook. What is one thing you could do to check whether its claims about the rule of law are correct?

Answers

Q1. (a)–(iii), (b)–(i), (c)–(ii), (d)–(iv).

Q2. The principle is the **rule of law**. Any two of: everyone must obey the law; no one is above the law; the law applies equally to all people; courts decide cases based on the law.

Q3. An elected parliament — the people choose their representatives. Two houses of parliament — Parliament is made up of two separate houses (in the federal Parliament, the House of Representatives and the Senate). Responsible government — Ministers must answer to Parliament and keep its support.

Q4. Parliament House — Canberra. High Court of Australia — Canberra; it interprets the Constitution and Australia's laws and settles important disagreements. Parliament of Victoria — Melbourne. Supreme Court of Victoria — Melbourne.

Q5. Sample answer: The rule of law means everyone must obey the same laws and courts treat all people the same. This upholds equality because the law treats everyone the same, so no one gets special treatment.

Q6. The Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. It protects 20 human rights.

Q7. Sample answer: **Equality** is important because it means all Australians are treated the same before the law. Without it, some people could be treated better than others, which would not be fair.

Q8. A parliament makes laws and represents the people. A court interprets and applies the law to settle disagreements and decide cases.

Q9. Sample answer: It means that when elections are free and fair, every citizen's vote counts the same and voting is done in secret. So people trust the result and are more willing to take part by voting.

Q10. Sample answer: The **High Court of Australia** upholds the **rule of law**. It interprets the Constitution and Australia's laws, and it can decide that the government has not followed the law, which keeps the government under the law like everyone else.

SQ1. Any three of: everyday people, businesses, the police, the government.

SQ2. Sample answer: It means that the law applies to everyone equally, and no person is so rich or powerful that they do not have to follow it.

SQ3. Sample answer: The source says the law applies equally to all people and courts decide cases based on the law, not on who a person is. This upholds equality because everyone is treated the same before the law.

SQ4. Sample answer: You could check the claims against a trusted source, such as an official Australian government or court website, or ask whether other sources say the same thing.

Who does what: Australia's three levels of government

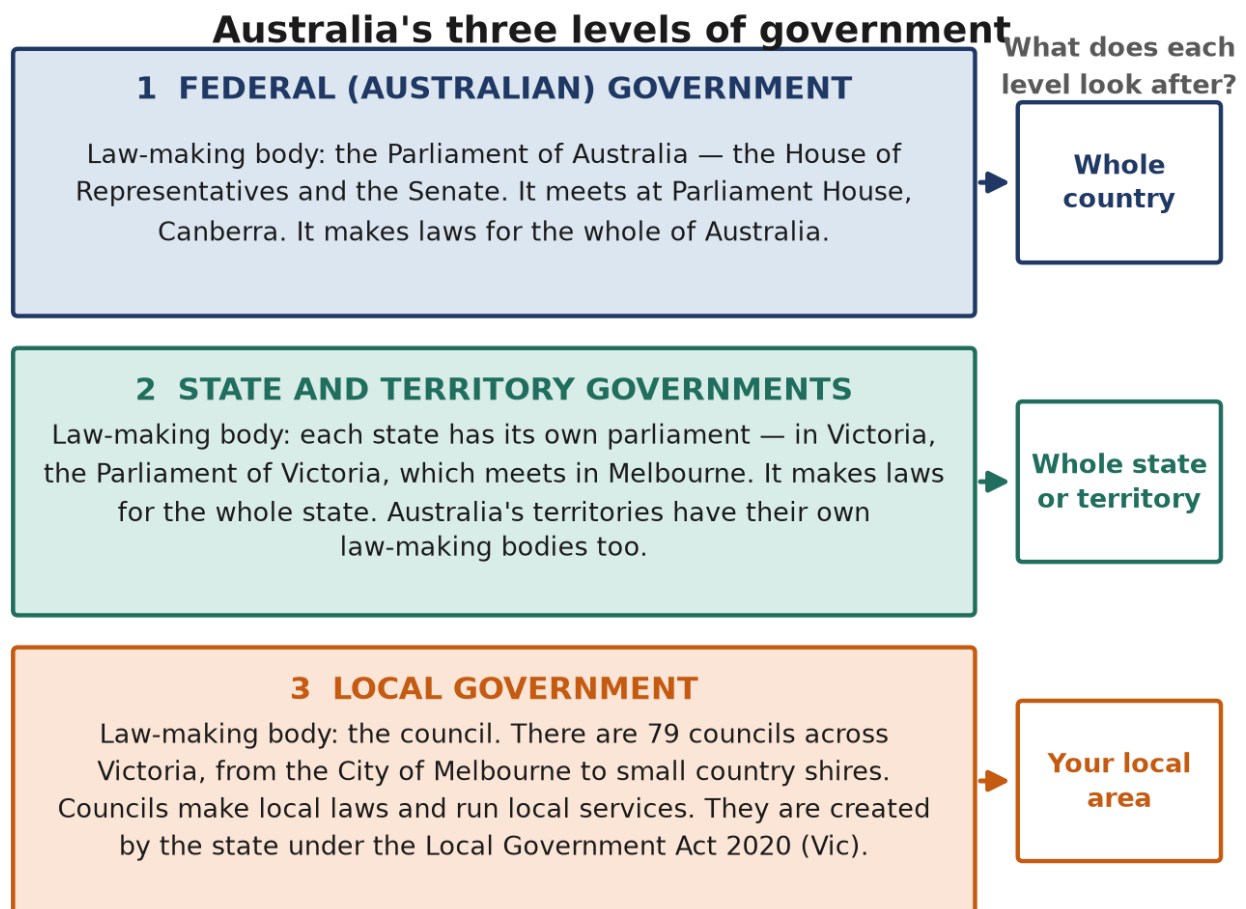
Content description: VC2HC6K03

Elaborations: VC2HC6K03.E01, VC2HC6K03.E02, VC2HC6K03.E03, VC2HC6K03.E04

Theory

Part 1 — Three levels of government

In Australia, the work of government is split between **three levels**. The **federal** (Australian) Government — the national level — looks after the whole country. Each state and territory has its own government; the Victorian Government looks after Victoria. And each local area has a **council** (local government), such as the City of Melbourne or the City of Ballarat, which looks after its own district.



Each level has its own jobs, its own laws and its own money to raise.

Australia's three levels of government: the federal level for the whole country, the state and territory level for the whole state, and the local level for your local area.

Each level has its own law-making body:

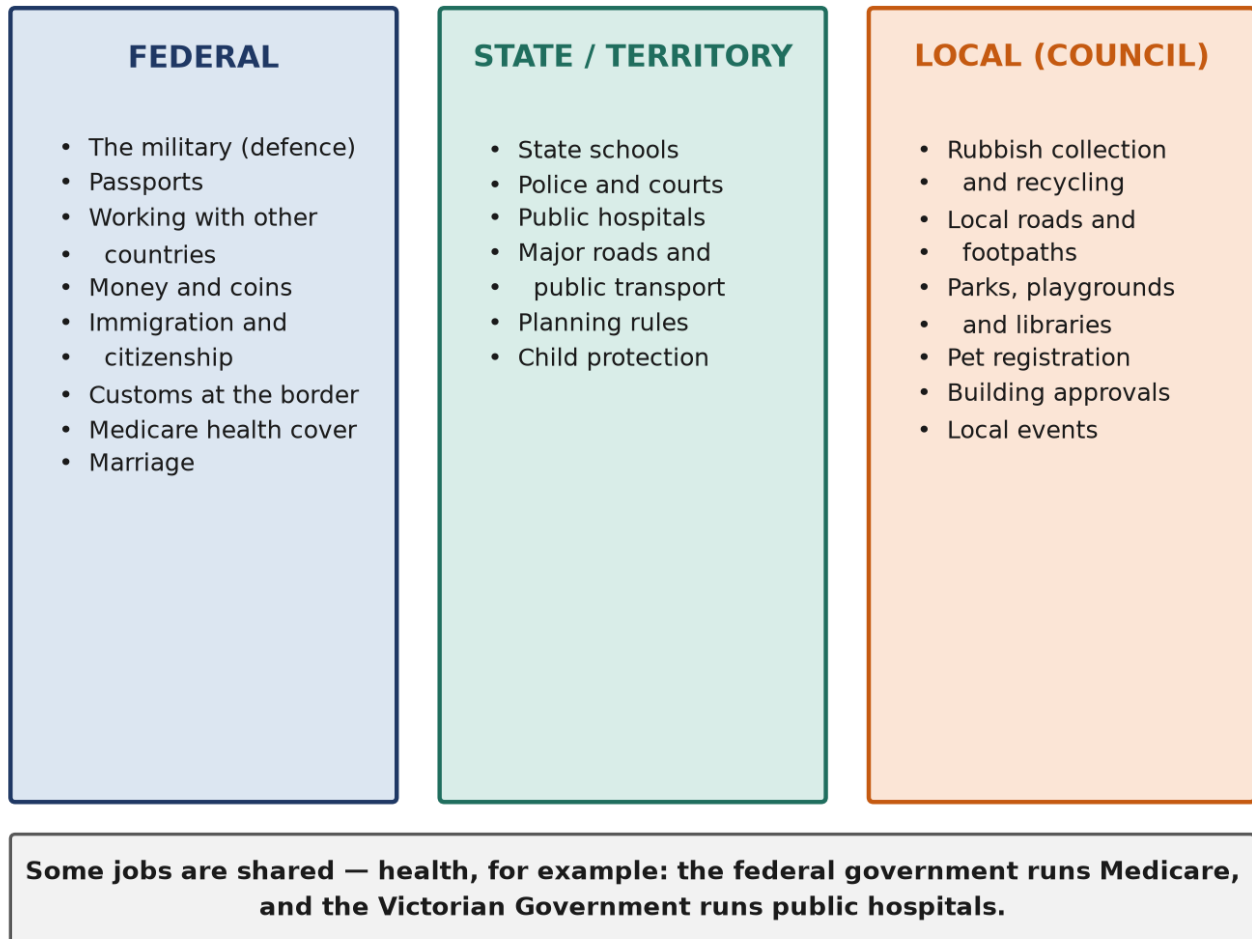
- **Federal:** the **parliament** of Australia — the House of Representatives and the Senate — which meets at Parliament House in Canberra. A parliament is the group of people chosen to make the laws for a country, state or territory.
- **State/territory:** each state's own parliament. The Parliament of Victoria meets in Melbourne and makes laws for the whole state.
- **Local:** the council. There are 79 councils across Victoria, and they make local laws and run local services. Councils are created by the state under the *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic).

Key idea. Each level has its own jobs, its own laws and its own money to raise.

Part 2 — Sorting the responsibilities

A **responsibility** of government is a job it must look after. The figure sorts typical jobs by level.

Who is responsible? Sorting the jobs of government



Typical jobs of government sorted into federal, state and territory, and local columns, with shared jobs like health shown below.

Some jobs are **shared**. In health, for example, the federal government runs Medicare, and the Victorian Government runs public hospitals. So when you sort a job, always ask: *which level is responsible for this?*

Part 3 — Sharing law-making power, and the rule for conflicts

The **Constitution** — the set of rules Australia was built on in 1901 — divides law-making power between the federal Parliament and the state parliaments. **Section 51** of the Constitution lists the areas the federal Parliament can make laws about, such as marriage, immigration, money, trade between the states, postal services and tax. In most of these areas the state parliaments can make laws too, so they are **shared areas**. The areas that are not listed in the Constitution — schools, police, courts, hospitals, roads and public transport — are **left with the states**.

The Constitution's division of powers

SHARED AREAS

listed in section 51 of the Constitution

The federal Parliament AND the state parliaments can both make laws in these areas.

- marriage
- immigration
- money
- trade between the states
- postal services
- tax

AREAS LEFT WITH THE STATES

not listed in the Constitution

All the remaining areas belong to the state parliaments.

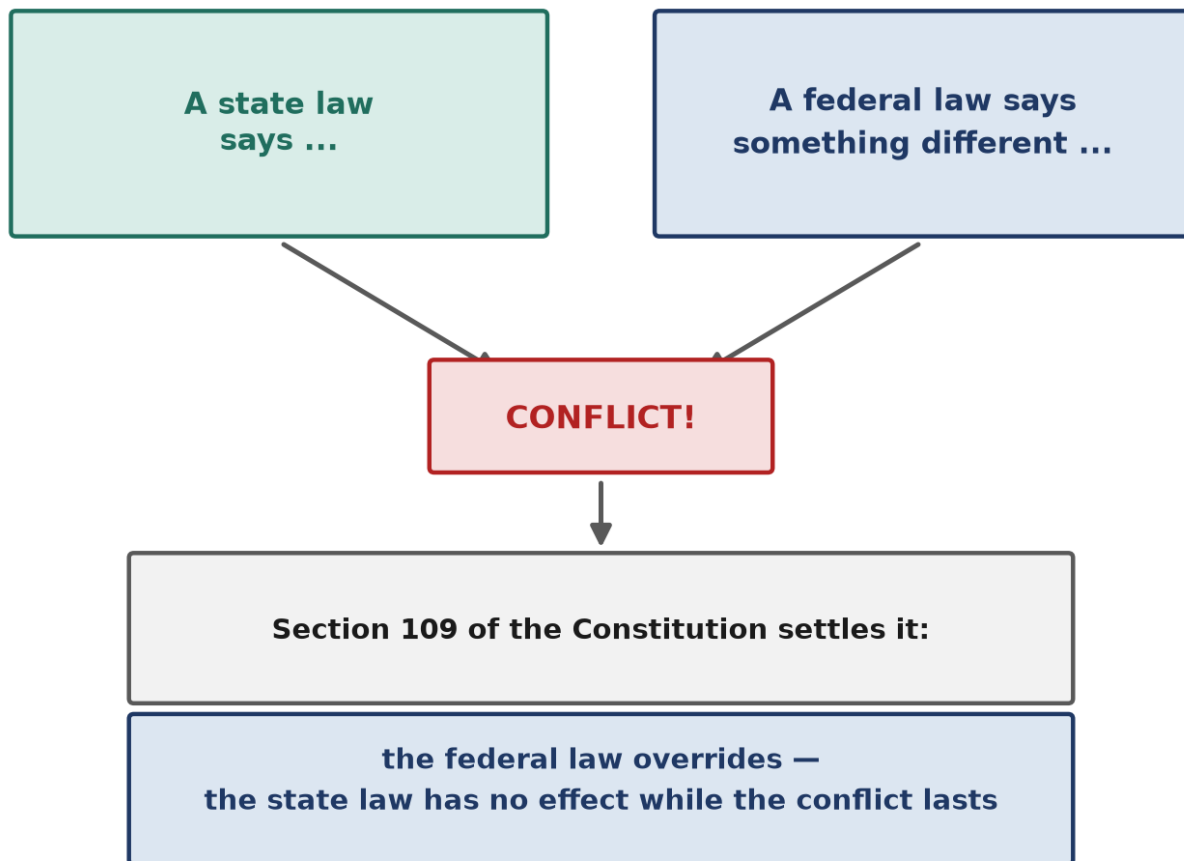
- schools
- police
- courts
- hospitals
- roads
- public transport

SECTION 109 RULE — if a state law and a federal law conflict in a shared area, the federal law overrides and the state law has no effect.

The Constitution's division of powers: shared areas listed in section 51, areas left with the states, and the section 109 rule for conflicts.

In a shared area, both levels can make laws, and the two laws can clash. **Section 109** of the Constitution gives the rule for that: if a state law and a federal law **conflict** (say different things about the same thing), the federal law **overrides** — the state law has no effect for as long as the conflict lasts.

What happens when a state law and a federal law conflict?



The conflict rule: when a state law and a federal law conflict, section 109 of the Constitution means the federal law overrides.

Key idea. Federal and state parliaments share power in the areas listed in section 51; in a conflict, the federal law wins because of section 109.

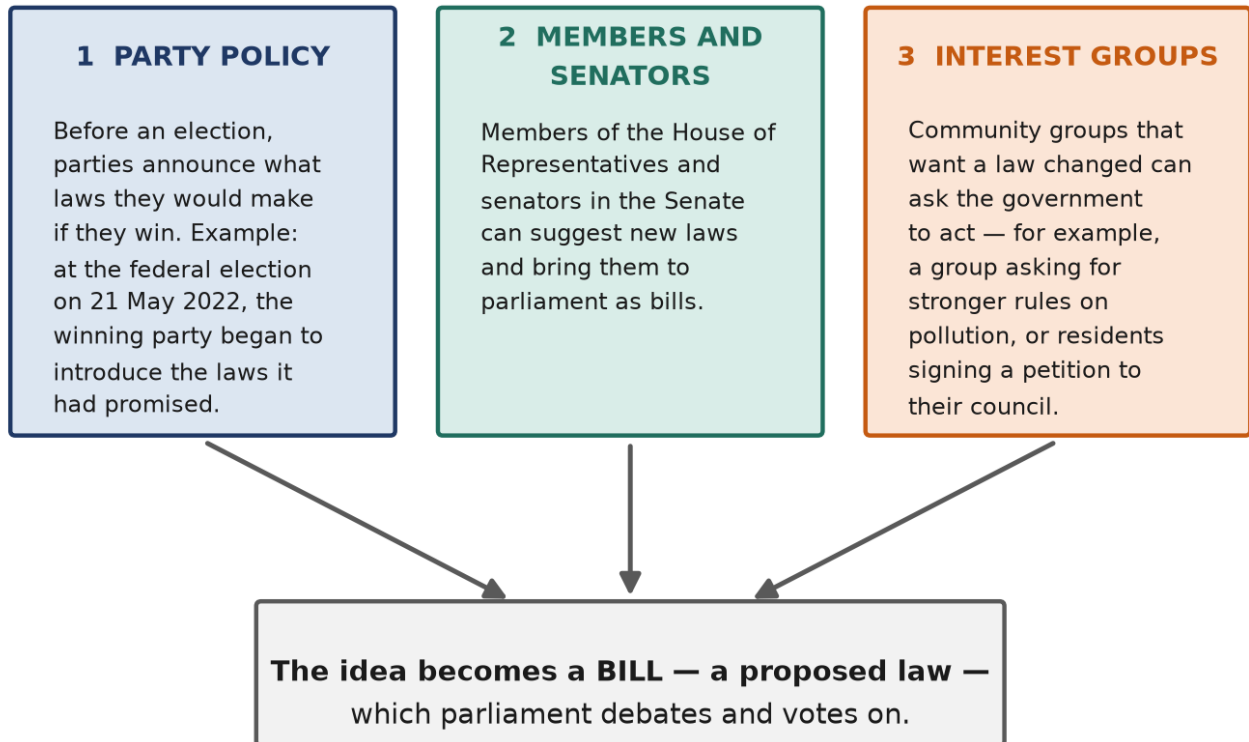
Part 4 — Where do new laws come from?

New laws begin as ideas, and the ideas usually come from one of three places:

1. **Party policy.** Before an election, parties announce the laws they would make if they win. For example, after the federal election on 21 May 2022, the winning party began to introduce the laws it had promised.
2. **Members and senators.** A member of the House of Representatives or a senator in the Senate can suggest a new law and bring it to parliament.
3. **Interest groups.** An **interest group** is a group of people who work together to try to influence the government — for example, a group asking for stronger rules on pollution, or residents signing a **petition** (a written request that people sign) to their council.

When an idea reaches parliament it is called a **bill** — a proposed law — which parliament debates and votes on. (Section 2C of this book shows how a bill becomes a law in parliament.)

Where do new laws come from?



Section 2C of this book shows how a bill becomes a law in parliament.

An interest group is a group of people who work together to try to influence the government.

Where new laws come from: party policy, members and senators, and interest groups; each idea becomes a bill for parliament to debate and vote on.

Part 5 — Laws in your community: who makes them, who enforces them?

To **enforce** a law means to make sure it is obeyed. The laws you meet every day come from different levels — and sometimes the level that makes a law is not the level that enforces it.

Laws in your community: who makes them, who enforces them?

The law	What it is about	Who makes it	Who enforces it
Parking local laws (for example, in the City of Melbourne)	Where and when cars can park in the local area	The council	Council parking officers
Food Act 1984 (Vic)	Keeping food safe in shops, restaurants and markets	Parliament of Victoria	Council officers inspect food businesses
Environment Protection Act 2017 (Vic)	Preventing pollution and harm to the environment and human health	Parliament of Victoria	EPA Victoria
Australian Citizenship Act 2007	Who can become an Australian citizen	Parliament of Australia	The Australian Government

Notice: one level can make a law and a different level can enforce it — council officers enforce the state's food law.

Four laws in your community sorted by who makes them and who enforces them: parking local laws, the Food Act 1984 (Vic), the Environment Protection Act 2017 (Vic) and the Australian Citizenship Act 2007.

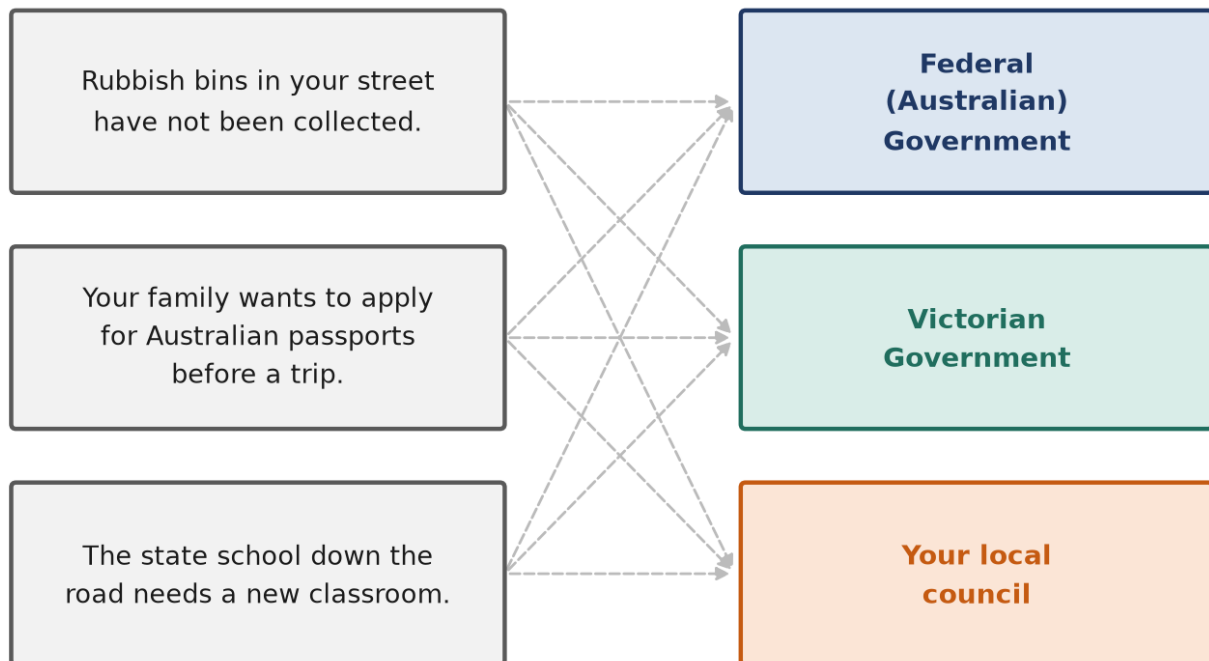
Notice the second row of the figure: the *Food Act 1984 (Vic)* is made by the Parliament of Victoria, but council officers enforce it by inspecting food businesses. Sorting a law means asking two questions: *who makes it?* and *who enforces it?*

Worked examples

Example 1 — with help

Three jobs need doing. Which level of government is responsible for each one?

Worked example 1 — Which level does this job?



Match each job to the level of government responsible — then check the worked steps.

Worked example 1: three jobs to match to the level of government responsible - rubbish bins, passports and a new classroom.

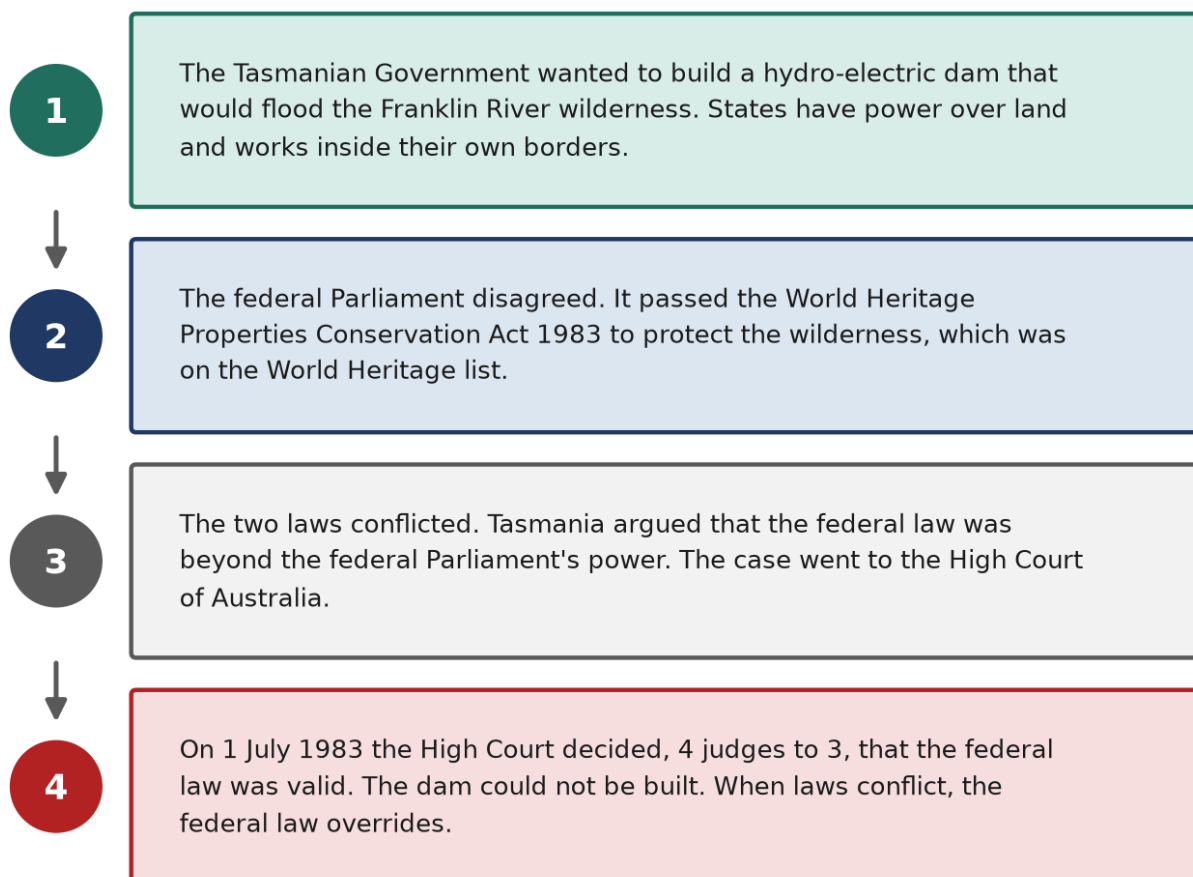
Job	Level	Reason
Rubbish bins in your street have not been collected.	Your local council	Rubbish collection is a council job (Part 2 figure).
Your family wants to apply for Australian passports before a trip.	Federal (Australian) Government	Passports are a federal responsibility.
The state school down the road needs a new classroom.	Victorian Government	State schools are a state responsibility.

Check. The three jobs land on three different levels — local, federal, state — which is exactly how the three levels share the work.

Example 2 — with help

A real conflict between a state and the federal level: the Tasmanian dam, 1983.

Worked example 2 — A real conflict: the Tasmanian dam, 1983



Worked example 2: the four steps of the 1983 Tasmanian dam case, ending with the High Court's 4-to-3 decision on 1 July 1983.

Step	What happened	What it shows
1	The Tasmanian Government wanted to build a hydro-electric dam that would flood the Franklin River wilderness.	States have power over land and works inside their own borders.
2	The federal Parliament disagreed. It passed the <i>World Heritage Properties Conservation Act 1983</i> to protect the area, which was on the World Heritage list.	The federal Parliament can make laws too, in its own areas.
3	The two laws conflicted. Tasmania argued that the federal law was beyond the federal Parliament's power. The case went to the High Court of Australia.	When the levels clash, the High Court reads the Constitution and decides.
4	On 1 July 1983 the High Court decided, 4 judges to 3, that the	When laws conflict, the federal law overrides — the division of powers

Step	What happened	What it shows
	federal law was valid. The dam could not be built.	in action.

Practice questions

With help

Q1. Sort these jobs by level of government (local, state/territory, or federal): (a) rubbish collection and recycling; (b) passports; (c) public hospitals; (d) local roads and footpaths; (e) immigration and citizenship; (f) state schools.

Q2. True or false? Fix each false statement. (a) Councils are created by the state under the *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic). (b) The Parliament of Australia meets in Melbourne. (c) There are 79 councils across Victoria. (d) The federal government runs public hospitals in Victoria.

Q3. Fill in each blank with one of these words: *shared, overrides, Constitution, conflict*. (a) The _____ is the set of rules Australia was built on in 1901. (b) Marriage and tax are _____ areas: both levels can make laws there. (c) If a state law and a federal law _____, the federal law _____.

Q4. Match each story to where the new law idea comes from: *party policy, a member or senator, or an interest group*. (a) Before an election, a party promises a new road-safety law and announces it during the campaign. (b) A group of residents signs a petition asking for stronger rules on pollution. (c) A senator suggests a new law and brings it to parliament as a bill.

Q5. Look at the Part 5 figure. For the *Food Act 1984* (Vic): (a) who makes this law? (b) who enforces it?

Q6. Name two jobs your local council is responsible for, and one job it is **not** responsible for.

On your own

Q7. The federal Parliament and the Parliament of Victoria have both made laws in a shared area, and the two laws conflict. Which law overrides, and which section of the Constitution gives this rule?

Q8. Sort these laws by the level that makes them: (a) parking local laws in the City of Melbourne; (b) the *Environment Protection Act 2017* (Vic); (c) the *Australian Citizenship Act 2007*; (d) the *Food Act 1984* (Vic).

Q9. In your own words, explain what the Tasmanian dam case of 1983 shows about the Constitution's division of powers.

Q10. A new law idea can begin outside parliament. Name the three origins from Part 4 and give one example of each.

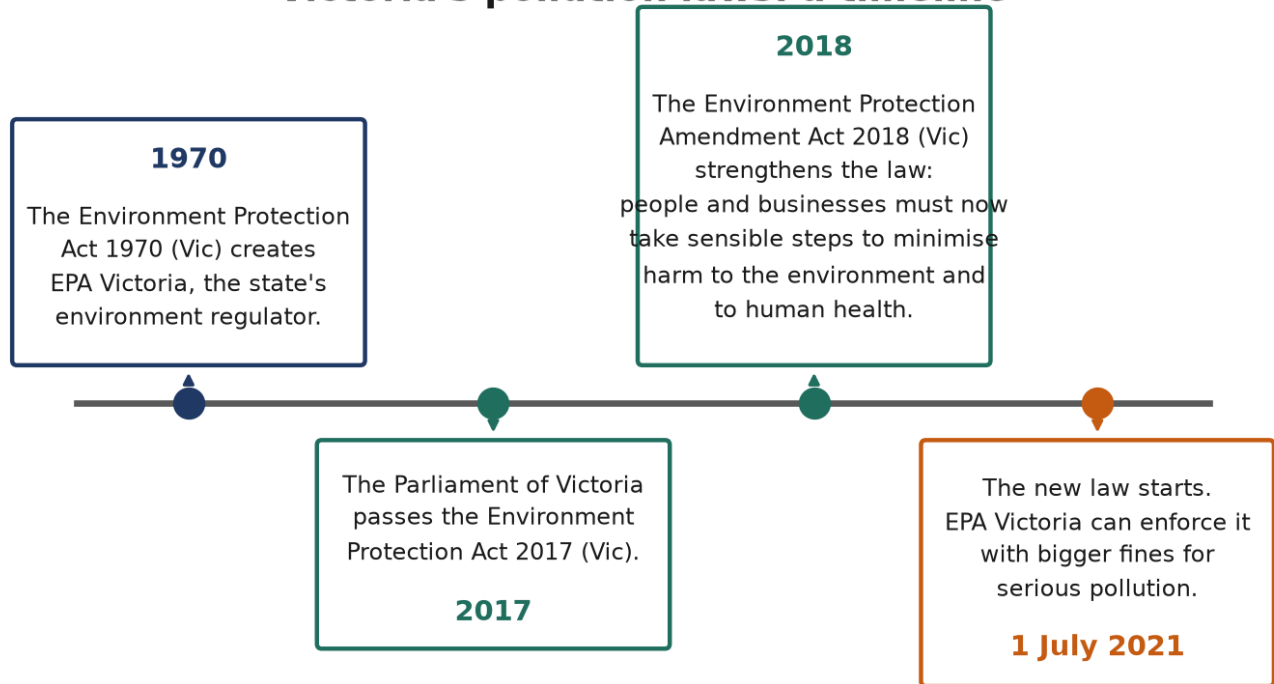
Source inquiry

Source A — Fact file: Victoria's pollution laws, 1970–2021

- **1970** — the *Environment Protection Act 1970* (Vic) creates EPA Victoria, the body that looks after Victoria's environment.
- **2017** — the Parliament of Victoria passes a new law, the *Environment Protection Act 2017* (Vic).
- **2018** — the *Environment Protection Amendment Act 2018* (Vic) strengthens the law: people and businesses must now take sensible steps to minimise harm to the environment and to human health.

- **1 July 2021** — the new law starts. EPA Victoria can enforce it, with bigger fines for serious pollution.

Victoria's pollution laws: a timeline



The state level made and enforces this law — pollution rules for Victoria are Victorian laws.

A timeline of Victoria's pollution laws: EPA Victoria created in 1970, the Environment Protection Act 2017 (Vic), the 2018 changes, and the new law starting on 1 July 2021.

- Q11.** Which level of government made the *Environment Protection Act 2017 (Vic)*, and what is the name of that level's law-making body?
- Q12.** Who enforces Victoria's pollution laws?
- Q13.** In which year was EPA Victoria created, and by which law?
- Q14.** After the 2018 changes, what must people and businesses do under the stronger law?
- Q15.** Sort these three sets of laws. For each, name the level that makes the law and who enforces it: (a) pollution laws; (b) parking laws; (c) citizenship laws.
-

Answers

Q1. (a) local. (b) federal. (c) state/territory. (d) local. (e) federal. (f) state/territory. **Q2.** (a) true. (b) false — the Parliament of Australia meets at Parliament House in Canberra. (c) true. (d) false — the Victorian Government runs public hospitals; the federal government runs Medicare. **Q3.** (a) Constitution. (b) shared. (c) conflict; overrides. **Q4.** (a) party policy. (b) an interest group. (c) a member or senator. **Q5.** (a) the Parliament of Victoria (state level). (b) council officers (local level), who inspect food businesses. **Q6.** e.g. rubbish collection, and local roads and footpaths; **not** passports (a federal job). **Q7.** The federal law; section 109. **Q8.** (a) local. (b) state. (c) federal. (d) state. **Q9.** see the worked solution. **Q10.** Party policy (for example, promises announced during the federal election campaign of 21 May 2022); a member or senator (suggesting a bill); an interest group (for example, residents signing a petition). **Q11.** The state level; the Parliament of Victoria. **Q12.** EPA Victoria. **Q13.** 1970; the *Environment Protection Act 1970* (Vic). **Q14.** Take sensible steps to minimise harm to the environment and to human health. **Q15.** (a) made by the state (Parliament of Victoria), enforced by EPA Victoria. (b) made by the council (local laws), enforced by council parking officers. (c) made by the federal Parliament (Parliament of Australia), enforced by the Australian Government.

Worked solutions

Q1. Compare each job with the Part 2 figure. (a) Rubbish collection and recycling sit under LOCAL. (b) Passports sit under FEDERAL. (c) Public hospitals sit under STATE. (d) Local roads and footpaths sit under LOCAL. (e) Immigration and citizenship sit under FEDERAL. (f) State schools sit under STATE.

Q2. (a) True — the *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic) is the state law that created today's councils. (b) False — the Parliament of Australia meets at Parliament House in Canberra; the Parliament of Victoria meets in Melbourne. (c) True — 79 councils, from the City of Melbourne to small country shires. (d) False — public hospitals are a state responsibility; the federal side of health is Medicare.

Q3. (a) Constitution. (b) shared. (c) conflict ... overrides. Section 109 gives this rule.

Q4. (a) A party announcing the laws it would make if it wins is party policy. (b) Residents signing a petition to change a law are an interest group. (c) A senator bringing a bill to parliament is a member or senator suggesting a law.

Q5. Row 2 of the Part 5 figure: (a) the law is made by the Parliament of Victoria — the state level. (b) It is enforced by council officers — the local level — who inspect food businesses. One level makes the law and a different level enforces it.

Q6. Any two council jobs from the Part 2 figure (rubbish collection; local roads and footpaths; parks, playgrounds and libraries; pet registration; building approvals; local events). The “not” job must belong to another level — for example passports (federal) or state schools (state).

Q7. In a shared area both levels can make laws (section 51 lists the federal areas, and the states can make laws there too). When the two laws conflict, section 109 says the federal law overrides and the state law has no effect while the conflict lasts. So the **federal law** overrides, and the rule comes from **section 109**.

Q8. (a) Parking local laws are made by the council — local. (b) A (Vic) law is made by the Parliament of Victoria — state. (c) An Act of the Parliament of Australia — federal. (d) Another (Vic) law — state. The “(Vic)” or “of Australia” part of a law's name tells you who makes it.

Q9. The dam sat inside Tasmania — an area left with the states — yet the federal Parliament passed a law to protect the area, and the two laws conflicted. On 1 July 1983 the High Court decided, 4 judges to 3, that the federal law was valid, so the dam could not be built. The case shows both halves of the division of powers: the states run the areas not listed in the Constitution, the federal Parliament makes laws in its own areas, and when the laws conflict the federal law overrides.

Q10. 1 — Party policy: at the federal election on 21 May 2022, parties announced the laws they would make if they won. 2 — Members and senators: a member or senator can suggest a new law and bring it to parliament as a bill. 3 — Interest groups: for example, a group asking for stronger rules on pollution, or residents signing a petition to their council.

Q11. “(Vic)” means Victoria, so the state level made the law. The state’s law-making body is the Parliament of Victoria.

Q12. EPA Victoria enforces Victoria’s pollution laws — from 1 July 2021 with bigger fines for serious pollution.

Q13. 1970, by the *Environment Protection Act 1970* (Vic).

Q14. They must take sensible steps to minimise harm to the environment and to human health (the change made by the *Environment Protection Amendment Act 2018* (Vic)).

Q15. (a) Pollution laws: made by the state (Parliament of Victoria); enforced by EPA Victoria. (b) Parking laws: made by the local council as local laws; enforced by council parking officers. (c) Citizenship laws: made by the federal Parliament of Australia; enforced by the Australian Government. Three laws, three patterns — in all three the maker and the enforcer sit at the same level, while the *Food Act* row in the Part 5 figure showed the opposite pattern.