

Mathematics Level 7

Chapter 4 — Skills: investigating and evaluating civics and citizenship issues

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Asking better questions about current issues

Curriculum placement (audit trail). Victorian Curriculum 2.0 Civics and Citizenship, Levels 7 and 8 band · Skills strand · Investigating contemporary civics and citizenship issues · **VC2HC8S01**. This section draws on elaborations .E01 and .E02. No §2A exclusions apply to this content description; both elaborations are drawn on.

Teaching sequence (for teachers). 1 — Introduce the two skills of this section (developing questions, refining questions) using any current issue the class already knows. 2 — Study the three question types and the funnel model; students turn a broad topic of their own into a first question. 3 — Work through Case study A (the social media minimum age) as a whole class: the timeline, the who-decides map, and the two sides of the values debate. 4 — Students run the checklist and study the worked refining model. 5 — Case studies B–D: the 2025 federal election, the citizenship test, and the voting-age question — students develop and refine questions on each (Worked examples 1–4). 6 — Scaffolded tasks 1–12. 7 — Tasks 13–24, where students apply the same moves to the current cases carried in the knowledge chapters (sections 1A–1D, 2A–2D, 3A–3D). 8 — Extended responses with the marking guide. This section is designed to be exercised on the knowledge chapters’ cases, not taught as a separate content stream. It hands directly to section 4B, where students locate and compare sources to answer the questions they build here.

Theory

What does it mean to develop and refine a question? Every investigation starts with curiosity — something about public life that makes you ask *why?* or *who decided?* To **develop** questions is to turn that curiosity into clear questions you could actually answer with evidence. To **refine** questions is to improve them: make them sharper, fairer and more focused, so the investigation has a real target. Good investigators do this in a loop, not once: they ask, look at what they find, and ask again.

The words of this section. The curriculum uses some words without defining them, so this section gives each one a working frame. Every task here is answerable on these frames alone; other definitions exist and are not interchangeable.

- **Contemporary issue** — the Victorian Curriculum uses this term but does not define it. In this section it means: an issue being argued about in public in Australia now, on which at least two groups hold different views, and on which a decision can be made by a government, an organisation or citizens.
- **Investigate** — to look into something carefully, in a fair way, using evidence from sources rather than guessing or repeating what one person said.
- **Values** — the curriculum speaks of “the values of contemporary Australia” but does not define the word. In this section, *values* are the things a person or group believes are important and worth protecting — for example, safety, freedom, fairness, respect, and giving everyone a fair go. Different people rank the same values in different orders, and much public debate is really a disagreement about which value should carry more weight when two of them pull in different directions.
- **Institution** — an organisation with a standing role in how Australia is governed — for example, the Commonwealth Parliament, the High Court of Australia, the eSafety Commissioner. **Political actors** are the people and groups who try to influence, make, carry out or change public decisions: parliaments, ministers, courts, regulators, parties, interest groups, businesses, news outlets and citizens. Both terms carry the same sense in section 4B.

Three kinds of questions. Strong civics questions usually come in three types. Most investigations begin with factual questions, then move to explanatory ones, and finish with evaluative questions that judge something using evidence.

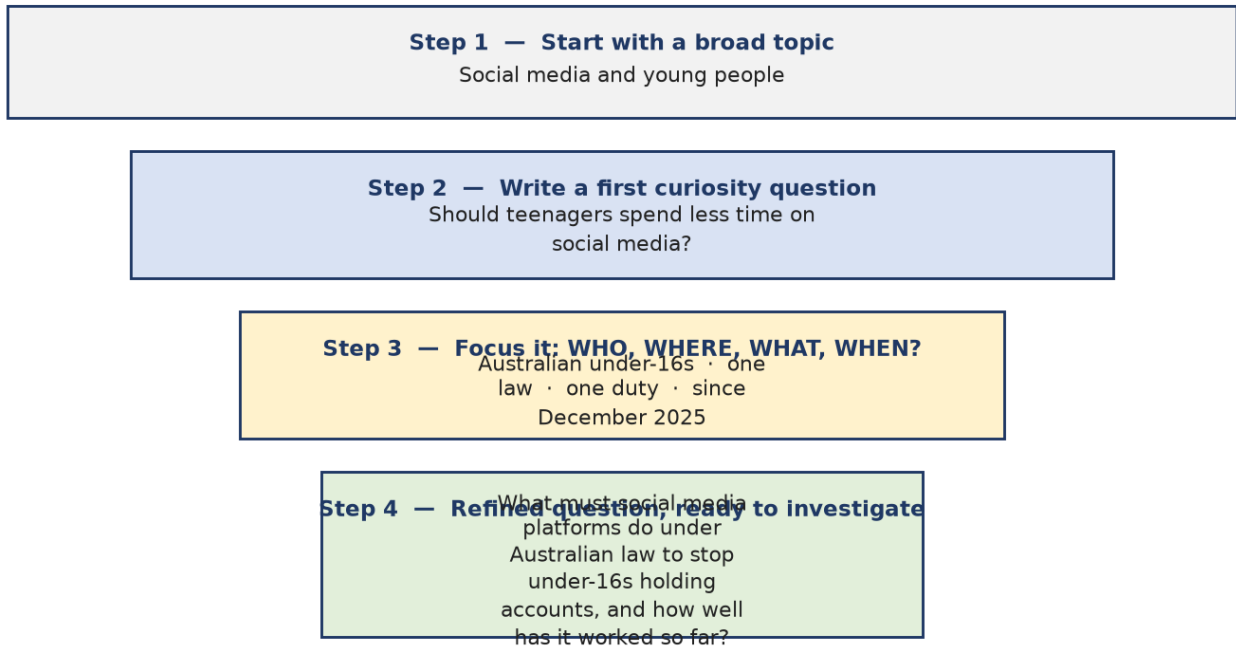
Three kinds of questions for a civics investigation

Type of question	What it asks	Civics example
Factual	Find out WHAT is happening.	Which social media platforms must block accounts of under-16s in Australia?
Explanatory	Find out HOW or WHY it happens.	How did the federal Parliament make the social media age law in 2024?
Evaluative	Judge something USING evidence.	Has the age limit made social media safer for young Australians? What is your evidence?
<i>Strong investigations often start with factual questions, then move to explanatory and evaluative ones.</i>		

A table of three question types for civics investigations — factual, explanatory and evaluative — each with what it asks and a civics example about the social media minimum age

Developing questions: from a big topic to a question. A topic like “social media” is too big to investigate. The skill is to narrow it step by step until you have one clear question about one part of it.

From a big topic to a refined, investigable question



*Each step makes the question SMALLER and CLEARER.
You can now find evidence to answer it: news reports, Parliament records, statistics.*

A labelled funnel diagram showing the four steps of developing a question: start with a broad topic, write a first curiosity question, focus it using who, where, what and when, and reach a refined question that is ready to investigate

Refining questions: the checklist. Before a question is ready to investigate, test it against five checks. A “no” to any line is not failure — it is the signal to refine again.

Is my question ready to investigate?

☐

Clear

Could a classmate repeat your question back in their own words?

☐

Focused

Is it about one issue, one place and one group of people?

☐

Investigable

Can you find evidence for it — news reports, Parliament records, statistics, court cases?

☐

Open

Does the wording avoid presuming the answer (no "why is X terrible" style)?

☐

Worthwhile

Will answering it help you understand power, laws or values in Australia?

If you answer NO to any line, refine the question again — that is the skill of this section.

A checklist of five tests for an investigation question: is it clear, is it focused, is it investigable, is it open, and is it worthwhile

Watch the wording: questions can smuggle in claims. A question can hide an opinion inside itself. “*Why is the new law terrible?*” assumes the law is terrible before any evidence is looked at. “*When did the government finally fix the problem?*” assumes there was a problem and that the government fixed it. Before you answer any question — including your own — list what the question already assumes. Then reword it so the evidence, not the wording, decides. This check applies to questions you *agree with* as well as questions you oppose.

Two directions for strong questions. This section’s two elaborations point to the two most powerful directions a civics question can take:

- **Questions about power (.E01).** Who decides? Who checks them? Who can change it? These questions investigate the current power of institutions and political actors in decision-making in Australia.
- **Questions about values (.E02).** What do Australians think is important — and what should carry more weight when two valued things pull apart? These questions refine what we ask about the values of contemporary Australia.

Both directions need the **steelman rule**: before you judge any position, put it in the strongest form its own supporters would accept as their own view. If you can only beat a weak version of the other side, you have not beaten it at all. The marking guide at the end of this section awards marks for the quality of your reasoning — defined terms, checked assumptions, both sides stated at their strongest — never for the conclusion you reach. Two students who reach opposite conclusions can both earn full marks.

Case study A — Australia's social media minimum age (power and values)

What happened. Through 2024, Australians argued in public about whether young teenagers should be kept off some social media. The Australian Government announced a plan for a minimum age of 16 on certain platforms. A bill was brought to the Commonwealth Parliament, approved by the House of Representatives on 27 November 2024, approved with changes by the Senate on 28 November 2024, and given formal approval (royal assent) on 10 December 2024, becoming the *Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024*. During 2025 the eSafety Commissioner — the regulator responsible for online safety — worked out the details. The age limit took effect on 10 December 2025. As at 21 November 2025, ten platforms were covered, including Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok, X and YouTube. Covered platforms must take *reasonable steps* to stop under-16s from holding accounts; parental permission does not override the rule. Platforms that fail badly, or keep failing, can face fines of up to about \$49.5 million; parents and young people are not fined. In March 2026 the Government announced it would examine five platforms' age-testing, and in June 2026 it said it was considering raising the top fine to \$99 million. A group called the Digital Freedom Project challenged the law, and the High Court of Australia agreed in December 2025 to hear the case.

Source: Parliament of Australia, *Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Bill 2024* bill homepage, aph.gov.au; Office of the eSafety Commissioner, esafety.gov.au; news reports — summary checked 26 August 2026.

Timeline: Australia's social media minimum-age law

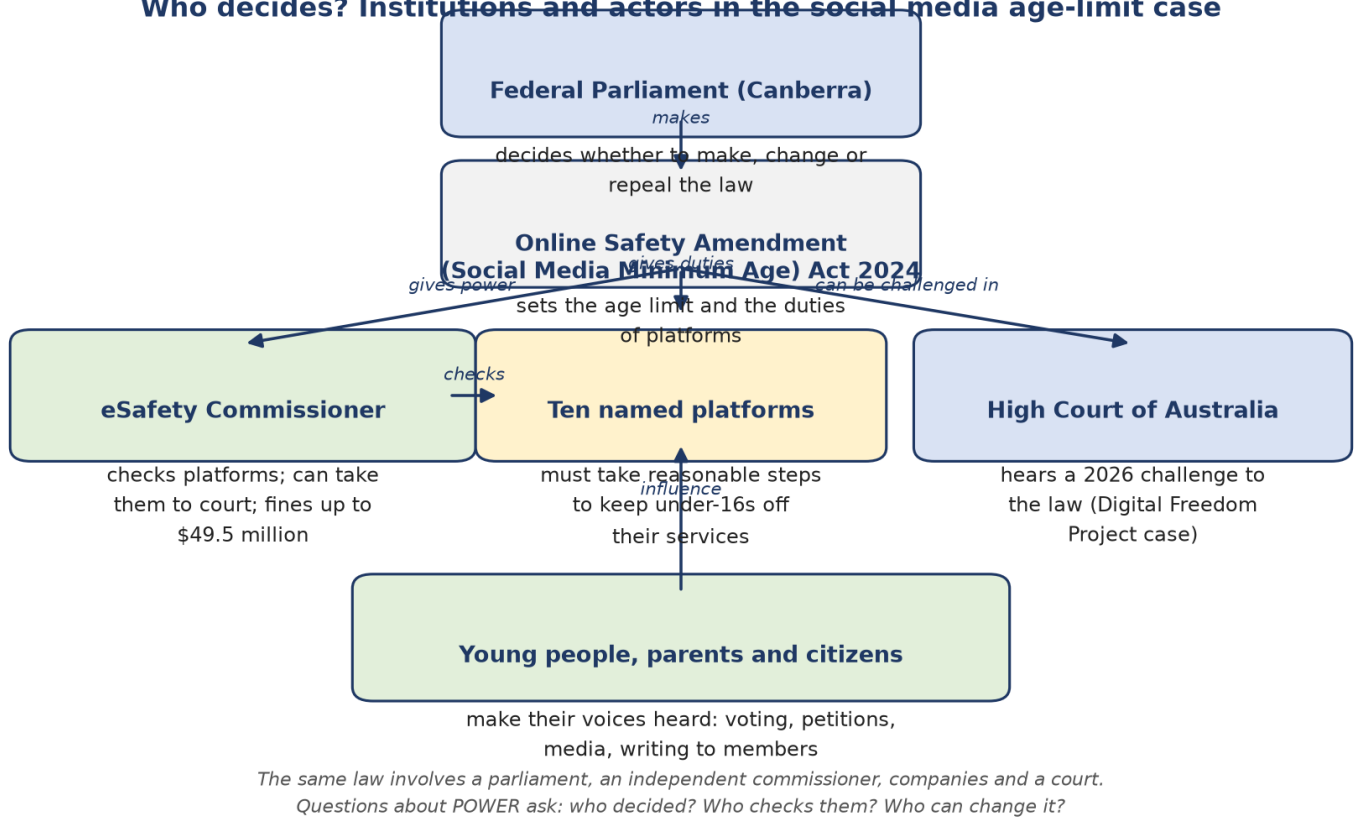


Sources: Parliament of Australia bill records; Office of the eSafety Commissioner; news reports (summary viewed 26 August 2026).

A timeline of Australia's social media minimum age law from November 2024 to June 2026, showing the bill's introduction, approval by both houses, formal approval, the rule-making year, the start date of 10 December 2025, and later government reviews

Who was involved — and what power did each have? The same law involves a parliament, an independent regulator, big companies and a court. That makes it a rich case for .E01 questions about power: *who decided, who checks, who can change it?*

Who decides? Institutions and actors in the social media age-limit case



A labelled diagram mapping the institutions and political actors in the social media minimum age case: the Commonwealth Parliament, the Act itself, the eSafety Commissioner, the ten named platforms, the High Court of Australia, and citizens and young people, with arrows showing who makes, checks, follows and challenges

The values tug. The debate also divides along values (.E02). Both sides give real reasons that real people hold — so both are stated here at their strongest, before any judging.

Two sides of a values debate: the social media age limit

Side 1 — keeping young people safe

- Young minds are still growing, and apps are designed to hold attention.
- The law puts the duty on big companies, not on families.
- Most members of both houses voted for the law.
- Parents get a legal backstop when platforms fail.

Side 2 — staying free and connected

- Teens use social media to stay in touch with friends, to learn and to find community.
- Some teens report feeling cut off since the ban began.
- Age checks raise privacy questions about everyone's data.
- A law may not work as planned if users find ways around it.

Both sides give real reasons that real people hold. A strong investigation studies each side at its STRONGEST before judging.

Values question to investigate: Which should carry more weight in this law — protecting young people, or their freedom and connection? What evidence decides it?

A two-column diagram stating the strongest case on each side of the social media minimum age debate — keeping young people safe, and staying free and connected — and a values question worth investigating about which should carry more weight

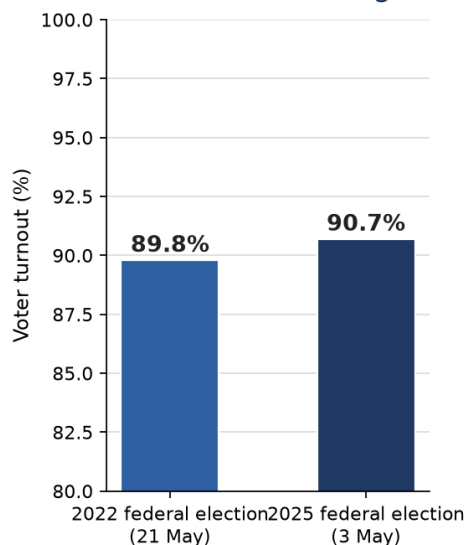
Which CD concept this case shows. How institutions and political actors use power in one decision (.E01), and how a values disagreement can be turned into a fair, investigable question (.E02).

Case study B — the 2025 federal election (power through voting)

What happened. On Saturday 3 May 2025, Australians voted at a federal election. Voting in Australia is compulsory: every enrolled citizen aged 18 or over is expected to vote. About 18 million people were enrolled, and 90.7% of enrolled voters turned out — slightly higher than the 89.8% turnout at the 2022 election. The Australian Labor Party, led by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, won enough seats in the House of Representatives to form government. As at 30 June 2026, 18,367,806 Australians were enrolled — 97.8% of the estimated number of Australians eligible to enrol. Sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds may enrol early, but they cannot vote until they turn 18.

Source: Australian Electoral Commission, *2025 federal election participation rates and Enrolment statistics*, aec.gov.au, checked 26 August 2026.

Turnout at recent federal elections — voting is compulsory in Australia



Source: Australian Electoral Commission, 2025 federal election participation rates (viewed 26 August 2026). 18,367,806 Australians were enrolled to vote on 30 June 2026.

A bar chart comparing voter turnout at the 2022 and 2025 Australian federal elections, 89.8 per cent and 90.7 per cent, noting that voting is compulsory

Which CD concept this case shows. Elections are where citizens' power meets institutions' power — fertile ground for .E01 questions: *What power does one vote really have? Who forms government, and by what rules? Why does Australia make voting compulsory — and does compulsory voting change who wins?*

Case study C — the Australian citizenship test (values made official)

What happened. People who choose to become Australian citizens must pass the Australian citizenship test, introduced on 1 October 2007. Since October 2009 the test has had 20 multiple-choice questions, answered in English in 45 minutes. To pass, an applicant needs at least 75% overall — 15 of the 20 — **and** must answer all five questions on Australian values correctly. When the test was new, more than 20% of early test-takers failed it.

Source: Department of Home Affairs information on the citizenship test, as summarised in public records, checked 26 August 2026.

Which CD concept this case shows. The test is one place where Australia *writes down* the values it expects new citizens to know. That makes it a sharp case for .E02 questions: *Which values does the test choose, and why those? Who decided? Should passing a values test be a condition of citizenship — and does the same test apply to people born here?* Notice the last two questions: each one could be refined further before anyone investigates it.

Case study D — “Should the voting age be lowered to 16?” (a values question with a history)

What happened. Australia's voting age has moved before: it fell from 21 to 18 in 1974. The question of lowering it again has never gone away. On 21 October 2019, Adam Bandt, a Greens member of the House of Representatives, moved to lower the voting age to 16. Supporters say sixteen-year-olds work, pay tax and live with the results of laws; if they can be expected to follow laws, they should help choose the people who make them. Opponents say voting is a duty best taken on at full legal adulthood, that sixteen-year-olds are still developing their own views, and that compulsory voting would force some of them to vote before they are ready. No change has been made: the voting age remains 18.

Source: Parliament of Australia records of the House of Representatives, and public summaries of Australia's voting-age history, checked 26 August 2026.

Which CD concept this case shows. A long-running values question (.E02) that also touches power (.E01): who gains, and who loses, if the rule changes? The case is also a model of a question that must be refined — “Should the

voting age be lowered?” is broad; a refined version names the place (Australia), the level (federal), the test (what would count as good evidence) and stays open to either answer.

Worked examples

Example 1 — scaffolded (developing a power question from Case A)

Develop a question about the power of institutions in the social media minimum age case.

Step	What you do	Working
1	Name the broad topic.	Social media rules in Australia.
2	Write a first curiosity question.	Who gets to decide what happens on social media?
3	Focus it: WHO, WHERE, WHAT?	Who — the eSafety Commissioner. Where — Australia. What — its power over platforms under the age-limit law.
4	Check it against the checklist.	Clear ✓ · Focused ✓ · Investigable ✓ (the law and the Commissioner’s own pages record the powers) · Open ✓ · Worthwhile ✓
5	Write the refined question.	What powers does the eSafety Commissioner have to make social media platforms follow Australia’s under-16 age limit — and who checks the Commissioner?

Step 5 does something important: it asks two linked power questions — what power an institution holds, and who checks that power. That is the shape of a strong *E01* question.

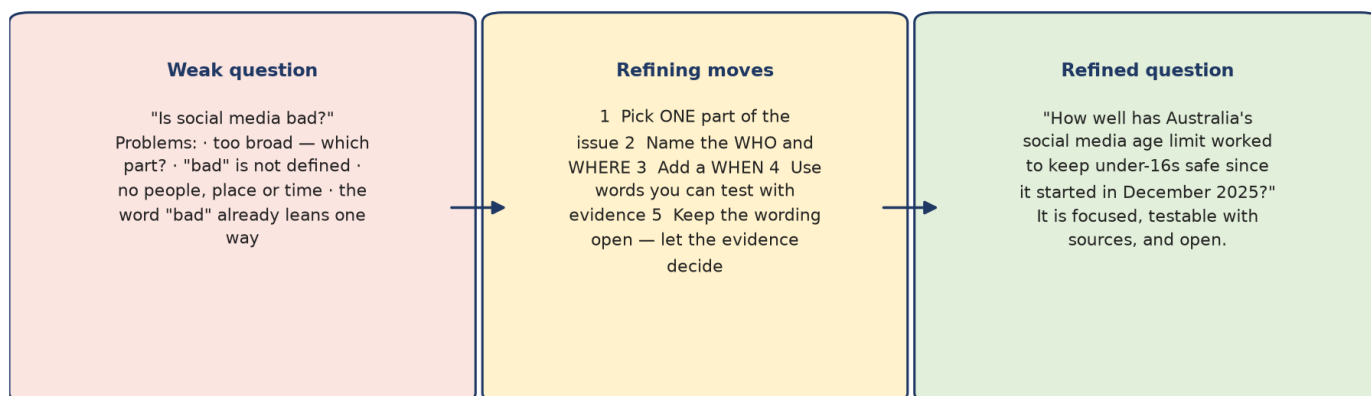
Example 2 — scaffolded (refining a values question from Case C)

Refine the question “*Why is the citizenship test unfair?*”

Step	What you do	Working
1	List what the question already assumes.	It assumes the test <i>is</i> unfair. An investigation cannot start by presuming its own answer.
2	Reword to remove the hidden claim.	“Is the citizenship test fair?”
3	Focus it: WHICH part, WHERE, for WHOM?	Which part — the five Australian values questions that must all be answered correctly. Where — Australia. For whom — applicants for citizenship.
4	Add a test you can actually look up.	Compare what the test asks with what Australians who were born here are ever asked.
5	Write the refined question.	Is it fair that applicants for Australian citizenship must answer all five values questions correctly, when Australians born here are never tested on the same values? What evidence would help decide?

The refined question still allows two answers. That openness is the point: the evidence decides, not the wording.

Model: refining a question



A refined question can be answered with evidence from a range of sources — news, Parliament records, government statistics, court cases.

A model of refining a question in three panels: a weak question with its problems, the five refining moves, and the refined question that results

Example 3 — unscaffolded (developing a power question from Case B)

Develop and refine one .E01 question from the 2025 federal election.

Starting curiosity: *Does my vote matter if everyone has to vote anyway?* Focus on the turnout statistic (90.7%) and the rules that produced it. One refined form: *"Does compulsory voting change which parties win Australian federal elections — what does the 2025 result show?"* The question names the rule (compulsory voting), the place (Australia), the event (the 2025 election) and a way to check (the election result). It stays open: the evidence might show an effect, or it might not.

Example 4 — unscaffolded (refining a values question from Case D)

Refine *"Should sixteen-year-olds vote?"*

One refined form: *"Should the voting age for Australian federal elections be lowered to 16? The strongest case for, the strongest case against, and the evidence each side points to."* Notice the built-in steelman: the question itself demands both sides at their strongest. A weaker refinement would keep a lean (*"Should responsible sixteen-year-olds be allowed to vote?"*) — the word *responsible* smuggles in one side's case.

Practice tasks

Scaffolded tasks

Task 1 — Question types. Copy the three-row table from the question-types figure. Write one new example question of each type (factual, explanatory, evaluative) about the 2025 federal election (Case study B).

Task 2 — Developing. Pick one broad topic from this list: *school rules · road safety · sport in Australia · young people and work*. Run the four steps of the funnel: write the topic, a first curiosity question, your WHO–WHERE–WHAT–WHEN focus, and your refined question.

Task 3 — Checklist. Take your refined question from Task 2 and test it against the five checklist lines. For any "no", rewrite the question once and test it again.

Task 4 — Spotting smuggled claims. For each question, list what it already assumes, then reword it in a fair way: (a) “Why do politicians break their promises?” (b) “When will the Government stop wasting money on committees?” (c) “How did the eSafety Commissioner finally get social media under control?”

Task 5 — Power questions (E01). Case study A lists four institutions: the Commonwealth Parliament, the eSafety Commissioner, the High Court of Australia, and the platforms. Write one power question for each, using the pattern: *What power does _____ have — and who checks it?*

Task 6 — Values questions (E02). Look at the values-tug figure. Write one values question about the social media age limit that does **not** lean either way. Swap with a partner: can they find any hidden lean in your wording?

Task 7 — Refining moves. Refine “Is Parliament powerful?” using the five moves from Worked example 2: list the assumptions, remove them, focus the WHO and WHERE, add a test, and write the final question. Use Case study A to choose which part of Parliament’s work to focus on.

Task 8 — Pairing with section 1A. Section 1A studies elections, parties and forming government. Using Case study B, develop one factual, one explanatory and one evaluative question about how the 2025 election decided who forms government.

Task 9 — Pairing with section 2B. Section 2B studies how citizens influence lawmaking. During 2024–25, citizens, parents, teachers and researchers all tried to influence the social media law. Develop two questions: one about a way citizens could make their views known to the Parliament, and one about whether that way worked.

Task 10 — Pairing with section 3B. Section 3B studies values and social cohesion. Using Case study C, write one question that asks what the citizenship test says about the values Australia holds, and one question that asks whether those values are shared by Australians generally.

Task 11 — Pairing with section 1D. Section 1D studies how citizens are informed and how they participate. Develop one question about where a Year 7 student could find trustworthy information about the social media law, and refine it using the checklist.

Task 12 — Steelman practice. Take the side of the values tug you agree with. Now write the other side’s case in its strongest form — the form its own supporters would accept. Finish with one sentence: what evidence would change your own mind?

Tasks

Task 13. Choose one contemporary issue carried in the knowledge chapters (your teacher will confirm which case to use — for example, an issue from section 1B’s values study, the lawmaking cases in section 2B, or a case from Chapter 3). Write three first questions about it, one of each type (factual, explanatory, evaluative).

Task 14. From your three questions in Task 13, choose the strongest. Refine it through the five-line checklist, showing each change you made and why.

Task 15 (E01). For your Task 13 issue, write two power questions: one about the institution with the formal power to decide, and one about who checks that institution. For each question, name the source type you would use first to answer it.

Task 16 (E02). For your Task 13 issue, name two values in tension. Write one values question that stays open, and show that it passes the “no hidden lean” test by swapping it with a partner.

Task 17 — Assumption hunt. Take a question a classmate wrote for Task 14. List every claim hidden inside the question’s wording. If you find one, give it back with a fairer rewording — and accept the same treatment on your own question.

Task 18 — The voting age. Case study D ends with a refined question about lowering the voting age. Write your own refined version, then state the strongest reason *for* and the strongest reason *against* your own version being the right one to investigate.

Task 19 — Compulsory voting. “Voting in Australia is compulsory.” Develop this statement into one question you could investigate using the 2025 election statistics in Case study B. State what evidence would count as an answer.

Task 20 — Who checks? Choose one of these: the eSafety Commissioner · the High Court of Australia · a state parliament. Write a refined .E01 question about who checks that body’s power, and list two sources you would check first.

Task 21 — Values made official. The citizenship test lists values that applicants must know. Write one factual question about the test, one explanatory question about why the test exists, and one evaluative question about whether the test is fair. Refine the evaluative one using Worked example 2’s steps.

Task 22 — Pairing with section 2A. Section 2A studies the rule of law and the courts. Using Case study A’s High Court challenge, develop one question about what the High Court can decide about a law made by Parliament, and one question about what happens to the law while the case is being heard.

Task 23 — Pairing with section 3D. Section 3D studies national identity and citizenship. Write one values question connecting the citizenship test (Case study C) with what it means to be Australian. Keep the wording open, and steelman both the question’s for-side and against-side in one sentence each.

Task 24 — Your own issue. Find one contemporary Australian issue in the news this week that no case study in this section uses. Record it with a full source line (author or organisation, title, address, date checked). Develop one power question (.E01) and one values question (.E02) about it, refine each through the checklist, and bring both to class.

Extended responses

Extended response 1. *“Australia’s social media age limit shows that one institution — the eSafety Commissioner — now holds too much power over young people’s lives.”* Develop TWO investigation questions from this claim — one about power (.E01), one about values (.E02). For each: show the refining steps (assumptions spotted, focus added, wording kept open), name the institution or value at the centre of the question, and list two sources you would check first, of two different types. Finish with one sentence explaining why each question is worth asking. Length: one to two pages. The marking guide below is your guide — marks are awarded for reasoning, never for the side you choose.

Extended response 2. Choose one of: (a) lowering the voting age to 16 · (b) the citizenship test’s values questions · (c) compulsory voting in Australia. Write the broad question the topic suggests, then refine it through every step of this section: the funnel, the checklist, and the assumption hunt. Present your final question with a short defence: why it is clear, focused, investigable, open and worthwhile. Then steelman both answers — the “yes” case and the “no” case — at their strongest, and name one piece of evidence that would help decide between them. Length: one to two pages.

Marking guide and answers

Extended response 1 marking guide (8 marks).

Step	Mark
Develops a power question centred on an institution named accurately	1
Develops a values question centred on values named and defined	1
Shows refining steps: assumptions spotted and removed	1
Shows refining steps: WHO/WHERE/WHAT focus added	1
Wording stays open — no hidden lean in either question	1
Lists two sources of different types for each question	1
Explains why each question is worth asking	1
Applies the steelman rule to at least one side of the debate	1

Extended response 2 marking guide (8 marks).

Step	Mark
States the broad question the topic suggests	1
Funnel steps shown: topic narrowed to one part	1
Checklist applied, with a change made for at least one “no”	1
Assumption hunt shown: at least one hidden claim found and removed	1
Final question defended as clear, focused, investigable, open and worthwhile	1
Steelman of the “yes” case at its strongest	1
Steelman of the “no” case at its strongest	1
Names evidence that would help decide between the two cases	1

Two students can reach opposite conclusions and both score full marks. Marks are awarded for defined terms, checked assumptions, fair treatment of both sides and honest limits — never for the conclusion reached.

Brief answers and models.

T1. Example: factual — “What share of enrolled voters voted at the 2025 federal election?” (90.7%). Explanatory — “Why do Australians have to vote at federal elections?” Evaluative — “Does compulsory voting make Australian elections fairer?”

T2–T3. Answers will vary. Award the mark where the funnel steps are shown and the checklist produced at least one change. A question that survives all five lines unchanged was probably already focused enough.

T4. (a) Assumes politicians make promises and break them, all of them, on purpose. Fairer: “Do politicians keep the promises they make at elections? Which promises get kept and which do not?” (b) Assumes the Government wastes money and that committees cause it. Fairer: “What do parliamentary committees cost, and what do they produce that Parliament could not get otherwise?” (c) Assumes the Commissioner has got social media “under control” and that this was late. Fairer: “What effect has the eSafety Commissioner had on how platforms apply the under-16 age limit so far?”

T5. Example: What power does the eSafety Commissioner have to force platforms to follow the age limit — and who checks the Commissioner? What power does the High Court have over a law Parliament has made — and what limits the Court’s own power?

T6. Example of an open wording: “Which should carry more weight in Australia’s social media rules — protecting under-16s from harm, or their freedom to connect and take part online?” A hidden lean to look for: words like *only*, *really*, *just*, or one side’s goal already called a right or a harm.

T7. Example: “How much power does the Commonwealth Parliament have to make laws about social media, and what could stop one of its laws from taking effect?” (The High Court case in Case study A is one answer to the second half.)

T8. Example: factual — “How many seats does a party need in the House of Representatives to form government?” Explanatory — “How did the 2025 election result decide which party formed government?” Evaluative — “Does the party that forms government always reflect what most voters wanted?”

T9. Example: “How could an ordinary citizen make their view about the social media bill known to the Parliament in 2024?” (write to a member, send a submission to the Senate committee, join a campaign). “Did public submissions change the bill before it was approved?”

T10. Example: “What do the five citizenship-test values say about what Australia thinks is important?” and “Are the citizenship test’s values shared by Australians generally — how could we check?”

T11. Example: “Where can a Year 7 student find information about the social media age limit that has been checked before it is published?” (the eSafety Commissioner’s own pages, the Parliament’s bill pages, news reports from named journalists).

T12. Answers vary. Award the mark where the opposing case is stated in a form its own supporters would accept, and the closing sentence names real evidence, not just “I’d think about it”.

T13–T24. Answers will vary by chosen issue. Award marks where the move named in the task is shown: three question types (T13); a checklist-driven refinement with reasons (T14); two .E01 questions plus source types (T15); an open values question that survives a partner check (T16); hidden claims found and reworded in both directions (T17); a refined voting-age question with reasons for and against itself (T18); an investigable compulsory-voting question with the evidence stated (T19); a who-checks question with two sources (T20); factual, explanatory and evaluative questions on the test with the last one refined (T21); two questions anchored to the High Court’s role (T22); an open values question connecting the test to identity with both sides steelmanned (T23); and a new, sourced issue with one .E01 and one .E02 question, both checklist-refined (T24).

Working with sources to analyse current issues

Curriculum placement (audit trail). Victorian Curriculum 2.0 Civics and Citizenship, Levels 7 and 8 band · Skills strand · Investigating contemporary civics and citizenship issues · **VC2HC8S02**. This section draws on elaborations .E01, .E03 and .E04. Elaboration .E02 is excluded under CONTENT_POLICY Rule 1 and recorded in TOC §2A (row 6); the content description is delivered in full through neutral contexts.

Teaching sequence (for teachers). 1 — Introduce the four moves (locate, select, explain, compare) on any current issue the class already knows. 2 — Work through Case study A (the social media minimum age) as a whole class: the timeline, the actors, the two sides of the debate. 3 — Students run the five-question checklist on the two model sources and study the worked comparison. 4 — In pairs, students work through Case study B (the Victorian plastics ban), focusing on why the response succeeded. 5 — Scaffolded tasks 1–6. 6 — Tasks 7–13, where students apply the same moves to the current cases carried in sections 1A–1D, 2B and 3B. 7 — Extended response with the marking guide. This section is designed to be exercised on the knowledge chapters' cases, not taught as a separate content stream.

Theory

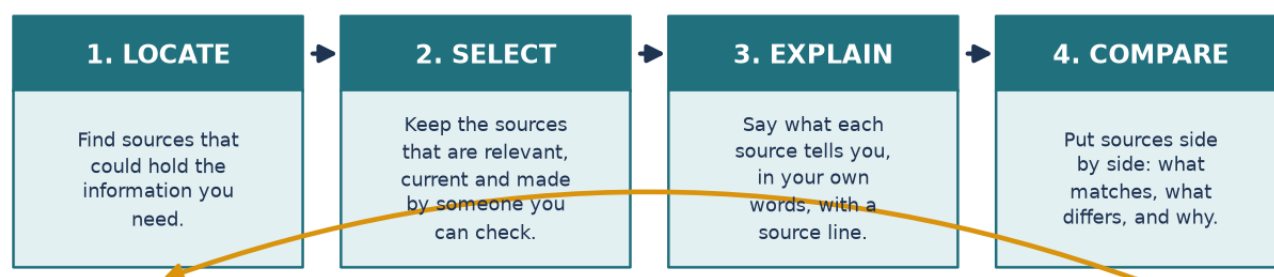
What does it mean to analyse an issue? In this book, to *analyse* an issue is to pull it into its parts — who is involved, what each wants, what each has done, and what evidence there is — and then show how the parts fit together. You are not asked to have the “right” opinion. You are asked to build a careful picture of the issue that someone who disagrees with you could still call fair.

The words of this section. The curriculum uses some words without defining them, so this section gives each one a working frame. Every task here is answerable on these frames alone; other definitions exist and are not interchangeable.

- **Contemporary issue** — the Victorian Curriculum uses this term but does not define it. In this section it means: an issue being argued about in public in Australia now, on which at least two groups hold different views, and on which a decision can be made by a government, an organisation or citizens.
- **Political actor** — also not defined by the curriculum. Here it means any person or group that tries to influence, make, carry out or change public decisions or laws. That includes parliaments, ministers, courts, regulators, parties, interest groups, charities, businesses, news outlets and individual citizens. “Political” here means *about public decisions*, not party-political.
- **Perspective** — the view of an issue held by a person or group, shaped by their values (what they think matters), their aims (what they want to happen) and their interests (what they have to gain or lose).
- **Source** — anything that carries information about the issue: a law, a media release, an inquiry report, a news report, a statistic, a submission, a post, a video.

The four moves. The content description names four skills: locating, selecting, explaining and comparing. They work in a loop, not a straight line.

The four moves of source analysis



Comparing often shows a gap — so you refine the question (4A) and locate again.

A labelled diagram showing the four moves of source analysis — locate, select, explain, compare — with a feedback arrow back to refining the question

Move 1 — Locating sources. You locate sources by going to where public decisions are recorded. Strong search terms use the *names of institutions*, not just topic words: “Parliament of Australia bill social media”, “eSafety Commissioner minimum age”, “Victorian Government single-use plastics”. Government pages tell you what a government said and did; court and regulator pages tell you what the law says; news reports tell you what happened and what people said about it; interest groups and charities tell you one side of the argument in depth; the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) gives counted data; social media gives fast, first-hand views — with the least checking.

Where sources come from: six common types

Government and parliament	Ministers, departments, parliamentary committees	Media releases, bills, inquiry reports, Hansard	States exactly what the government did or said	Presents the government's own side of the issue
Courts and regulators	Judges, commissioners, agencies set up by law	Court decisions, rules, guidance pages	Careful, formal, based on the law	Can be slow to read; written for specialists
News media	Journalists, editors, news companies	News reports, interviews, fact-checks	Quick; reports what others said and did	Short; may take an angle; check who owns the outlet
Interest groups and charities	Groups set up to push for one side of an issue	Campaigns, reports, petitions, submissions	Deep on one side; often has data	Argues for its own aim; compare with other sides
Statistics offices	The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)	Census results, surveys, counts and rates	Numbers gathered in a careful, open way	Numbers need a question; check what was counted
Social media	Anyone — users, influencers, officials	Posts, videos, comment threads	Fast; first-hand views from people affected	Unchecked claims are common; check the poster
A good analysis usually mixes types — no single type is always best.				

A table of six common source types for civics issues — government and parliament, courts and regulators, news media, interest groups and charities, statistics offices, and social media — with who makes each type, examples, strengths and cautions

Move 2 — Selecting sources. You will always find more sources than you can use. Before a source goes into your analysis, put it through five questions.

The five-question checklist before you use a source



Is it about my question?

If it only touches the topic, keep searching.



Is it current enough?

For a contemporary issue, prefer the last few years.



Who made it?

Name the person or group. Can you find them elsewhere?



Why was it made?

To inform, to persuade, to sell, to entertain?



Does it give reasons or evidence?

Claims with evidence weigh more than bare claims.

A source that fails one question can still be used — just say what it is good for.

A checklist of five questions for selecting a source: is it about my question, is it current enough, who made it, why was it made, and does it give reasons or evidence

Move 3 — Explaining sources. To explain a source is to say, in your own words, what it tells you about the issue. Quote only short phrases, and always attach a **source line**. In this book a source line names the author or organisation, the title or page, the date, the address (URL) and the date you checked it:

eSafety Commissioner, *Social media minimum age*, esafety.gov.au, checked 26 August 2026.

Move 4 — Comparing sources. To compare is to put sources side by side and ask: what do they agree on, what do they differ on, and *why* do they differ? Sources usually differ because their makers have different aims, values or interests — not because one side is careless. A comparison is not a contest to find the “true” source; it is a way of seeing the issue whole.

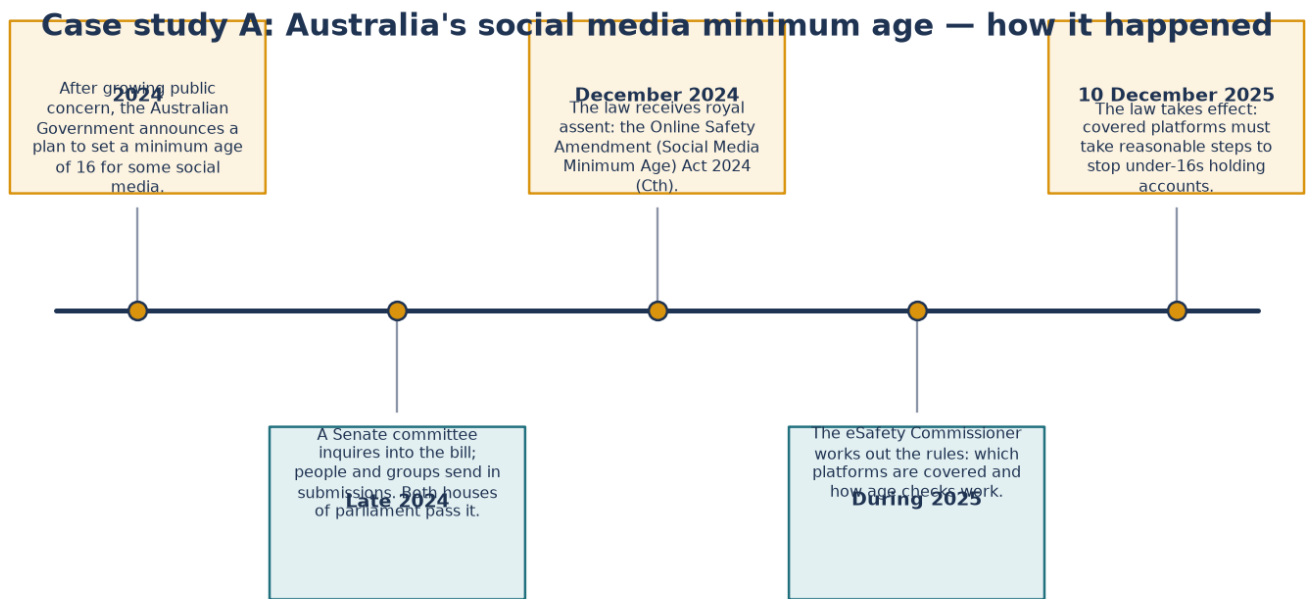
The steelman rule. Before you judge any position in this section, put it in the strongest form its own supporters would accept as their own view. If you can only beat a weak version of the other side, you have not beaten it at all. The marking guide at the end of this section awards marks for the quality of your reasoning — defined terms, checked sources, both sides stated at their strongest, limits admitted — never for the conclusion you reach. Two students who reach opposite conclusions can both earn full marks.

Worked case study A — Australia’s social media minimum age

This case study exercises .E01 (comparing political actors) and .E03 (competing values).

What happened. Through 2024, Australian governments, parents, teachers and researchers were arguing in public about whether young teenagers should be kept off some social media. The Australian Government announced a plan to set a minimum age of 16 for certain platforms. A bill (a proposed law) was brought to the Commonwealth Parliament, examined by a Senate committee that received submissions (written views sent to the committee) from members of the public, experts and companies, and passed by both houses in late November 2024. It received royal

assent (the Governor-General’s formal sign-off that turns a bill into law) on 10 December 2024, becoming the *Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024* (Cth). During 2025 the eSafety Commissioner — the regulator responsible for online safety — worked out the details: which platforms are covered and how age checks should work. The rules took effect on 10 December 2025.



A timeline of Australia’s social media minimum age law from 2024 to December 2025, showing the announcement, parliamentary passage, royal assent, the rule-making year and the start date of 10 December 2025

Under the law, covered platforms must take *reasonable steps* to stop under-16s from holding accounts. As at 21 November 2025 the covered platforms included Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Threads, TikTok, X, YouTube, Reddit, Twitch and Kick. Some services — including WhatsApp, Messenger, Google Classroom and YouTube Kids — are not covered. Parental permission does not override the rule. Platforms that fail badly, or keep failing, can face fines of up to about \$49.5 million; parents and young people are not fined.

Who was involved — and what could each achieve? Comparing actors means asking what each wanted, what tools they had, and what actually happened.

Case study A: political actors and their aims

Australian Government (the Executive)	Protect under-16s from harmful social media features	Introduced the bill; consulted the public	Bill became law in 2024
Commonwealth Parliament (House and Senate)	Examine the bill, debate it, then vote on it	Debate, Senate committee inquiry, voting	Passed the law in late November 2024
eSafety Commissioner (the regulator)	Make the law work in practice; enforce it	Rules on covered platforms; age-check guidance; fines	Platform list in place for 10 December 2025 start
Social media platforms (e.g. TikTok, Instagram)	Keep users while meeting the law	Age-assurance tools; account deactivation; submissions to the inquiry	Must take reasonable steps or risk large fines
Child-safety and parent groups	Strong rules to protect young people	Campaigns, media stories, submissions	Helped build public support for a law
Some researchers and young-people's groups	Protect safety without cutting young people off	Open letters, evidence to the inquiry, media	Pushed for age checks designed with care
Same issue, different actors, different powers — comparing them is the skill (elaboration E01).			

A table comparing six political actors in the social media minimum age case — the Australian Government, the Commonwealth Parliament, the eSafety Commissioner, social media platforms, child-safety and parent groups, and researchers and young people's groups — by aim, method and result

Notice the pattern: the government had the power to bring the law; the parliament had the power to pass, change or reject it; the regulator turns the law into workable rules and can fine platforms; the platforms must follow the law even though some argued against it; and groups without formal power (campaigners, researchers, young people) still shaped the debate through submissions, open letters and media.

The competing values. The debate was not “safety versus nothing”. Real values sat on both sides, and both deserve their strongest form.

Case study A: the competing values in the debate



Both sides hold real values. A good analysis states each side at its strongest before judging either (see the contested-terms rule).

A two-sided diagram of the competing values in the social media minimum age debate: safety-first reasons on one side and connection-first reasons on the other

Supporters of the law included the government, parts of the news media (such as the “Let Them Be Kids” campaign) and some parents’ groups. Critics came from several directions at once: the Law Council of Australia warned the law was too broad and raised privacy and rights concerns; the Privacy Commissioner raised doubts; TikTok argued the law was rushed and might push young users toward less-safe corners of the internet; and some advocates for young people said they had not really been consulted. Even the eSafety Commissioner said in public that she had reservations about the approach — while her office still carried out the job the parliament gave it. That last point is a good one for analysis: an actor can disagree with a decision and still be the one who must carry it out.

Which CD concepts does this case show? Locating: the official record lives with the Parliament (the bill), the Federal Register of Legislation (the Act) and the eSafety Commissioner (the rules). Selecting: news and social media posts about the law must be checked against those records. Explaining: the law in your own words, with a source line. Comparing: a government media release, a platform’s statement and a critic’s open letter all describe the same law — and differ because their makers have different aims.

Sources for Case study A (checked 26 August 2026). Parliament of Australia, *Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Bill 2024*, aph.gov.au · Federal Register of Legislation, *Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024* (Cth), legislation.gov.au · eSafety Commissioner, *Social media minimum age*, esafety.gov.au · summary checked against the Wikipedia article of the same name (a secondary source — use it for orientation, then check the official pages).

Worked case study B — Victoria’s single-use plastics ban

This case study exercises .E04 (a successful response, and how it was achieved) and .E03 (competing values).

What happened. For years, environmental groups had campaigned against single-use plastic — items used for minutes that remain in the environment for decades. In 2021 the Parliament of Victoria passed the *Single-use Plastic Items Act 2021*, giving the government a legal basis to ban items by stages after consultation. Stage 1 began on 1 February 2023: single-use plastic straws, cutlery, plates, drink stirrers and foam-plastic food and drink containers could no longer be sold or supplied. Straws stayed available for people who need them. Stage 2 followed on 1 February 2025, adding items such as lightweight produce bags and cotton buds with plastic stems.

Case study B: Victoria's single-use plastics ban — how it happened



A timeline of Victoria's single-use plastics ban from the 2021 Act through stage 1 on 1 February 2023 to stage 2 on 1 February 2025

Why this counts as a successful response — and how it was achieved. A response is successful when it does what it set out to do. Here: the targeted items had almost disappeared from shops by each deadline, alternatives appeared quickly, and the program kept going to its second stage. *How* it was achieved matters just as much, because the same methods can be used to analyse any government response:

1. **A clear legal basis.** The Act was passed by parliament first, so each later ban rested on law, not on a minister's say-so.
2. **Consultation before each stage.** The government asked businesses and community groups what would work, and the straws exemption came out of listening to people with disability.
3. **Notice and time.** Each stage was announced well before it started, giving shops and makers time to switch stock.
4. **Stages, not everything at once.** Starting with the easiest items built support for the harder ones later.
5. **Fairness built in.** The straws exemption kept access for people who need them — a value (inclusion) protected inside an environmental policy.
6. **Backing.** The rules come with fines for anyone who keeps supplying banned items.

The competing values. The strongest case for the ban: plastic waste harms wildlife and waterways, the banned items have easy substitutes, and most Victorians supported the change. The strongest case from businesses, especially small shops and hospitality venues: new stock costs money, substitutes are sometimes not as good in other ways, and change needs time and consultation. Both sides were heard: the consultation and staged design are evidence that the business concerns shaped the policy rather than being ignored.

Sources for Case study B (details checked 26 August 2026; re-check before teaching). Victorian Government information on single-use plastics, vic.gov.au and environment.vic.gov.au · Parliament of Victoria, *Single-use Plastic Items Act 2021* (Vic), legislation.vic.gov.au · Boomerang Alliance, campaigns on plastics, boomerangalliance.org.au.

Worked comparison — two model sources on the plastics ban

Below are two short texts **written for this book**. Each one states, in plain words, a real public position of its actor at the time. They are not quotes.

Source A (model text). The Victorian Government announced that from 1 February 2023 certain single-use plastic items could no longer be sold or supplied in Victoria. The Government said the ban would

reduce plastic waste and protect Victoria’s environment, and that businesses had been given time to prepare. Plastic straws remain available for people who need them.

Source B (model text). An alliance of environment groups that had campaigned for the ban welcomed it as a strong first step. It said plastic pollution was already harming wildlife and waterways, and urged the Government to move faster and cover more items in the next stage.

Model annotation — how to compare them.

A worked comparison: two sources on the plastics ban (model)

Who made it?	The Victorian Government — the people running the ban	An environment group that campaigned for the ban
Why was it made?	To tell the public what the ban does and win support for it	To welcome the ban and push for it to go further
What does it say?	The ban cuts plastic waste and protects Victoria's environment	A good first step — but more items should be banned sooner
Perspective	Proud of a careful, staged law with time for businesses	Urgent: the environment cannot wait for slow steps
Useful for my question?	Yes — for what the government did and why	Yes — for how supporters critique the same law

Both agree the ban is good — they differ on speed. Finding THAT is comparing.

A worked comparison table asking five questions of two model sources on the plastics ban: who made it, why it was made, what it says, its perspective, and its usefulness

Read the table, then notice the key finding: the two sources **agree** that the ban is a good thing — they differ on **speed**. Finding exactly where agreement ends and difference begins is the heart of comparing. Ask *why* they differ: the Government must keep businesses on side and make the rules workable; the environment group answers to the environment, not to shopkeepers. Different roles, different aims — so different emphasis, from sources that are both useful.

Practice tasks

Scaffolded tasks

Task 1 — Locating. List three different source types you would use to research the social media minimum age (see the source-types figure). Beside each, write one search term that uses the name of an institution, not just topic words.

Task 2 — Selecting. Apply the five-question checklist to Source A and then to Source B in the worked comparison. For each question, write a one-line answer.

Task 3 — Explaining. In two sentences of your own words, explain what the eSafety Commissioner does under the social media law. Add a source line.

Task 4 — Comparing. Copy the first three rows of the worked comparison table (who made it, why it was made, what it says) and complete them yourself for Source A and Source B without looking at the model. Then check your answers against the model and correct one thing.

Task 5 — Comparing actors (E01). The actors table leaves work to do. For *child-safety and parent groups* and for *researchers and young-people's groups*, write one more method each could use to influence the law, and one sign that the method had an effect.

Task 6 — Pairing with section 2B. Section 2B studies how citizens influence lawmaking, including submissions to parliamentary committees. The social media bill was examined by a Senate committee inquiry (a formal examination of an issue by a small parliamentary group) that took submissions. Name two ways an ordinary citizen's view could have reached that committee, and say which of the two you think gives a committee more to work with, and why.

Tasks

Task 7. Choose one contemporary issue carried in the knowledge chapters (your teacher will confirm which case to use — for example, an issue from section 1B's values study, or the lawmaking participation cases in section 2B). Locate three sources of three *different* types. Record each with a full source line.

Task 8. Take your strongest source from Task 7 and run the five-question checklist on it. Finish with one sentence: "This source is most useful for my question because ..."

Task 9 (E01). From your Task 7 issue, choose two political actors. For each, write a short paragraph: what the actor wanted, what power or methods it had, what actually happened, and whether it achieved its aim. Finish with one sentence comparing the two.

Task 10 (E03). Identify two values in tension in your Task 7 issue (for example, safety and freedom; environment and cost; fairness and speed). State each side's case in its strongest form — the steelman rule applies to the side you *agree with* as well.

Task 11 (E04). Identify one response to your Task 7 issue (a law, a program, a campaign, a court decision). Using two of your sources, decide whether the response achieved what it set out to do, and list two features of *how* it was carried out that helped or hindered it.

Task 12 — Pairing with section 1C. For your Task 7 issue, name the institution that had the formal power to decide it (Commonwealth Parliament, a state parliament, a minister, a court, a regulator, a council). Which of your sources told you that, and how did you check it?

Task 13 — Pairing with section 1D. Find one news report and one social media post about the same event in your issue. Explain two reasons they might present the event in different ways. Use the words *audience* and *purpose* in your answer.

Extended response

"Australia's minimum age for social media is a good response to a real problem." Analyse this claim. Use at least three sources of at least two different types (one must be an official source). State each side of the debate in its strongest form before you reach your own view, and finish by naming one limit of the evidence you used. Length: one to two pages. The marking guide below is your guide — marks are awarded for reasoning, never for the side you choose.

Marking guide and answers

Extended response marking guide (8 marks).

Step	Mark
Locates at least three sources of at least two types, each with a source line	1
Selects sources with stated reasons (checklist thinking visible)	1
Explains the law accurately, in the student's own words	1
States the case <i>for</i> the law in its strongest form	1
States the case <i>against</i> the law in its strongest form	1
Compares: names where the sources agree and where they differ, and why	1
Reaches a conclusion that follows from the evidence used	1
Names one limit of the evidence, or of the student's own argument	1

Two students can reach opposite conclusions and both score full marks. Marks are awarded for defined terms, checked sources, fair treatment of both sides and honest limits — never for the conclusion reached.

Brief answers and models.

T1. Example: government/parliament — “Parliament of Australia Online Safety Amendment Social Media Minimum Age Bill”; regulator — “eSafety Commissioner age-restricted platforms”; news media — “social media minimum age Australia Senate committee”.

T2. Source A: made by the Victorian Government (the actor running the ban); purpose — inform the public and win support; current for the 2023 start; gives the date and scope of the change but not independent evidence. Source B: made by an environment alliance; purpose — welcome the ban and push for more; useful for the supporter side of the debate; argues for its own aim, so pair it with a source from another side.

T3. Model: The eSafety Commissioner works out which platforms are covered by the law and how age checks should work, and can fine platforms that fail badly or keep failing. Source: eSafety Commissioner, *Social media minimum age*, esafety.gov.au, checked 26 August 2026.

T4. Students' own copies; the model table is the check.

T5. Example methods: running a campaign that asks parents to write to their local member; giving evidence to the Senate inquiry; publishing a short video of young people's own views. Signs of effect: the committee's questions to witnesses; changes to how the rules were later designed (for example, which services were left out).

T6. Two ways: sending a submission to the committee, or writing to a senator or local member asking them to raise the issue. A written submission usually gives a committee more to work with, because it stays on the record with the person's reasons and evidence.

T7–T13. Answers will vary by chosen issue. Award marks where the student shows the move named in the task: a recorded source line (T7), a completed checklist with a usefulness statement (T8), aim–method–result for each actor plus a comparison sentence (T9), two steelmen (T10), a judged result plus two features of method (T11), the correct institution with the source that showed it (T12), and two reasons using *audience* and *purpose* (T13).

What shaped Australia's democratic institutions?

Curriculum — VC2 codes only (VCAA export 29-07-2026). Strand: Skills · Sub-strand: *Evaluating democratic institutions and systems* · Levels 7 and 8. VC2HC8S03 · Elaboration drawn on: .E01

In Chapters 1–3 you met Australia's democratic **institutions** — the lasting bodies that run our democracy: the parliaments, the government, and the courts (1C, 2A). Those sections asked *what the institutions are and what they do*. This section asks a different question: **why do they look and decide the way they do?**

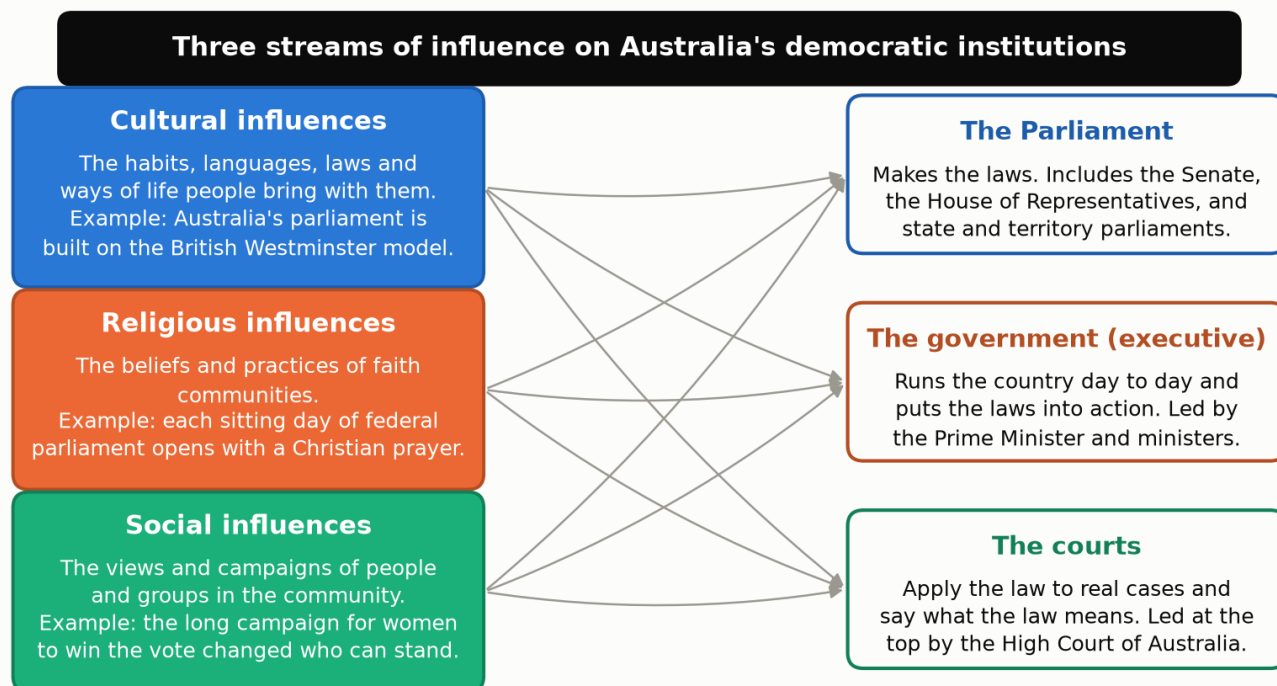
Part of the answer is that institutions do not appear from nowhere. They are built by people, and people bring their cultures, their faiths and their campaigns with them. Over time these leave their mark on how an institution looks, what it says, and who gets to be part of it. This section teaches you to **evaluate** those marks: to name them, find evidence for them, and judge how strong they are — and how strong they are *not*.

A contested term, defined for this section. The curriculum uses the word *influences* but does not define it, and Australians disagree about how strong each influence really is. The working definition in this book: **an influence is a factor that helps shape how an institution looks or decides, without controlling the outcome.** Two people can agree that the opening prayer in Parliament is a religious influence and still disagree about how much it matters today. Holding that disagreement well — with evidence — is the skill this section teaches.

The three streams of influence

The curriculum names three streams. A single fact about an institution can sit in more than one stream.

- **Cultural influences** — the habits, languages, laws and ways of life people bring with them. Australia's parliaments copy the British **Westminster** model: a government that must answer to a lower house, and an opposition that checks it (1A, 1C). That is a cultural inheritance.
- **Religious influences** — the beliefs and practices of faith communities. Each sitting day of the federal Parliament opens with a Christian prayer. That is a religious inheritance.
- **Social influences** — the views and campaigns of people and groups in the community. The long campaign for women's votes changed who may stand for Parliament. That is a social inheritance.



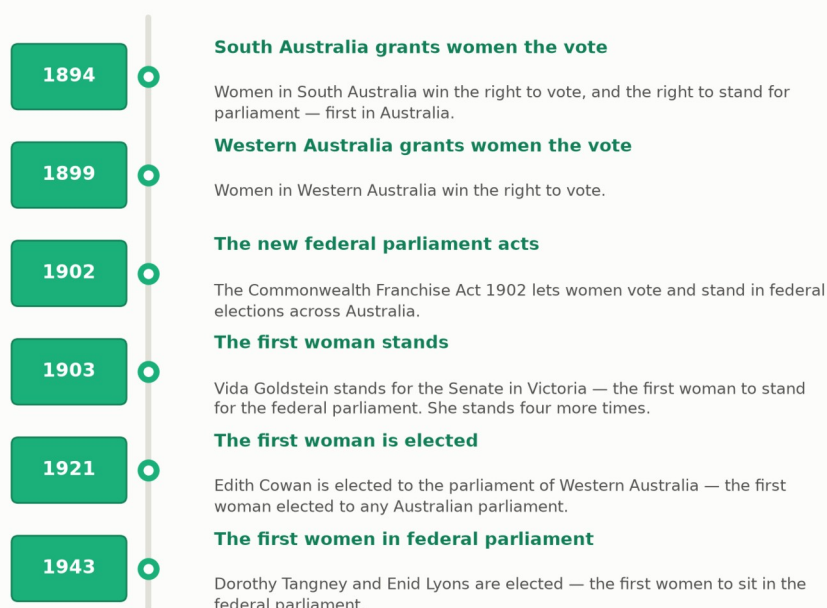
Every stream can reach every institution. In this section you learn to say which influence acted, what evidence shows it, and how strong it was.

An influence helps shape how an institution looks or decides. It does not control the outcome.

Concept map showing cultural, religious and social influences flowing into the Parliament, the government and the courts, with the note that an influence shapes but does not control an institution

The timeline below is the social stream in action. For decades before each law changed, citizens ran meetings, wrote petitions and letters, and argued their case in newspapers. The institution changed because organised people kept asking it to change.

A social influence at work: the campaign for women's votes



Decades of meetings, petitions, letters and newspaper campaigning came before each step. The influence was social: organised citizens changing who the institution lets in.

Vertical timeline of women winning the vote and the right to stand for parliament in Australia, from South Australia in 1894 to the first women elected to the federal parliament in 1943

A contested term, defined for this section. *Secular* describes a state with **no official religion**: the government does not belong to one church or support one faith over others (see also 3A). Australians contest whether Australia is secular. **One view:** the opening prayers, the oath and the Crown show a Christian heritage, so Australia is not fully secular. **Another view:** the Constitution stops the Commonwealth from setting up an official religion, and no church runs the state, so Australia is secular in law while carrying Christian customs in practice. Both views are arguable. In this section we do not pick a side for you — we name the evidence and say which view each fact supports.

The method: five steps to evaluate an influence

Evaluating is more than noticing. Use the five steps below every time, in order. Step 5 is where the evaluating happens.

The five-step method: how to explain an influence

1

1 Name the institution

Say which institution you are talking about.

The Commonwealth Parliament.

2

2 Name the influence

Say which cultural, religious or social influence you will examine.

Christian heritage.

3

3 Find the evidence

Find the real, dated thing that shows the influence: a practice, a law, a number, a record.

The Speaker reads a Christian prayer at the start of each sitting day.

4

4 Explain how it shows

Say how the evidence shows the influence at work in the institution.

The prayer is built into the official routine of the Parliament itself.

5

5 Judge its strength and limits

Say how strong the influence is, and what limits it or competes with it.

Section 116 bans an official religion, and members may affirm instead of swearing.

Work top to bottom. Step 5 is where the evaluation happens — that is where marks are won.

Five-step method for evaluating an influence: name the institution, name the influence, find the evidence, explain how it shows, then judge its strength and limits, with a worked example in the side column

Where evidence lives

Step 3 asks for evidence. You cannot count an influence just because you feel it is there. Six source types do the work in this section. Three subject terms are defined here for first use:

- **Hansard** — the written record of what members of parliament said in debates.
- **submission** — a written view that a person or group formally sends to a parliamentary committee (2B).

- **judgment** — a court’s written decision and reasons (2C).

Where can you find evidence of an influence?

Type of source	What it can show	Example used in this section
Laws made by parliament	What parliament decided, and when.	The Marriage Act changed in 2004, and again in 2017.
Parliamentary debates (Hansard)	What members of parliament said and argued about.	The 2017 debates on the new marriage law.
Official statistics (ABS)	How many Australians acted or responded, and how.	The 2017 postal survey result: 61.6% Yes.
Court judgments	How courts apply the law and say what it means.	A case that settles what a law allows or bans.
News reports	What the public heard about an issue, and when.	News coverage of the survey campaigns.
Committee submissions	Views that groups formally send to a parliamentary committee.	Letters from faith and community groups in 2017.

When you claim an influence acted, name the source type that shows it.

Table of six source types where evidence of an influence can be found, what each type can show, and the example of it used in this section

An influence is not a control. A prayer does not write the law. A survey does not pass an Act. A campaign does not elect anyone by itself. Institutions keep their own deciders — members vote, courts decide (1C, 2A). That is why Step 5 always asks for **limits** as well as strength.

Worked examples

Example 1 — scaffolded

Case study 1: Christian heritage in the federal Parliament. *What happened:* each sitting day opens with a Christian prayer read by the Speaker, a practice over a century old; new members choose an oath ending “So help me God” or a solemn affirmation; and the King’s representative, the Governor-General, opens each Parliament and gives **royal assent** — the King’s signature — to every law (1C). *Who was involved:* the Parliament, the Speaker, the Governor-General, and the King. *Which concept it shows:* a religious influence, visible in daily practice, and the legal limits on religious influence at the same time.

Christian heritage: visible in practice, limited by law

Signs of Christian heritage in Parliament

The opening prayer

The Speaker reads a Christian prayer at the start of each sitting day. This has happened for over a century.

The oath

Members may swear an oath of loyalty that ends with the words "So help me God".

The Crown

The King's representative opens Parliament, and every bill needs royal assent in the King's name to become a law.

Limits on religious influence

Section 116

The Constitution stops the Commonwealth making an official religion or requiring a religious test for office.

The choice to affirm

Members may make a non-religious affirmation instead of an oath. No faith is required to serve.

Parliament decides

Faith groups can speak, persuade and campaign — but only elected Parliament can make the law.

Evaluation tip: the same institution can show an influence and a limit on that influence at the same time.

Two-panel figure listing signs of Christian heritage in Parliament — the opening prayer, the oath, and the Crown — beside the limits on religious influence: section 116, the choice to affirm, and the fact that Parliament itself decides

Section 116 of the Australian Constitution — in plain language

The words are simplified for this book. The rule binds the Commonwealth only.

	What section 116 says	What it means in practice
1	The Commonwealth cannot make any religion the official religion of Australia.	Australia has no state religion. In law the country is secular.
2	The Commonwealth cannot force anyone to take part in a religious practice.	No law can make you attend a church service or a religious rite.
3	The Commonwealth cannot stop people practising the religion of their choice.	People of every faith — and of no faith — are free to worship.
4	The Commonwealth cannot require a religious test for its jobs and offices.	A person does not have to be religious to be a member of parliament.

Source: Australian Constitution, section 116 (simplified wording), Parliament of Australia, aph.gov.au, retrieved 26 August 2026.

Table giving section 116 of the Australian Constitution in plain language: no official religion, no forcing religious practice, no stopping people practising their religion, and no religious test for public office

Now the five steps.

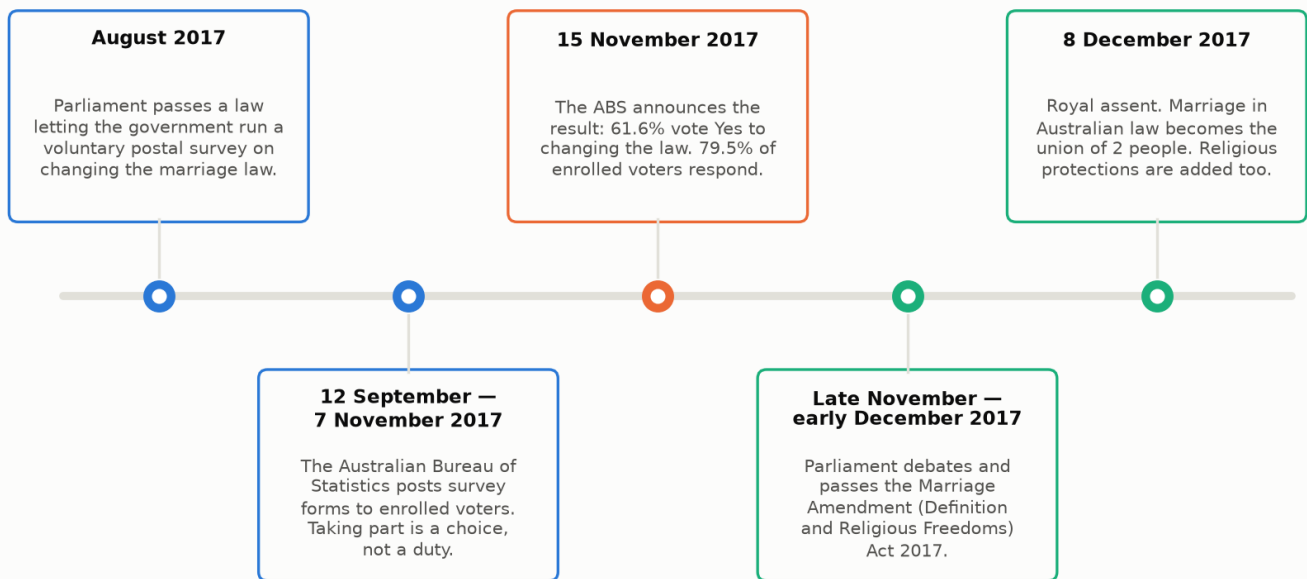
Step	What we say	Why it counts
1. Name the institution	The federal Parliament (and, through royal assent, the Crown in Parliament — 1C).	Evaluating starts from a named institution, never from “Australia” in general.
2. Name the influence	A religious influence: Christian heritage carried in the prayer, the oath and the Crown. The Westminster customs around them are also cultural .	Naming the stream is the claim being tested.
3. Find the evidence	The prayer appears in the parliament’s own daily record; the oath and affirmation are set out in law; section 116 is in the Constitution itself.	Every fact above is checkable in a source type from the evidence table.
4. Explain how it shows	The parliament <i>chooses</i> to open its own day with Christian prayer, and the law offers a God-framed oath. That shows Christian heritage woven into how the institution looks and sounds.	Evidence becomes an argument only when you say what it shows.
5. Judge strength and limits	Strength: the practice is daily and over a century old — strong as heritage. Limits: members may affirm instead of swear; section 116 stops any official religion or religious test; and Parliament itself votes on whether the prayer stays, so the influence lasts only as long as the elected house keeps it.	Two honest readings survive: “a living influence” and “a historical trace we keep by choice”. A student who can give both , with evidence, is evaluating.

Sources: *Parliament of Australia*, aph.gov.au; *Australian Constitution, section 116 (simplified wording)*; retrieved 26 August 2026.

Example 2 — scaffolded

Case study 2: the 2017 postal survey and the marriage law. *What happened:* see the timeline below. In 2017 the law said marriage was the union of a man and a woman (a 2004 change). Parliament first voted to let the government run a national postal survey, the ABS posted forms to enrolled voters, 61.6% voted Yes, and Parliament then debated and made the *Marriage Amendment (Definition and Religious Freedoms) Act 2017*, which received royal assent on 8 December 2017. *Who was involved:* the Parliament, the ABS, enrolled voters (79.5% responded), and the Yes and No campaign groups. *Which concept it shows:* a **social** influence — the views of the community, gathered at scale — with a **religious** influence inside the debate, because faith groups argued the issue and the 2017 Act added protections for religious bodies.

The 2017 marriage law postal survey — what happened, and when

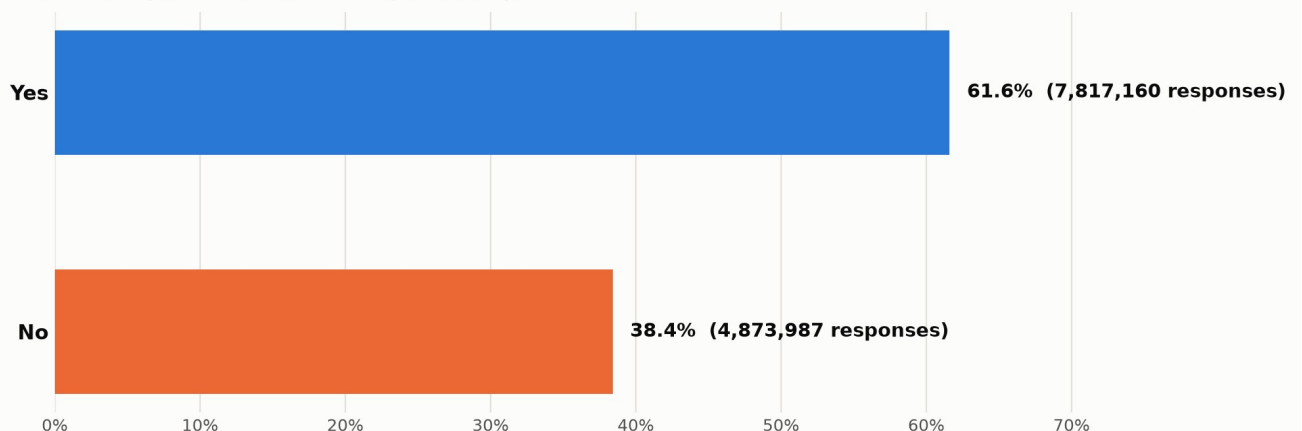


Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey, 2017 (released 15 November 2017); Parliament of Australia, aph.gov.au, retrieved 26 August 2026.

Timeline of the 2017 marriage law postal survey, from the Parliament allowing the survey in August 2017, through the ABS posting forms and announcing a 61.6 per cent Yes result, to royal assent of the Marriage Amendment Act on 8 December 2017

The 2017 postal survey result — valid responses

"Should the law be changed to allow same-sex couples to marry?"



12,727,920 Australians responded — a response rate of 79.5% of enrolled voters. Taking part was voluntary.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey, 2017 (released 15 November 2017), abs.gov.au, retrieved 26 August 2026.

Horizontal bar chart of the 2017 postal survey result: Yes 61.6 per cent (7,817,160 responses) and No 38.4 per cent (4,873,987 responses), from 12,727,920 responses, a 79.5 per cent response rate, with taking part voluntary

Step	What we say	Why it counts
1. Name the institution	The federal Parliament, which makes and changes the marriage law.	The survey itself changed nothing; only Parliament can change the law.
2. Name the influence	A social influence: the views of enrolled voters, plus the campaigns of Yes and No groups. A religious influence too: faith communities made their views known in the	One event can carry two streams; naming both is more accurate than naming one.

Step	What we say	Why it counts
	debate and in submissions, and the 2017 Act wrote in protections for religious bodies.	
3. Find the evidence	The ABS result (official statistics); Hansard records of the 2017 debates; committee submissions from faith and community groups; news reports of the campaigns.	Four different source types, each doing a different job.
4. Explain how it shows	Parliament chose to ask the public before deciding, and the Yes majority set the direction of the 2017 Act. That shows public views shaping what the institution decided.	The link is “Parliament asked, then acted in line with the answer”.
5. Judge strength and limits	Strength: a 79.5% response made the result hard to ignore — strong as a signal to politicians. Limits: taking part was a choice, the result did not force Parliament’s hand, and members still debated and voted. The influence was strong; the deciding power stayed with Parliament.	“Strong influence” and “Parliament still decided” are both true. Saying only one is not evaluating.

Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey, 2017 (released 15 November 2017), abs.gov.au; Parliament of Australia, aph.gov.au; retrieved 26 August 2026.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

Q1. Use the streams map figure. (a) Name the three streams of influence. (b) Sort each fact into a stream: (i) Australia’s parliaments copy the British Westminster model; (ii) each sitting day opens with a Christian prayer; (iii) a decades-long campaign wins women the vote. (c) The prayer is also a habit kept for over a century. Which second stream could it sit in, and why?

Q2. Steps 1–2, on the opening prayer. (a) Name the institution the prayer belongs to. (b) Name the main stream of influence it shows. (c) Which panel and which line of the heritage signs figure shows it?

Q3. Step 3, on the opening prayer. Using the evidence table, name two source types that could show the prayer is a long-standing daily practice, and say what each would show.

Q4. Steps 4–5, on the opening prayer. (a) In one sentence, explain how the prayer shows a religious influence on Parliament. (b) Name one limit from the right-hand panel of the heritage signs figure.

Q5. The oath and the affirmation. (a) What two choices does a new member of Parliament have when taking office? (b) What does that choice say about how strong religious influence is in Parliament? Use the word *limit* in your answer.

Q6. Match each situation to the plain-language rule from the section 116 table that stops it. (a) A group asks the Commonwealth to make one church the official church of Australia. (b) A law tries to make everyone attend a church service. (c) A law tries to stop people praying at home. (d) A rule tries to block someone from becoming a federal member because of their religion.

Q7. Steps 1–2, on the 2017 postal survey. (a) Name the institution that actually changed the marriage law. (b) Name the main stream of influence the survey shows. (c) Name one religious influence that appeared in the same story.

Q8. Step 3, on the survey result bar chart. (a) Read the two results from the chart, with percentages. (b) Name the source type the chart belongs to. (c) Why does the 79.5% response rate matter when you judge the strength of the influence in Step 5?

Q9. Step 5, on the survey. (a) Did the survey result force Parliament to change the law? (b) In one sentence, judge the strength of the social influence: strong, weak, or strong but not controlling — and say why.

Q10. The women’s votes timeline. Choose two events from it. For each, name the stream of influence and give one reason it is social rather than cultural.

Q11. The women’s votes timeline, as institution and change. (a) Which institution changed across 1894–1943? (b) What exactly changed about it? (c) Name two kinds of citizen action from the figure’s caption that pushed for the change.

Q12. A new case, started for you. In December 2024 the federal Parliament made the *Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024*, setting 16 as the lowest age for social media accounts — a case studied in 1B. Steps 1–2 are done for you: institution = the federal Parliament; influence = a social influence (public worry about harm to children, pushed by campaigners and reported in the news). (a) Complete Step 3: name one source type from the evidence table that could show the public worry was real and wide. (b) Complete Step 4 in one sentence: how does that evidence show the influence? (c) Complete Step 5 with one limit: who still did the deciding?

Unscaffolded

Q13. A claim to evaluate: “The opening prayer means Australia is not a secular country.” Use the section 116 table and the heritage signs figure to give one fact that supports the claim and one fact that answers it.

Q14. Which stream shaped the *structure* of Australia’s parliaments most: cultural, religious or social? Argue for one, with two facts from this section or from 1C.

Q15. Was the 2017 marriage law change mainly a social influence or mainly a religious influence? Argue for one as the main stream, but name the other stream’s part in the story.

Q16. The 2017 Act added protections for religious bodies and ministers of religion. What does that addition show about religious influence on lawmaking? Answer in two sentences using the words *influence* and *limit*.

Q17. The women’s votes timeline shows laws changing. Explain in two sentences why the timeline is still evidence of a **social** influence, not just a legal one.

Q18. Compare the opening prayer (Case study 1) and the 2017 survey result (Case study 2) as influences. Which do you judge stronger in Australia today? Defend your choice with one fact about each.

Q19. The 2024 social media minimum age law (1B). Evaluate it as a social influence using all five steps, in no more than five sentences. *Source: Parliament of Australia, aph.gov.au, retrieved 26 August 2026.*

Q20. Section 2C used consumer law — laws that protect people who buy goods and services — as a case study. Name one social influence that could shape such a law, and one source type from the evidence table that would show it.

Q21. Section 2B teaches that groups send submissions to parliamentary committees. Explain in two sentences why submissions are better evidence of an influence than a news report of the same group’s view.

Q22. Royal assent (1C) connects every Australian law to the King, head of the Church of England. Is royal assent today a religious influence, a cultural influence, or both? Argue your answer in three sentences.

Q23. “Influences shape institutions; they do not control them.” Use **two** different cases from this section to show what that sentence means.

Q24. Pick one line from the left panel of the heritage signs figure. Imagine it disappeared tomorrow. Would the Parliament still work as a democratic institution? Use your answer to judge how strong that religious influence really is.

Extended response

Q25. Australia's democratic institutions have been shaped by cultural, religious and social influences.

Choose **one** influence from each stream (three in total). For each influence: name the institution it shaped; give one dated fact or figure as evidence; explain how the evidence shows the influence; and judge its strength and its limits in Australia today.

How your answer will be judged: marks are awarded for the reasoning steps — naming, evidence, explanation, and an honest judgment of strength **and** limits. You are not marked on which side of a contested question you take, only on how well you argue it. A short closing sentence comparing your three influences (which is strongest today, and why) earns the top band.

Answers

- Q1.** (a) Cultural, religious, social. (b) (i) cultural; (ii) religious; (iii) social. (c) Cultural — a habit kept for over a century is a way of life as well as a faith practice.
- Q2.** (a) The federal Parliament (House of Representatives). (b) Religious. (c) Left panel, “the opening prayer”.
- Q3.** Hansard / the parliament’s daily record — the prayer appears in it day after day, showing the practice is real and repeated; news reports — showing the public has long seen it happen.
- Q4.** (a) Parliament chooses to open its own day with a Christian prayer, so Christian heritage is woven into how the institution looks and sounds. (b) Any one: section 116; the choice to affirm; Parliament itself decides whether the prayer stays.
- Q5.** (a) Swear an oath ending “So help me God”, or make a solemn affirmation. (b) The choice is a limit: no member is made to call on God, so religious influence is real but not controlling.
- Q6.** (a) No official religion. (b) Cannot force religious practice. (c) Cannot stop people practising their religion. (d) No religious test for public office.
- Q7.** (a) The federal Parliament. (b) Social. (c) Faith groups argued the issue in the debate and submissions; the 2017 Act added protections for religious bodies.
- Q8.** (a) Yes 61.6%; No 38.4%. (b) Official statistics (ABS). (c) A high response rate makes the result a stronger picture of the enrolled public’s views, so the signal to Parliament was stronger.
- Q9.** (a) No — Parliament still debated and voted. (b) Strong but not controlling: 79.5% responding made the result hard to ignore, yet the deciding vote stayed with Parliament.
- Q10.** Example: 1894 and 1902. Both are social because the change followed organised public campaigning for women’s votes, not an inherited custom (cultural) or a faith teaching (religious).
- Q11.** (a) The parliaments — state parliaments first, then the federal Parliament. (b) Who may vote and stand: women won both rights. (c) Meetings; petitions (also letters, newspaper campaigning).
- Q12.** (a) Any one, e.g. news reports of the public worry, or committee submissions from child-safety groups. (b) Parliament heard the worry at scale and then made the law in line with it. (c) Parliament — members debated and voted; the public worry did not write the Act.
- Q13.** Supports: the daily Christian prayer and the oath show Christian heritage in state practice. Answers: section 116 stops any official religion, and members may affirm — so in law no church is set up. (Either honest reading, with both facts, is a good evaluation.)
- Q14.** Example: cultural — the Westminster model (government answering to a lower house, an opposition checking it) sets the whole structure; the prayer and oath sit *inside* that structure. A social answer argued from the women’s votes timeline is also acceptable if defended with two facts.
- Q15.** Example: mainly social — Parliament asked enrolled voters, 61.6% said Yes, and the Act followed; the religious stream appears in the faith-group submissions and the religious protections written into the Act.
- Q16.** The protections show religious views shaping what the law contains — a real influence. They are also a limit-shaped influence: they protect religious practice *from* the law’s reach rather than controlling the law.
- Q17.** The laws are the *outcome*; the influence was the organised campaigning — meetings, petitions, letters — that came before each law. Evidence of the campaigning is evidence of the social influence.
- Q18.** Either judgment accepted. Example: the survey result — it moved a law within months, while the prayer, though older, changes no law and stays only because Parliament keeps voting to keep it.
- Q19.** Model: institution = federal Parliament; influence = social (public worry about harm to children); evidence = news reports and submissions showing the worry was wide; how = Parliament made the 2024 Act in line with that

worry; strength/limits = strong signal, but members still debated and voted, and the law's detail was Parliament's choice.

Q20. Example: consumer groups campaigning for fairer refunds (social); evidence in committee submissions (or Hansard records of members quoting the campaigns).

Q21. A submission is the group's view sent formally into the institution's own record, so it shows the view reaching the deciders; a news report only shows the view was said in public.

Q22. Example: mainly cultural today — the King's role is an inherited custom of the Westminster system; its religious meaning (head of a church) is historical, and no religious content attaches to the assent of ordinary laws. A "both" answer argued cleanly also earns full marks.

Q23. Example: the survey (79.5% Yes-side response, yet Parliament still voted) and the prayer (daily for over a century, yet members may affirm and s 116 blocks any official religion). In both, the influence bent the institution's practice without taking its deciding power.

Q24. Example: if the opening prayer disappeared, Parliament would still make laws, debate and vote — so the prayer is strong as heritage but weak as control. Any line judged this way (practice vs control) is correct.

Q25. Marking guide is in the teaching notes. A top-band answer names three influences (one per stream), each with a named institution, a dated fact or figure, an explanation of what it shows, and a strength-and-limits judgment, then closes by comparing the three.

Fully-worked solutions

Q1. (a) Cultural, religious and social influences. (b) (i) The Westminster model is an inherited way of doing politics — cultural. (ii) The prayer is a faith practice — religious. (iii) The women's votes campaign is organised public pressure — social. (c) Cultural: a practice kept daily for over a century becomes a custom, so the prayer sits in both streams at once.

Q2. (a) The federal Parliament — specifically the House of Representatives, whose day the Speaker opens with prayer. (b) Religious. (c) The left panel, line 1: "the opening prayer".

Q3. The parliament's own record (Hansard): the prayer appears in it on every sitting day, which shows the practice is real, daily and long-standing. News reports: they show the public has watched the practice for a long time. Together they satisfy Step 3 with two independent source types.

Q4. (a) By choosing to open each sitting day with a Christian prayer, Parliament weaves Christian heritage into how the institution looks and sounds — that is the influence. (b) Limits include: section 116's four rules; the member's choice to affirm; and the fact that Parliament itself votes on whether the prayer stays.

Q5. (a) A new member swears an oath ending "So help me God" **or** makes a solemn affirmation with no religious words. (b) Because no member must call on God, the religious influence is real but limited: it offers a religious form without forcing it.

Q6. (a) "No official religion" — the Commonwealth cannot set up a church. (b) "Cannot force religious practice" — attending cannot be made compulsory. (c) "Cannot stop people practising their religion" — private prayer is protected. (d) "No religious test for public office" — religion cannot bar a member.

Q7. (a) The federal Parliament: only it can change the marriage law. (b) Social — the survey gathered the views of enrolled voters at scale. (c) Faith communities argued the issue in the public debate and in submissions, and the 2017 Act wrote in protections for religious bodies — the religious stream inside a social story.

Q8. (a) Yes 61.6% (7,817,160 responses); No 38.4% (4,873,987 responses). (b) Official statistics — the ABS. (c) Strength in Step 5 rests on how well the result pictures the public: with 79.5% of enrolled voters responding, the result was a strong signal; a low response rate would have made it a weaker one.

Q9. (a) No. The survey was a choice, not a duty, and its result did not force Parliament's hand; members still debated and voted the *Marriage Amendment (Definition and Religious Freedoms) Act 2017*. (b) Strong but not controlling: the

size of the response made the direction hard to ignore, while the deciding power stayed where the Constitution puts it — in Parliament.

Q10. Take 1894 (South Australia) and 1902 (Commonwealth Franchise Act). Both are social because each law followed organised public campaigning — meetings, petitions, letters — rather than an inherited custom (which would be cultural) or a teaching of a faith (which would be religious). The stream is read from *what pushed the change*, not from the law itself.

Q11. (a) The parliaments: South Australia and Western Australia first, then the new federal Parliament. (b) Who may take part: women won the right to vote and the right to stand, so the institution's membership opened up. (c) Meetings and petitions (the caption also names letters and newspaper campaigning).

Q12. (a) News reports showing the worry was real and wide, or committee submissions from child-safety and parent groups. (b) Parliament heard that worry at scale and made the 2024 Act in line with it — the view shaped the decision. (c) The limit: elected members still debated, amended and voted; the public worry influenced the law but did not write it.

Q13. Fact supporting the claim: Parliament opens each day with a Christian prayer and offers a God-framed oath — Christian heritage is visible in state practice. Fact answering the claim: section 116 stops the Commonwealth setting up an official religion or imposing a religious test, and any member may affirm. Held together, the two facts support the section's working reading: secular in law, Christian customs in practice.

Q14. Model answer (cultural): the structure is Westminster — a government that must answer to a lower house, an opposition that checks it, royal assent completing every law (1C). Those cultural inheritances decide how the whole building stands, while the religious signs (prayer, oath) sit inside rooms of that building. Hence culture shaped the structure most. A social answer (the structure opened to women only after campaigning) earns equal credit if it names two dated facts.

Q15. Model answer (social as main stream): Parliament chose to ask enrolled voters; 79.5% responded; 61.6% said Yes; and the 2017 Act followed that direction within weeks. The religious stream was real but secondary: faith groups pressed their views in the debate and submissions, and their lasting mark is the protections written into the Act, not the direction of the change.

Q16. The added protections show religious views shaping the *content* of a law: faith communities asked to be shielded, and Parliament wrote shields in. That is influence with a limit shape — it protects religious practice from the law's reach rather than deciding the law's main question, which the elected house settled.

Q17. The laws on the timeline are outcomes, not the influence. The influence is the organised campaigning named in the caption — meetings, petitions, letters, newspaper arguments — that came before each law and pushed for it. So the timeline is evidence of citizens changing an institution, which is a social influence.

Q18. Model answer (survey stronger): the survey result moved a law within months of being announced — 61.6% Yes, 79.5% responding, Act assented 8 December 2017. The prayer is older and daily, yet it changes no law and survives only because each Parliament keeps it. So the social influence did more deciding-shaping in 2017 than the religious one does today; the religious one runs deeper as heritage. An opposite judgment, defended with the same two facts, scores equally.

Q19. Step 1: the federal Parliament. Step 2: a social influence — public worry about harm to children, pushed by campaigners. Step 3: evidence in news reports of the worry and in submissions to committees. Step 4: Parliament made the *Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024* in line with that worry, so the view shaped the decision. Step 5: strong as a signal, limited as a control — members still debated and voted, and the law's detail (age 16, which platforms) was Parliament's choice.

Q20. A social influence: consumer groups campaigning for stronger protections for buyers — for example, fairer refunds when goods fail. A source type: committee submissions carrying those groups' views into the parliament's own record (or Hansard, where members quote the campaign). Together they satisfy Steps 2 and 3.

Q21. A submission carries a group's view formally into the institution's own record, so it is evidence the view *reached the deciders*; a news report is only evidence the view was said in public. For evaluating influence on an institution, the formal route is the stronger source.

Q22. Model answer (cultural today): royal assent is an inherited Westminster custom — the King’s representative completing every law (1C). Its religious edge (the King as head of a church) is historical, and no religious content attaches to assenting an ordinary Australian law. So the custom is a cultural inheritance that *carries* a religious history rather than a religious influence at work today. A clean “both” argument also earns full marks.

Q23. Case 1: the 2017 survey — 79.5% of enrolled voters responded and 61.6% said Yes, a strong social signal, yet Parliament still debated and voted the Act; the influence bent the outcome without taking the deciding power. Case 2: the opening prayer — daily for over a century, a strong religious mark, yet members may affirm and section 116 blocks any official religion; the influence shapes the room without ruling the house. Both cases show the same rule: influences shape institutions; they do not control them.

Q24. Model answer (the opening prayer): if the prayer disappeared tomorrow, Parliament would still open, debate, vote and make laws — nothing in the lawmaking machine would stop. So judged by control, the prayer is a weak influence; judged by heritage, it is a strong one, because a daily practice over a century old says something true about where the institution came from. The point of Step 5 is to hold both judgments at once.

Q25. Model structure (one influence per stream). *Cultural*: the Westminster model shaping the Parliament — evidence: the government must answer to the lower house and can lose office (1A, 1C); strength: it sets the whole structure; limit: Australians have amended the system within it (for example, the 2017 Act shows Parliament using Westminster machinery to change social law). *Religious*: the opening prayer — evidence: the parliament’s own daily record, a practice over a century old; strength: strong as heritage; limit: affirmation is always available and section 116 blocks an official religion. *Social*: the 2017 postal survey — evidence: ABS result, 61.6% Yes from a 79.5% response; strength: the law followed within weeks; limit: the survey did not bind Parliament, which still voted. Closing comparison: the social influence did the most deciding-shaping in 2017, the cultural influence runs deepest in the structure, and the religious influence is strongest as heritage and weakest as control.

Teaching notes (teacher-facing)

Teaching sequence (one teaching learning sequence). 1) Open with the streams map; elicit one fact students already know from Chapters 1–3 for each stream. 2) Define *influence* (contested-term box) and stress “shapes, does not control”. 3) Teach the five-step method with the side-column example. 4) Work Example 1 slowly; let students attempt Q1–Q6 in pairs. 5) Work Example 2; Q7–Q12. 6) Set the unscaffolded block (Q13–Q24) for homework or rotation; Q13 and Q15 are the best contested-terms discussions. 7) Q25 as the checked, evidence-based extended response.

Pairing map (Chapter 4 rule: skills exercised on Chapters 1–3 cases, no parallel content stream). Q12/Q19 → 1B’s social media minimum age case (2024 Act, royal assent December 2024). Q14/Q22 → 1C’s institutions and royal assent. Q5/Q6 → 2A’s rule of law. Q20 → 2C’s consumer law case study. Q21 → 2B’s committee submissions. Q10/Q11 → 3A’s secular/pluralist terms work. The two worked case studies are this section’s own CD vehicles (E01 and a neutral contemporary case), not a second content stream.

§2A audit note. VC2HC8S03.E02 (Treaty / Koori Court) is excluded per CONTENT_POLICY Rule 1 and is **not** taught, referenced or substituted anywhere in this section, including these notes. The Christian-heritage elaboration .E01 and neutral influences carry the CD.

Q25 marking guide (12 marks; mark the reasoning, never the side). For each of the three influences (4 marks each): 1 mark naming the institution and the stream; 1 mark a dated fact or figure as evidence; 1 mark explaining how the evidence shows the influence; 1 mark a strength **and** limits judgment. The closing comparison sentence separates the top band where two answers are otherwise equal. A student arguing “the prayer is a weak historical trace” and a student arguing “it is a living influence” both score full marks if each completes the four steps — state this to the class before setting the task, per the contested-terms policy.

Vocabulary note. Student-facing text is held to the Yr7 ceiling. Subject terms defined at first use in this section: *institution*, *influence* (*working definition*), *secular* (*working definition*), *royal assent*, *Hansard*, *submission*, *judgment*, *Westminster*. Proper nouns and the verbatim curriculum block are exempt per WORD_LEVEL_POLICY.

Democratic values and legal principles at work in institutions

Section 4D · Chapter 4 — Skills: investigating and evaluating civics and citizenship issues · Civics and Citizenship 7

Owens: VC2HC8S04 · **Draws on:** VC2HC8S04.E01 · VC2HC8S04.E02 · VC2HC8S04.E03 · VC2HC8S04.E04

Curriculum focus

VC2HC8S04 (Skills — Evaluating democratic institutions and systems)

This is a skills section: it does not teach a new content stream. Every case study below is drawn from the knowledge of Chapters 1–3 (voting systems and institutions from 1A and 1C; courts and the principles of justice from 2A; kinds of lawmaking from 2C; citizenship from 3D) and is used here as material to **evaluate**.

The words we use, and what they mean in this section

The curriculum uses the phrases *democratic values* and *principles of the legal system* without defining them, and people do not always mean the same things by them. So this section states its working meanings up front, and every task here is answerable on these meanings alone.

- **Democratic values** — in this section, the values the book’s values lens names: freedom, fairness, equality, participation, and respect for others. The Australian Government’s own statement of Australian values, used in the citizenship test, is a close public list: it names freedom, democracy, the rule of law and a fair go among its values. Other lists exist; when we say an institution “expresses democratic values” we mean these ones, unless we say otherwise.
 - **Principles of the legal system** — here, the principles of justice taught in Section 2A: **fairness** (both sides heard, in the open, before an independent decision-maker), **equality** (the same law and the same process for everyone), and **access** (people can actually understand and use the law, with help if they need it).
 - **The rule of law** — the idea that everyone, including the government, is under the same public law: laws are made in public, are clear enough to follow, apply equally to all, and can be checked by independent courts. Narrower and wider meanings exist; this is the one used here.
 - **Upper house** — the reviewing house of a parliament: the **Senate** in the Commonwealth Parliament, the **Legislative Council** in the Parliament of Victoria. A **house of review** is a house whose main job is to re-check bills after the lower house has passed them.
 - **Crossbench** — the members of a house who belong to neither the government nor the main opposition group. When no group holds a majority, the crossbench holds the **balance of power**: a law needs some of their votes to pass.
 - **Preferential voting** — the system used for the House of Representatives: voters number every box; if no candidate is the first choice of enough voters, the lowest candidate is taken out and their votes move to next choices, until one candidate has a majority. **Proportional voting** — the system used for the Senate: several winners share the seats, so a group’s share of seats comes out close to its share of the vote.
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Teaching sequence 1 (for teachers) — Naming the lens: from values to institutions

Runs on the May 2025 federal election (the real, dated case from Sections 1A and 1C).

1. **Recall (5–8 min).** Ask the class to name the values from the book’s values lens (freedom, fairness, equality, participation, respect). Then ask: *where do those values live?* Collect institutions on the board (parliament, courts, the voting system, citizenship).
2. **Model the frame (10–12 min).** Put up Figure 4d_evaluation_frame. Work steps 1 and 2 aloud with the Senate. For step 3, read off the evidence in Figure 4d_senate_2025: no group holds the 39 votes a majority needs; the crossbench holds 21 of 76 seats.

3. **First judgement in pairs (10 min).** Pairs complete step 4 with a degree word (fully / mainly / in part / weakly) and one piece of evidence for their degree. Share two or three answers, including ones that disagree. Make the marking rule explicit now: marks are for defined words, evidence on both sides, and a reasoned degree — never for the side chosen.
4. **Steelman check (5 min).** Use Figure 4d_steelman_upper_house: read each side's case and ask which line is the strongest on each side, and what fact would change a mind.

Teaching sequence 2 (for teachers) — Practising the frame on four institutions

Stations built from the four worked case studies below; each station also names the Chapters 1–3 section it practises.

1. **Stations (25–30 min).** Four cards: citizenship (3D), the upper house (1A/1C), courts (2A), lawmaking and the rule of law (2C). At each card, pairs record one way the institution expresses its value or principle **strongly** and one **limit**, using the case-study evidence on the card.
2. **Whole-class share (10 min).** For each station, take one strong and one limiting piece of evidence from different pairs and test them: is each side written in its strongest form? Would a supporter of the other side accept it as their own side's argument?
3. **Assessment link.** The two extended responses at the end of the section are the formal version of the station task; the station records are the students' evidence files for them.

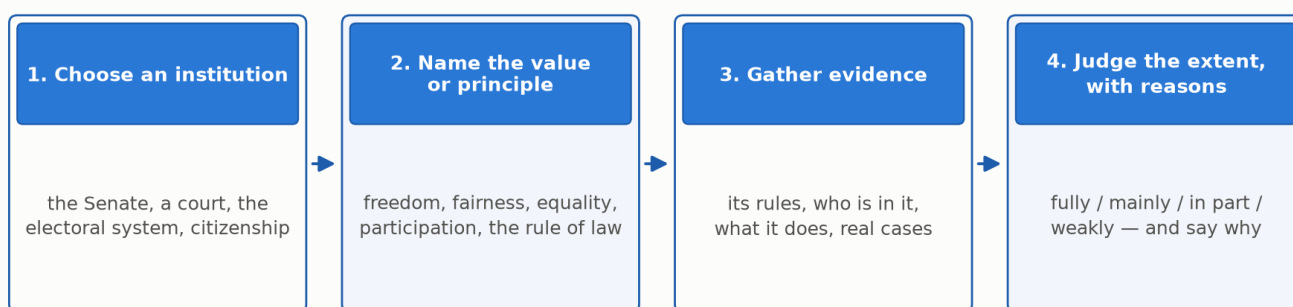
Core ideas — what it means for a value to be “expressed” in an institution

An **institution** is an established part of the system with a public job: a parliament, a court, the electoral system, citizenship. A value or principle is **expressed** in an institution when the institution's rules and its real actions show that value at work. So evaluation is not “is this good or bad?” It is a smaller, sharper question:

To what extent do this institution's rules and actions show this value or principle — and where do they fall short?

That question always has four moves (Figure 4d_evaluation_frame): choose the institution; name the value or principle; gather evidence from its rules, its people and its real cases; then judge **the degree**, with reasons. Degree words do real work here. “The Senate is democratic” is a slogan. “The Senate expresses democracy **mainly** in how votes become seats, but **weakly** in how much one state vote counts compared with another” is an evaluation.

A frame for evaluating how values and principles are expressed



The question is always 'to what extent?'. A good answer gives evidence on BOTH sides before it decides, and marks are given for the reasoning, not for the side chosen.

Four-step flow chart: choose an institution, name the value or principle, gather evidence, judge the extent with reasons

The map below places the four evaluations this section practises. Notice that each institution can express a value strongly in one way and weakly in another — finding both is the task.

The institution	The values and principles it expresses	How it expresses them
Parliament (two houses)	representation · participation · scrutiny	Members are elected by the people. Bills are debated and voted on in public. The house of review checks bills, and committees question how government power is used.
Courts	fairness · equality · the rule of law	Independent judges hear both sides in open court. The same law and process apply to everyone, including the government. Courts can decide a law is invalid when it is against the Constitution.
Electoral system	equality · participation · choice	One person, one vote, and each vote has the same value. Enrolling and voting are required by law, the vote is secret, and the count is run by an independent body, not the government of the day.
Citizenship	belonging · rights and responsibilities · the rule of law	New citizens make a pledge to share Australia's democratic beliefs, respect rights and freedoms, and uphold and obey the law. Most must pass a test on values, government and the law.

An institution can express a value strongly in one way and weakly in another — that is what evaluation looks for.

Table linking four institutions (parliament, courts, electoral system, citizenship) to the democratic values and legal principles each expresses, and how

One more habit, from the achievement standard: ask **who exercises power** in each institution. Power in a house of review sits with the crossbench when no group holds a majority. Power over a law's meaning sits with the courts. Power to make a citizen sits with parliament's law and a public ceremony. Naming who holds power is half of evaluating an institution; the other half is checking the values and principles that power is meant to serve.

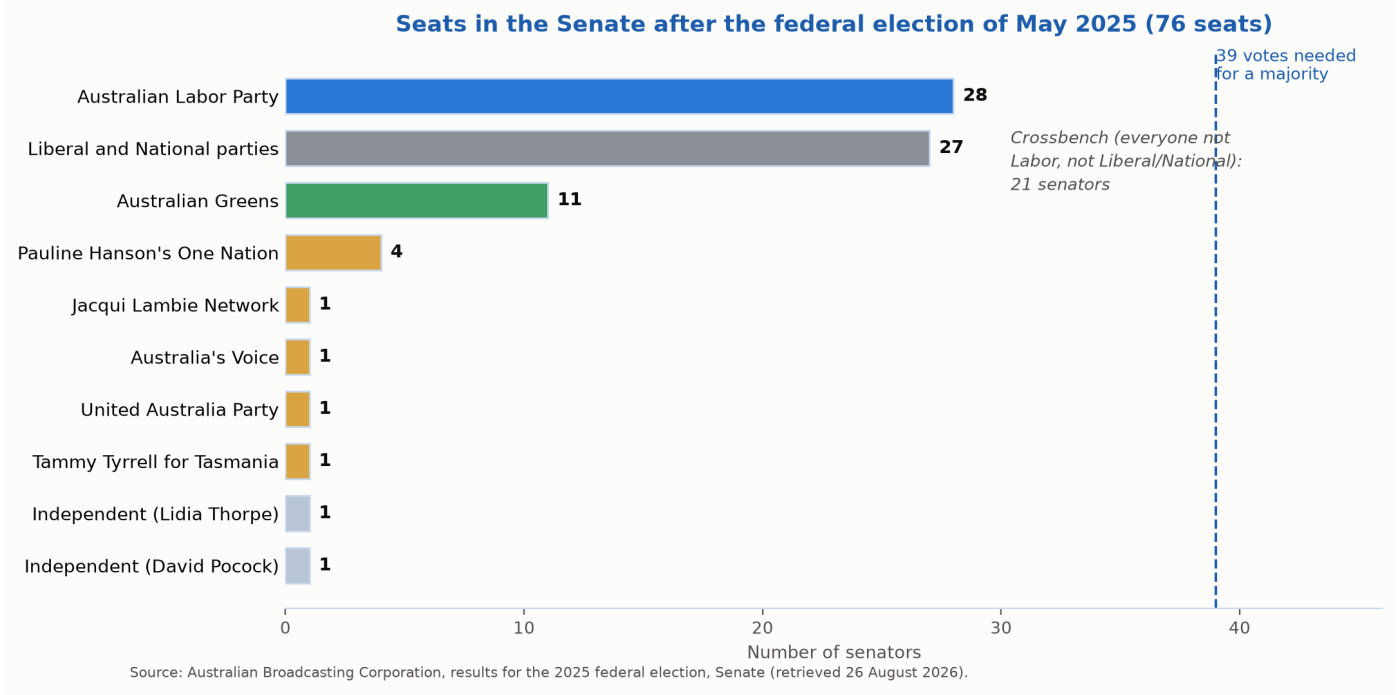
Worked case studies

Case study 1 — The Senate elected in May 2025: how far does an upper house express democracy? (VC2HC8S04.E02)

What happened. At the federal election of 3 May 2025, Australians elected a Senate of 76: 12 senators for each state and 2 for each territory. The result left no group with the 39 votes a majority needs: Labor 28, the Liberal and National parties 27, and a crossbench of 21, led by the Greens with 11. In the House of Representatives on the same day, preferential voting gave Labor 94 of 150 seats and a majority government from 34.6% of the first-preference vote.

Who was involved. Voters; the major parties; small parties and independents; and, once the result settled, a government that must negotiate with the crossbench to pass any law.

The concept it shows. Two voting systems, two pictures of the same election. Preferential voting in the House produces a majority to govern; proportional voting in the Senate produces a house of review where seats follow the share of the vote much more closely, and where the balance of power usually sits with the crossbench. That is exactly the tension the curriculum example asks us to analyse: an upper house can represent the *votes* of the country well and the *voters* of the country unequally at the same time.



Bar chart of Senate seats after the May 2025 federal election: Labor 28, Liberal and National parties 27, Greens 11, One Nation 4, smaller parties and independents making a 21-member crossbench, with the 39-vote majority line marked

	House of Representatives	Senate
Members	150 members, each elected for one electoral division	76 senators: 12 for each state, 2 for each territory
How they are elected	Preferential voting; the candidate with enough votes wins the one seat	Proportional voting; several senators win seats in line with their share of the vote
What each house represents	Local areas — divisions are drawn to hold close to equal numbers of voters	The states equally — Tasmania and Victoria each return 12 senators, whatever their population
Result of the May 2025 election	Labor 94 seats, Liberal and National parties 43, crossbench 13 — one party holds a majority	Labor 28, Liberal and National parties 27, crossbench 21 — no group holds a majority on its own
Main jobs	Make laws; the party or group with majority support forms the government	Review bills, question the government, and act as the states' house

The same votes, counted by two different systems, produce two very different results.

Comparison table of the House of Representatives and the Senate: members, voting systems, what each represents, the 2025 results and main jobs

Worked evaluation. *Strongly:* the Greens won 11.7% of the Senate vote and hold 11 of 76 seats (14.5%) — close to their share; with 21 crossbenchers, small voices hold real power and the government must give reasons, not orders.

Weakly: Tasmania’s 12 senators represent about 0.6 million people while Victoria’s 12 represent about 6.9 million, so one Tasmanian’s Senate vote counts for roughly eleven Victorians’; and the government the people elected controls neither house’s timetable on its own. *Degree*: the Senate expresses democracy **mainly** in how votes become seats and power is shared, and **weakly** in the equal value of each voter — a house designed to represent states as well as people.

Does the Senate express democracy? The strongest case on each side		
The test question	Strongest case FOR: the Senate expresses democracy well	Strongest case AGAINST: the Senate expresses democracy less well
Whose votes show up in the room?	Proportional voting means seats follow votes closely: the Greens won 11.7% of the Senate vote in 2025 and hold 11 of 76 seats.	Every state gets 12 senators whatever its population: Tasmania (about 0.6 million people) has the same Senate power as Victoria (about 6.9 million).
Are small voices heard?	In 2025 the crossbench holds 21 of 76 seats, so the government must listen to and negotiate with smaller parties and independents.	Because seats are shared by states, one Tasmanian voter's Senate vote has much more weight than one Victorian's — votes are not equal in value.
What does the house do with power?	As a house of review it questions the government, runs inquiries and improves or stops bills — power is checked, not concentrated.	The government of the day almost never controls the Senate, so bills can be delayed or blocked even after the people have elected a government.
Each side is written as its own supporters would put it. Your task is to weigh the evidence — marks are given for the quality of the reasoning, not the side chosen.		

Steelman table of the strongest arguments for and against the claim that the Senate represents democracy well

Sources: Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2025 federal election results (Senate and House of Representatives), [abc.net.au](https://www.abc.net.au) (retrieved 26 August 2026); Wikipedia, “Results of the 2025 Australian federal election (Senate)” and “(House of Representatives)” (retrieved 26 August 2026).

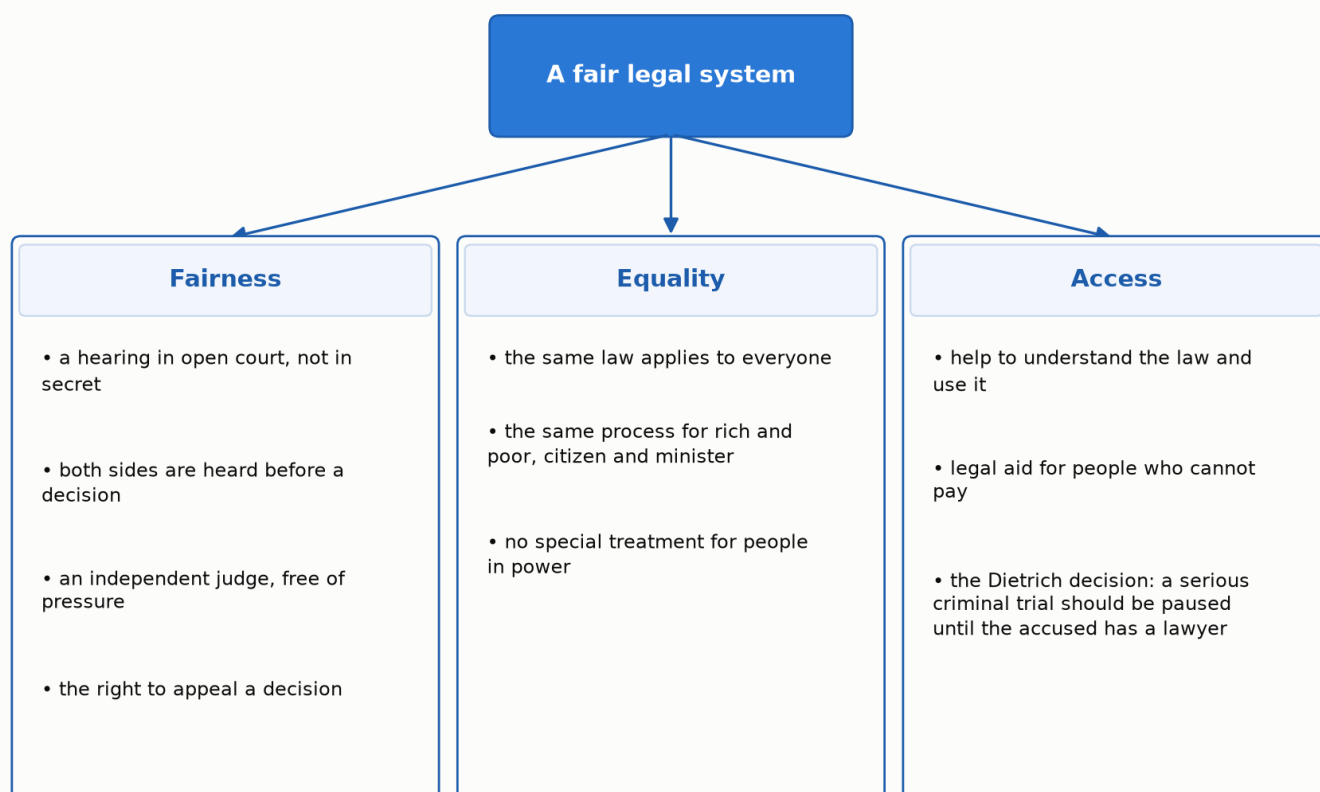
Case study 2 — Dietrich v The Queen (1992): courts and the principles of justice (VC2HC8S04 . E03)

What happened. In December 1986 a man flew from Bangkok to Melbourne with heroin hidden in his body. Charged with a serious drug offence, he asked for legal aid and was refused. He ran his own case in a Victorian county court and was found guilty. On 13 November 1992 the High Court of Australia decided, by five judges to two, that where a person facing a serious charge cannot get a lawyer through no fault of their own, the trial should ordinarily be paused until a lawyer is available — and a verdict from an unfair trial must be set aside. (*Dietrich v The Queen* [1992] HCA 57; (1992) 177 CLR 292.)

Who was involved. The accused; the courts, up to the High Court; and the legal aid systems the decision put under pressure (the High Court did not order governments to pay for lawyers, but made it hard to run serious trials without them).

The concept it shows. The principles of justice are not wishes; courts build them into the process. *Dietrich* is the principle of **access** doing real work: a trial without a lawyer for a serious charge was treated as a trial that may not be fair at all. The same case leans on **fairness** (both sides fully heard, in the open, before an independent bench) and on **equality** (the process must work the same for someone without money as for someone with it).

The three principles of justice courts try to uphold



In Dietrich v The Queen (1992) the High Court used the principle of access to protect the fairness of serious criminal trials.

Labelled diagram of the three principles of justice — fairness, equality, access — with the court features that serve each one

Worked evaluation. *Strongly:* open courts, independent judges, the right to appeal, and a rule like *Dietrich* put the principles into the process itself; legal aid bodies exist to make access real. *Weakly:* help depends on funding and on passing a means check; cost and delay still keep some people from using the law as fully as others. *Degree:* courts express the principles of justice **mainly** — the principles are enforced as rules, but access is only as strong as the help a community pays for.

Sources: High Court of Australia, Dietrich v The Queen [1992] HCA 57, via AustLII; Wikipedia, “Dietrich v The Queen” (retrieved 26 August 2026).

Case study 3 — Australian citizenship: does formal citizenship uphold democratic values? (VC2HC8S04.E01)

What happened — and what it is. Citizenship is the formal legal membership of Australia. Most adults become citizens by a public path: live in Australia lawfully (four years, including 12 months as a permanent resident), meet a good-character check, pass a test of 20 questions (pass mark 75%, and **all five** questions on Australian values must be correct), then make the pledge at a ceremony in the community:

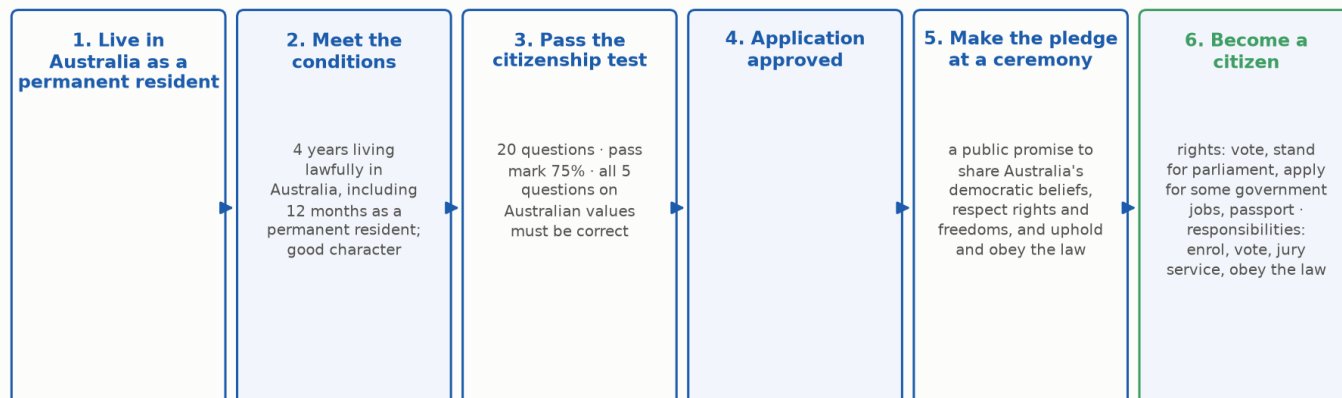
From this time forward, *under God*, I pledge my loyalty to Australia and its people, whose democratic beliefs I share, whose rights and liberties I respect, and whose laws I will uphold and obey.

(The pledge may also be made without the words “under God”.) Citizenship then carries rights — to vote, to stand for parliament, to hold an Australian passport — and responsibilities: to enrol and vote, to serve on a jury if called, to obey the law.

Who is involved. Permanent residents becoming citizens; the communities that host the ceremonies; and the parliament that sets the test and the pledge by law.

The concept it shows. Formal citizenship is a promise in both directions. The state gives rights that express participation and equality; the new citizen pledges respect for democratic beliefs, rights and the rule of law. The test makes the values explicit: a would-be citizen must show they know Australia's values, its system of government and its law. Whether that formal path *upholds* the values as well as it *names* them is the evaluation the curriculum example asks for.

The path to Australian citizenship (for most adults)



Citizens aged under 60 are usually required to pass the test. Citizenship is made at a ceremony in the community, not quietly in an office.

Six-step flow chart of the path to Australian citizenship: permanent resident, conditions, citizenship test with the five values questions, approval, pledge at a ceremony, and the rights and responsibilities of a citizen

Worked evaluation. *Strongly:* the pledge names the values in public; the test checks them; the rights that follow (above all, the vote) put participation into law, and enrolment and voting are required of citizens, so participation is shared, not left to the keen. *Weakly:* long-settled permanent residents pay taxes and obey the laws yet have no federal vote; a test is a check of knowledge, not of commitment, and can sit harder on some applicants than others. *Degree:* formal citizenship upholds democratic values **mainly** in the rights and responsibilities it creates, and **in part** only in who it keeps outside the formal promise.

Sources: Department of Home Affairs, Australian citizenship test and citizenship ceremony pages, homeaffairs.gov.au; Wikipedia, “Australian citizenship test” (retrieved 26 August 2026).

Case study 4 — The rule of law between courts and parliaments: 1951 and 2023 (VC2HC8S04.E04)

Two real cases, seventy-two years apart.

- **1951.** A new law of 1950 banned the Communist Party of Australia and let the government declare groups and people linked to it. The High Court, six judges to one, decided the Act was invalid: the Constitution does not give the Commonwealth that power, and a parliament cannot recite a power into existence (*Australian Communist Party v Commonwealth* [1951] HCA 5; (1951) 83 CLR 1). Justice Fullagar gave the line every rule-of-law essay borrows: “a stream cannot rise higher than its source.” Later that year, on 22 September 1951, voters refused a referendum that would have given the Commonwealth the power (No 50.56%).
- **2023.** NZYQ, a stateless man from Myanmar who arrived by boat in 2012, had been held in immigration detention with no end in sight because no country would take him. In November 2023 the High Court decided that detention with no real prospect of removal is not lawful (*NZYQ v Minister for Immigration* [2023] HCA 37), overturning a 2004 decision that had allowed it; 149 men had to be released. Parliament answered with new laws imposing strict visa conditions — monitoring and curfews backed by prison terms — and in 2025 the High Court struck parts of those conditions down as well.

The concept it shows. The rule of law underpins **every kind of lawmaking**, and it is what courts and parliaments are to each other:

- parliament makes Acts in public debate and vote;

- courts apply those Acts in real cases and make the common law in reasoned, published decisions;
- the High Court can decide that an Act is against the Constitution and therefore invalid;
- parliament can answer a court's decision by making a new law — within the Constitution's limits, which the courts check again.

No one in the loop is above the law: not the ministers of 1951, not the detention system of 2023, not the parliament that tried to write its own power into being.

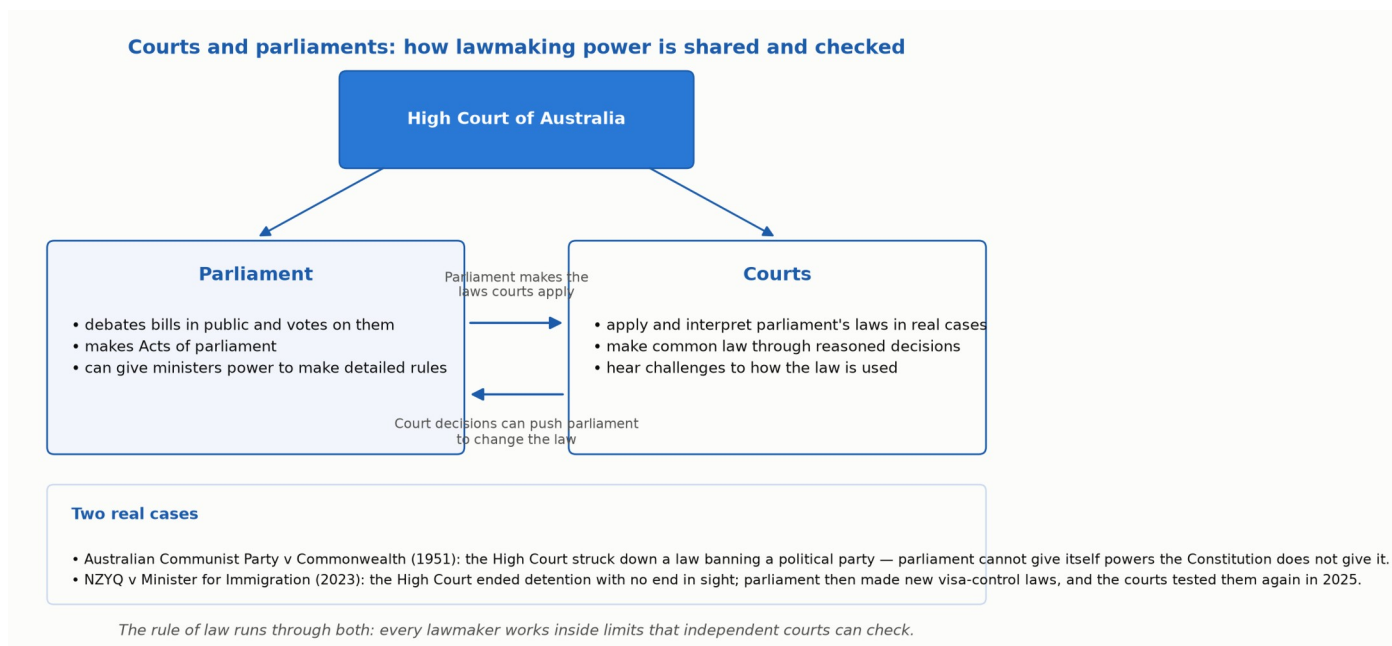


Diagram of the two-way relationship between parliaments and courts, with the High Court's power to invalidate laws that are against the Constitution, and the Communist Party case of 1951 and NZYQ of 2023 as worked examples

The rule of law applied to the three chief kinds of lawmaking

The rule-of-law test	Laws made by parliament (Acts)	Laws made by courts (common law)	Rules made by ministers (under an Act's authority)
Is the law public, known and clear?	Debated in public, voted on, and published for everyone to read	Reasons are given in open court and published	Must be published; must stay inside the power the Act gives
Does it apply to everyone, including those in power?	Ministers and MPs must obey the same Acts as everyone else	Judges too are under the law; their decisions can be appealed	A minister who acts outside the Act's limits can be challenged in court
Can it be changed only by a lawful process?	Changed only by a new vote of parliament	Changed on appeal by a higher court, or by parliament making a new Act	Parliament can cancel or change the power it gave
Is there an independent check?	The High Court can decide an Act is invalid if it is against the Constitution	Courts are independent of parliament and government	Courts can test the rules; parliament's committees review them

Whatever the kind of lawmaking, the rule of law demands the same things: public, equal, changeable only by process, and checked by independent courts.

Table applying four rule-of-law tests (public and clear, applies to everyone, changeable only by lawful process, independently checked) to laws made by parliament, by courts, and by ministers

Worked evaluation. *Strongly:* lawmaking in Australia stays inside public, checkable limits — Acts are debated and published, common law is reasoned in the open, and two High Court cases show the check working on parliament

itself. *Weakly*: the 2023–25 loop also shows how hard the edges are to run in practice: parliament responded to a court decision with fast laws that courts then had to pull back, and people’s lives sat in the gap. *Degree*: the rule of law is expressed **fully** as a structure — every kind of lawmaking has a public process and an independent check — and **mainly** in practice, where speed and fear test it.

Sources: High Court of Australia judgments via AustLII — Australian Communist Party v Commonwealth [1951] HCA 5; NZYQ v Minister for Immigration [2023] HCA 37; Wikipedia, “Australian Communist Party v Commonwealth”, “NZYQ v Minister for Immigration” and “Group voting ticket” (retrieved 26 August 2026).

Tasks

Scaffolded

Q1. Look at Figure 4d_senate_2025. (a) Write the number of senators held by Labor, by the Liberal and National parties, and by the crossbench altogether. (b) Check that your three numbers add to 76. (c) How many more votes than Labor’s 28 does a majority of 39 need?

Q2. Copy the table and fill the middle column using the word bank.

Value or principle	A Senate feature that expresses it
participation	
fairness (scrutiny)	
equality of states	

Word bank: every state returns 12 senators · the house of review re-checks every bill · all senators are elected by the people’s vote.

Q3. Finish these two sentences about the Senate, one for each side, using Figure 4d_steelman_upper_house.

- The Senate expresses democracy well because...
- The Senate expresses democracy less well because...

Q4. Put the steps of Figure 4d_citizenship_path in order by numbering them, then answer: which step checks that a would-be citizen knows Australia’s values, and how strict is that check?

Q5. Match each term to its meaning by drawing lines: rule of law · upper house · house of review · crossbench · balance of power · proportional voting.

Term	Meaning
rule of law	the power to decide a law’s fate when no group holds a majority
upper house	everyone, including the government, is under the same public law
house of review	the reviewing house of a parliament, such as the Senate
crossbench	seats shared so a group’s seats come out close to its share of the vote
balance of power	members who are not in the government or the main opposition group
proportional voting	a house whose main job is to re-check bills

Q6. Use Figure 4d_values_map. Choose one institution and one value from the map and complete the sentence starter: “The _____ expresses _____ by _____.”

Q7. Read the *Dietrich* case study. Label each fact below **fairness**, **equality** or **access** (a fact may earn two labels): (a) the case was heard in open court; (b) a person without money was to get the same protection as a person with it; (c)

the trial should have been paused until a lawyer was available; (d) both sides had to be heard before the judges decided.

Q8. Figure 4d_courts_parliament shows arrows in both directions between parliament and the courts. Using the word bank, label arrow A (parliament → courts) and arrow B (courts → parliament).

Word bank: makes the laws the courts apply · can push parliament to change the law.

Q9. The maths of representation, May 2025. Labor won 35.1% of the Senate vote and 28 of 76 Senate seats; it won 34.6% of the House first-preference vote and 94 of 150 House seats. (a) Work out each share of seats as a percentage (to one decimal place). (b) In which house is a party's share of seats closer to its share of the vote? (c) Which voting system produces that closeness?

Q10. A claim says: "An upper house elected by proportional voting must be the more democratic house." Before answering it, list two things the claim assumes (for example, about what "democratic" should mean). Which assumption would you test first, and why?

Q11. True or false? Correct the false ones into true sentences about the rule of law. (a) The rule of law means the government must follow the same law as everyone else. (b) A parliament can give itself any power it likes by saying so in an Act. (c) The common law is made in secret by judges. (d) An independent court can check how a minister uses a power an Act gives them.

Q12. Number these events from Case study 4 in order (1–6): the High Court ends detention with no end in sight · NZYQ arrives by boat · parliament makes strict new visa-condition laws · NZYQ is held in immigration detention · the High Court strikes parts of the new conditions down · 149 people are released.

Unscaffolded

Q13. Compulsory voting requires Australian citizens to enrol and vote, with a small fine for no-shows. Evaluate the claim: "Compulsory voting expresses the democratic value of participation." Give the strongest case you can for each side before your reasoned degree.

Q14. Using the 2025 results in Figure 4d_houses_compared, which house of the Commonwealth Parliament gives the better expression to the value *one vote, one value*? Argue your answer with the numbers, and name the value the other house expresses instead.

Q15. Explain, with one example from Case study 1, how the Senate's work as a house of review expresses a democratic value. Then give one way the same feature can work against the value of participation.

Q16. "The citizenship test is a fair way to welcome new citizens." Steelman both sides — write each as its strongest supporter would — then reach your own reasoned judgement.

Q17. Ministers and their departments make detailed rules under the authority of an Act (for example, rules about visas or road safety). Using Figure 4d_rule_of_law_checks, explain two ways that kind of lawmaking is kept inside the rule of law.

Q18. A friend says: "Courts cannot express democratic values, because judges are not elected." Give the claim its strongest form first — then evaluate it, using at least one principle of justice from Case study 2.

Q19. Using Case study 4, explain this sentence in your own words: "A court's decision can change what a parliament does, and a parliament can answer a court with a new law — and the rule of law is what keeps that loop honest."

Q20. Compare the Commonwealth Senate (12 senators per state, proportional voting, no party preference tickets since 2016) with the Victorian Legislative Council (40 members from eight regions of five, proportional voting; at its 2022 election, voters could still vote 1 above the line and let a party ticket direct their preferences). Which upper house expressed the value of voter control more strongly at that time? Justify your choice.

Q21. Pick one value from Figure 4d_values_map. Argue that your chosen institution expresses it *in part* only: name the strongest evidence for, and the strongest limit.

Q22. The pledge promises that a citizen will “uphold and obey” the law. Explain how that promise connects to the rule of law, and what a citizen who thinks a law is unjust can lawfully do about it (draw on the participation channels of Chapter 2’s lawmaking sections).

Q23. Access to justice: is it stronger in criminal matters or in civil ones? Use *Dietrich* and what you know of legal aid to argue one side, then state the best counter argument you can find.

Q24. You will interview a senator about how the Senate expresses democratic values. Write three questions that each test a *different* part of the claim (its rules · its members · what it does), and one sentence each on what answer would count as evidence for, and evidence against.

Extended responses

ER1. “Australian institutions express democratic values and legal principles strongly enough that citizens can trust them.” Evaluate this claim using **at least two** institutions studied in this section (for example: the Senate, the courts, citizenship, the electoral system). 300–400 words. Your response must define the value or principle you test, give evidence on both sides, and end with a reasoned degree (fully / mainly / in part / weakly). *Marking: marks are awarded for the reasoning steps — words defined, assumptions surfaced, both sides in their strongest form, evidence given, limits acknowledged, degree judged — never for the side you choose.*

ER2. “The rule of law shapes every kind of lawmaking in Australia.” Using the three kinds of lawmaking in Figure 4d_rule_of_law_checks and at least one case from Case study 4, explain and evaluate this claim. 300–400 words. Same marking rule as ER1.

Answers and marking points

Q1. (a) Labor 28; Liberal and National parties 27; crossbench 21 (Greens 11, One Nation 4, five single members). (b) $28 + 27 + 21 = 76$. (c) $39 - 28 = 11$ more votes.

Q2. participation — all senators are elected by the people's vote; fairness (scrutiny) — the house of review re-checks every bill; equality of states — every state returns 12 senators.

Q3. Accept any pair that uses the figure honestly; for example: "...because seats follow the share of the vote and the crossbench makes the government negotiate" / "...because one Tasmanian's vote weighs about eleven Victorians'."

Q4. Order: permanent resident → conditions → test → approval → pledge at ceremony → citizen. The test step; strict: 75% overall **and** all five values questions correct.

Q5. rule of law — everyone, including the government, is under the same public law; upper house — the reviewing house of a parliament; house of review — a house whose main job is to re-check bills; crossbench — members not in the government or main opposition group; balance of power — the power to decide a law's fate when no group holds a majority; proportional voting — seats shared close to a group's share of the vote.

Q6. Accept any map-faithful triple; for example: "The courts express equality by applying the same law and process to everyone, including ministers."

Q7. (a) fairness; (b) equality (and access); (c) access (and fairness); (d) fairness.

Q8. A — makes the laws the courts apply; B — can push parliament to change the law.

Q9. (a) Senate $28/76 = 36.8\%$; House $94/150 = 62.7\%$. (b) The Senate (36.8% is close to 35.1%; 62.7% is far from 34.6%). (c) Proportional voting.

Q10. Accept any two surfaced assumptions, e.g. that "democratic" means votes matching seats (not states), and that matching seats is what matters most. The testing choice must be reasoned.

Q11. (a) True. (b) False — a parliament cannot give itself powers the Constitution does not give (*Communist Party case*). (c) False — the common law is made in reasoned, published decisions in open court. (d) True.

Q12. NZYQ arrives by boat (1) → is held in immigration detention (2) → the High Court ends detention with no end in sight (3) → 149 people are released (4) → parliament makes strict new visa-condition laws (5) → the High Court strikes parts of the new conditions down (6).

Q13–Q24. Marking points, not model texts. Look for: the value or principle named and defined (Q13 participation; Q14 equality of votes vs the states' equality; Q15 scrutiny vs timely participation; Q16 fairness as equal treatment vs as a shared-values check; Q17 published rules, limits in the Act, court checks, committee review; Q18 the unelected-judge claim in its strongest form met with fairness/equality/access; Q19 both arrows of the loop plus the independent check; Q20 voter control vs party tickets, dated 2016 and 2022; Q21 a strong-for and a strong-against drawn from the map; Q22 the pledge as a rule-of-law promise plus lawful channels — petitions, submissions, protest, voting; Q23 *Dietrich* as a criminal safeguard weighed against civil legal aid limits; Q24 three questions testing rules, members and actions, each with a for-and-against evidence test). Every task awards marks for reasoning steps; two students on opposite sides can both earn full marks.

Model extended responses

Model ER1 (one possible full-mark shape; the marking guide, not the conclusion, is what earns the marks).

In this response, *democratic values* means freedom, fairness, equality, participation and respect for others, and *principles of the legal system* means fairness, equality and access before the law. I test two institutions: the courts and the Senate.

The courts express the principles of justice mainly. In *Dietrich v The Queen* (1992), the High Court paused the idea of a serious trial without a lawyer: access was enforced as a rule, not left as a hope. Open courts, independent judges and appeals do the same for fairness and equality, and the same law binds ministers and

citizens. The limit is real: legal aid is rationed by money, so access is strongest where a community pays for it.

The Senate expresses democratic values mainly in one way and in part in another. Its proportional voting matched seats to votes closely in 2025 — the Greens' 11.7% of the vote became 11 of 76 seats — and its 21-member crossbench means power must be shared and reasons given. But 12 senators for Tasmania and 12 for Victoria make one voter's Senate vote worth about eleven of another's, so the value of equal votes is expressed weakly.

Weighing both: the institutions express these values and principles strongly enough to be trusted **mainly**, not fully — trust is earned in the parts where the evidence is strongest (open courts, shared power) and is rightly questioned where it is weakest (equal vote value, funded access).

Model ER2 (same marking rule).

The *rule of law* here means: public, clear laws; the same law for everyone including the government; change only by lawful process; and checks by independent courts. I test it across the three kinds of lawmaking.

Acts of parliament are debated and voted on in public and published; ministers and MPs obey them too; and the High Court can hold an Act invalid — in 1951 it did exactly that to the Act banning the Communist Party, because parliament cannot recite a power into being. Common law is made in reasoned decisions in open court, can be appealed, and parliament may change it by a new Act. Minister-made rules must stay inside the power the Act gives, are published, and can be challenged in court and reviewed by committees.

The loop of 2023–25 tests the claim. NZYQ ended detention with no end in sight; parliament answered with strict visa-condition laws; the courts struck parts of them down in 2025. Each branch stayed inside the loop and let the others check it — which is the rule of law working — yet the speed of the parliament's answer shows how far fear can stretch the process.

Judgement: the rule of law shapes every kind of lawmaking **fully** as a structure and **mainly** in practice; the structure held, and the practice was tested.

Sources (all retrieved 26 August 2026)

- Victorian Curriculum F–10 Version 2.0, Civics and Citizenship, Levels 7 and 8 band: content description VC2HC8S04 and its four elaborations, cited by code (the wording is the VCAA's; read it in the Victorian Curriculum F–10 Version 2.0).
- Australian Broadcasting Corporation, results pages for the 2025 federal election (Senate and House of Representatives), [abc.net.au](https://www.abc.net.au).
- Wikipedia: “Results of the 2025 Australian federal election (Senate)”; “Results of the 2025 Australian federal election (House of Representatives)”; “Senate of Australia”; “Group voting ticket”; “Victorian Legislative Council”; “Australian citizenship test”; “Dietrich v The Queen”; “Australian Communist Party v Commonwealth”; “NZYQ v Minister for Immigration”.
- High Court of Australia judgments via AustLII: *Dietrich v The Queen* [1992] HCA 57; *Australian Communist Party v Commonwealth* [1951] HCA 5; *NZYQ v Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs* [2023] HCA 37.
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Who holds power: Westminster and the separation of powers

Civics and Citizenship 7 · Chapter 4 — Skills: investigating and evaluating civics and citizenship issues · Section 4E

This section’s content description — VC2HC8S05.

Elaborations drawn on: .E01 · .E02

Where this section sits: Section 1A taught you how elections form a government. Section 1C taught you the three branches of government, the separation of powers, and the key political actors. Section 4E is a **skills** section: it takes that knowledge and turns it into one skill — *explaining how political actors use power, and how far that power is checked*. Every task here is answered with evidence from real, checkable Australian cases.

The teaching sequence (for the teacher)

Section 4E is Chapter 4’s power-lens evaluation section (4D evaluates democratic values and legal principles; 4E evaluates power). It is exercised on the book’s running cases, not taught as new content. Plan roughly two lessons.

1. **Hook — “Who is the most powerful person in Australia?” (10 min).** Take three answers from the room (most students will name the Prime Minister). Hold the question open for the whole section; the closing exit task returns to it.
2. **Two systems, one government (15 min).** Use Figure 1 to recall Section 1C’s separation of powers, then layer the Westminster practice on top. Land the definition of *convention* and Constitution section 64 as the place where the two designs touch.
3. **Choosing Australia’s Prime Minister (15 min).** Walk Figure 2 with the 3 May 2025 election, then the four leadership spills of 2010–2018. The key move is noticing that no ballot paper names the Prime Minister.
4. **Two worked cases (25 min).** Case Study 1 (1950–51) shows two checks stopping a government; Case Study 2 (2024) shows checks *slowing and questioning* a government without stopping it. The contrast between “stopped” and “slowed” is the heart of the “degree” question in elaboration .E01.
5. **Steelman debate (20 min).** Split the room; each side argues Figure 8’s position in its strongest form, then swaps. Mark reasoning, never the side reached.
6. **Writing with the four-step model (20 min).** Students answer one unscaffolded task using Figure 9, then the exit task re-answers the hook question in three sentences with one named case as evidence.

Misconceptions to expect. (a) “Australians vote for the Prime Minister” — Figure 2 exists to fix this. (b) “Separation of powers means the branches never mix” — section 64 says Ministers must sit in Parliament; the mix is the Westminster part. (c) “A check that fails is not a check” — in Case Study 2 every check worked even though the law passed; a check is a limit, not a veto.

Pairing note. Case Study 1 doubles as Section 2A’s court case; Case Study 2 doubles as Section 2B’s committee-inquiry case. Teach each once, reuse across skills sections.

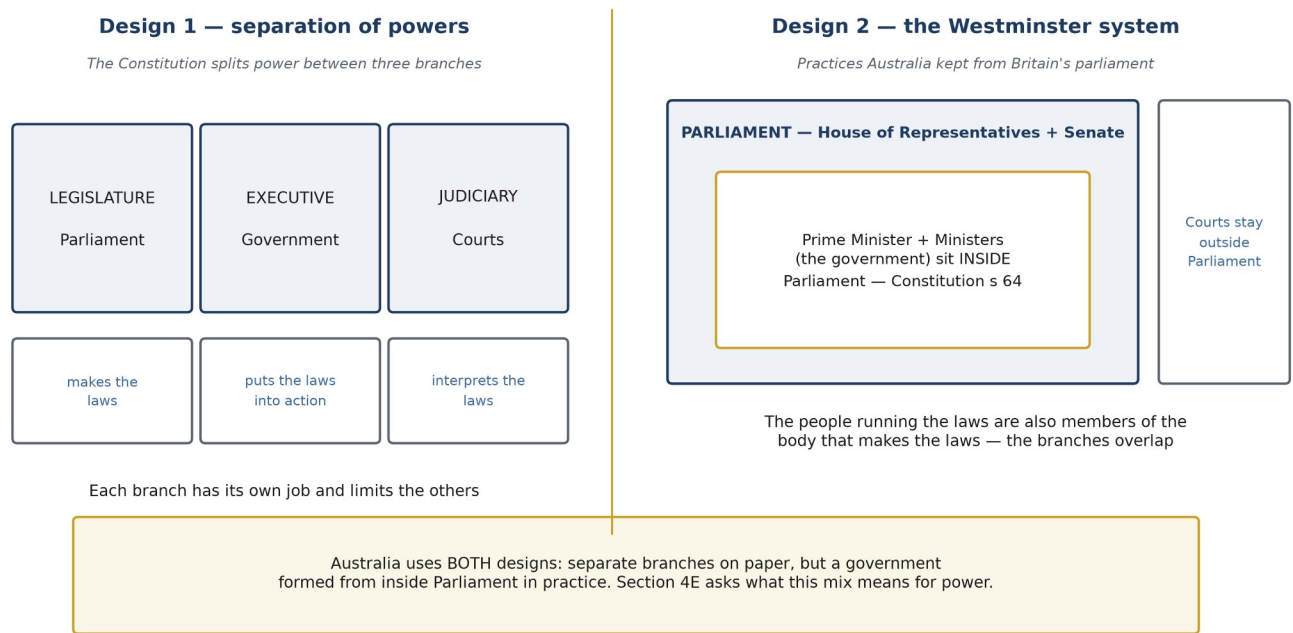
Key ideas

What “power” means in this section

The Victorian Curriculum uses the word *power* in this content description but does not define it. This section therefore treats it as: **the ability of a person, a group or an institution to make decisions about how Australia is run, to carry those decisions out, or to stop or change someone else’s decisions**. Every question in this section is answerable on that definition alone. Other definitions exist — power can also mean money, fame or force — and this section is not using those senses. *Power* in that definition is a **contested** idea: whether someone “has power” can change depending on which of the three abilities (make, carry out, stop) you look at. That is exactly why the section keeps asking *how far*, not just *who*.

Two systems share one government

Two systems share one government



A labelled two-panel diagram. Left panel: the separation of powers as three separate boxes — legislature (Parliament) makes the laws, executive (government) puts the laws into action, judiciary (courts) interprets the laws. Right panel: the Westminster system as a large Parliament box with the Prime Minister and Ministers sitting inside it, and the courts staying outside. A footer notes that Australia uses both designs.

Australia's system of government is two designs layered on top of each other.

- **Design 1 — the separation of powers.** The Australian Constitution splits the Commonwealth's government work between three branches: the **Parliament** (Chapter I) makes the laws — this branch is also called the **legislature**; the **executive government** (Chapter II) puts the laws into action — also called the **executive**; and the **courts** (Chapter III), topped by the High Court, interpret the laws — also called the **judiciary**. You met this in Section 1C. *Separation of powers* here means: each branch has its own job, and each branch can limit the others.
- **Design 2 — the Westminster system.** The Victorian Curriculum names the *Westminster system* in elaboration .E01 but does not define it, so this section treats it as: **the set of practices Australia's system kept from the parliament of the United Kingdom, whose home is the Palace of Westminster in London — above all, the practice that the government is formed by the party or group with the most support in the lower house, and that its ministers sit inside the Parliament while they govern.** Every question here is answerable on that definition alone.

The two designs pull in opposite directions. The separation of powers wants the branches kept apart; the Westminster system puts the executive **inside** the legislature. The Constitution itself joins them: **section 64** says a Minister must be, or become within three months, a senator or a member of the House of Representatives. So in Australia the executive and the legislature overlap **by design**, while the judiciary stays separate.

Three more Westminster words do heavy lifting in this section (all collected in the key terms table at the end):

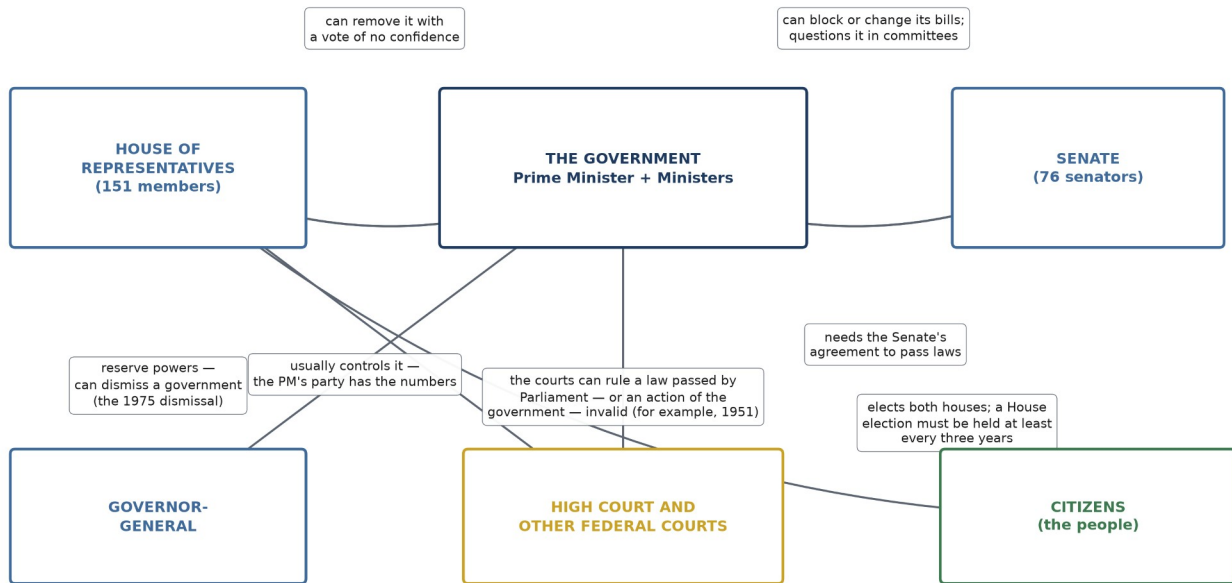
- **responsible government** — the government must keep the support of a majority of the House of Representatives, or resign, or call an election;
- **confidence** — that support of the majority of the lower house;
- **convention** — an unwritten rule that everyone follows even though no law writes it down. The Prime Minister's whole job is a convention: the Constitution never names the office.

Checks and balances: the “how far” question

Checks and balances is also used by the curriculum without a definition. This section treats it as: **the ways each part of the system can limit the power of the other parts, so that no single person or group gets power it cannot lose.** A check can be strong (it stops a decision, like a court ruling a law invalid) or soft (it slows, questions or changes a decision, like a committee inquiry). The skill in elaboration .E01 is judging the **degree** — how far the checks actually bite — not just listing them.

The web of checks and balances

Arrows show who can check whom — labels give one way each check works



A web diagram with six labelled boxes — the government, the House of Representatives, the Senate, the High Court, the Governor-General and the citizens — joined by arrows showing who can check whom: the House can remove the government with a vote of no confidence; the Senate can block or change bills; the courts can rule laws or actions invalid; the Governor-General holds reserve powers such as the 1975 dismissal; citizens elect both houses at least every three years.

Read the web in both directions. For every arrow **towards** the government there is an arrow **away** from it: the House can remove the government, but a government with a majority usually controls the House through party discipline. That two-way pull is what “balance” means — and noticing where the pull is unequal is the evaluation skill.

How Australia gets a Prime Minister — the 2025 election



A five-step flow chart built on the 3 May 2025 federal election: Australians vote for their local member; 151 members take their seats in the House of Representatives; Labor wins 94 of the 151 seats, a majority; Labor's leader Anthony Albanese can command the support of the House; the Governor-General appoints him Prime Minister. A side panel states that no ballot paper asks who should be Prime Minister.

The most important fact in this figure is the one students most often get wrong: **no Australian votes directly for the Prime Minister**. Voters elect their local member of the House of Representatives (the local area each voter belongs to is called an **electorate**). The party that can win the support of a majority of those 151 members forms the government, and its leader is appointed as Prime Minister by the Governor-General — a convention, not a written law. At the federal election of **Saturday 3 May 2025**, the Australian Labor Party won 94 of the 151 seats (more than the 76 needed for a majority), so its leader, **Anthony Albanese**, was sworn in for a second term as Prime Minister.

Because the PM's power comes from the party room as much as from the voters, a Prime Minister can lose the job **without an election**. Four did, in eight years: **Kevin Rudd (2010)**, **Julia Gillard (2013)**, **Tony Abbott (2015)** and **Malcolm Turnbull (2018)** each left office when their own party's members chose a new leader. Only Rudd later led his party into a federal election — he won back the leadership in 2013 and then lost that election. Gillard, Abbott and Turnbull never led their party into another federal election. The ballot that ends a Prime Minister's term is usually a party-room ballot of a few dozen MPs and senators — not a national vote of millions.

How much power does the Prime Minister have?

What can the Prime Minister do — and who can check it?

A power of the Prime Minister	Who or what can check it
Chooses the Ministers and chairs Cabinet, the government's main decision-making group	Their own party can ballot for a new leader at any time — that is how four PMs left office, 2010-2018
Decides what the government will work on and which bills are sent to Parliament	Parliament can change or reject any bill; the Senate can block bills the government wants
Advises the Governor-General on when to hold a federal election	A House of Representatives election must be held at least every three years — and voters decide who wins
Speaks for Australia at home and overseas	The Opposition, the media and citizens can question the PM — including at Question Time in Parliament
Is the public face of their party's policy	If the House of Representatives passes a vote of no confidence, the government is expected to resign or call an election

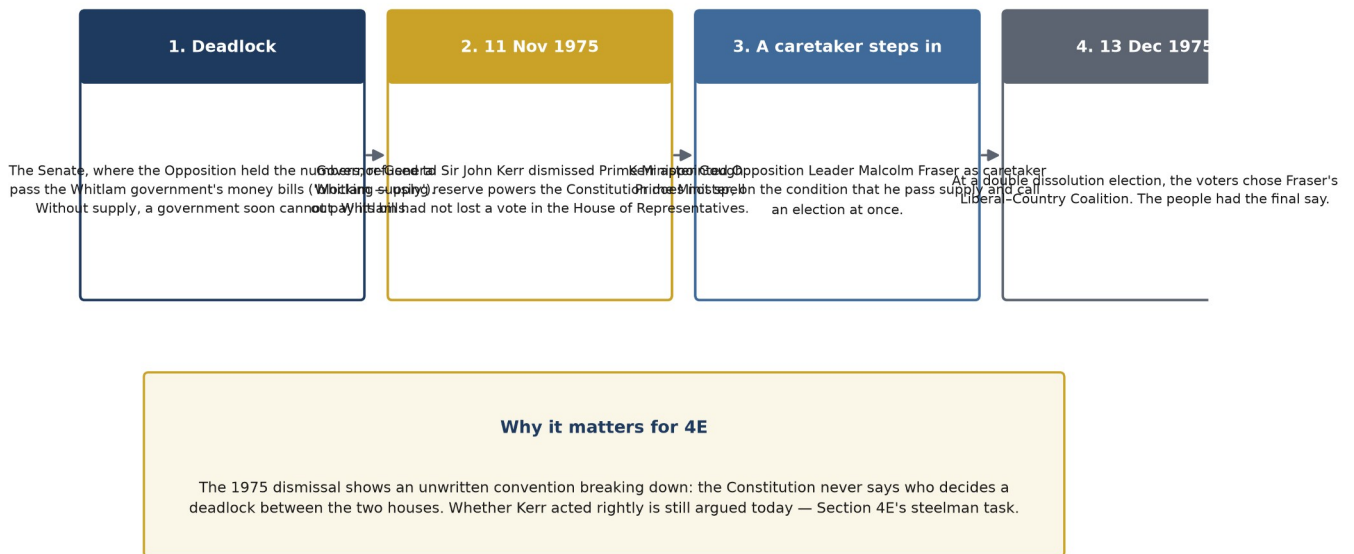
The office of Prime Minister is not named in the Constitution — it exists by Westminster convention. That is why checking its power matters.

A two-column table. Left column, powers of the Prime Minister: chooses the Ministers and chairs Cabinet; decides the government's agenda and its bills; advises the Governor-General on when to hold an election; speaks for Australia; is the public face of the party. Right column, the matching checks: the party can ballot for a new leader; Parliament can change or reject bills and the Senate can block them; a House election must be held at least every three years; Question Time, the Opposition, the media and citizens can question the PM; a vote of no confidence forces resignation or an election.

The Prime Minister is powerful **and** hemmed in. The office is not named in the Constitution, yet the PM chairs **Cabinet** (the government's main decision-making group), picks the Ministers, sets the government's agenda, and advises the Governor-General on when to hold an election. Each power in the table has a matching check. The unusual one is the first: in most countries a head of government can only be removed by a parliament or an election; in Australia, between 2010 and 2018, the check that actually fired four times was the **party room**.

Reserve powers: when the unwritten rules break — 1975

The dismissal — reserve powers tested, 1975



A four-step sequence. 1 Deadlock: the Opposition-controlled Senate refuses to pass the Whitlam government's money bills. 2 On 11 November 1975 Governor-General Sir John Kerr dismisses Prime Minister Gough Whitlam using reserve powers. 3 Opposition Leader Malcolm Fraser becomes caretaker Prime Minister on the condition that he pass supply and call an election. 4 At the 13 December 1975 double dissolution election the voters choose Fraser's Coalition (the Liberal Party and the Country Party, joined as one group).

On **11 November 1975**, Governor-General **Sir John Kerr** dismissed Prime Minister **Gough Whitlam**, even though Whitlam still held a majority in the House of Representatives. The trigger was a deadlock: the Senate, where the Opposition held the numbers, refused to pass the government's money bills, so the government was running out of money to govern. Kerr used **reserve powers** — powers of the Governor-General that are not spelled out in the Constitution — and appointed Opposition Leader **Malcolm Fraser** as **caretaker** (temporary) Prime Minister on the condition that he pass the money bills and call an election. At a **double dissolution** election on **13 December 1975** — an election where every seat in both houses is up for election — the voters chose Fraser's Liberal–Country Party Coalition (the Liberal Party and the Country Party, joined as one group — known simply as “the Coalition”).

1975 is the cleanest example in Australian history of a **convention** under stress. Two unwritten rules collided: the rule that the Governor-General normally acts only on the advice of ministers, and the rule that a government that cannot get its money bills through must resign or call an election. Whether Kerr's use of reserve powers was right is still argued today — which is why it appears in this section's steelman task. What is not argued is what it shows: the reserve powers are a real check on a government, and an unelected actor (the Governor-General) can exercise real power in a crisis.

Steelman: do the checks and balances really work?

Steelman: do Australia's checks and balances really work?

Each side in its strongest form — built from the same facts

YES — they hold power to account	NOT ALWAYS — the checks are weaker
The High Court ruled a law invalid in 1951 — and the people then rejected a referendum to get around it.	A PM with a majority in the House usually gets their bills through — the House rarely defeats its own government.
The Senate can block or change bills, and its committees question ministers and departments.	Party discipline means members nearly always vote as their party directs, so Parliament often backs the government rather than checking it.
The voters decide who governs: they changed the government in 2022 and kept it in 2025 — peacefully, with a ballot.	Key rules about the PM are unwritten conventions — and in 1975 one of them broke.
The Constitution only changes when the people agree: of the 45 referendums held since 1901, only 8 have passed.	Most checks wait for an election, which can be up to three years away.

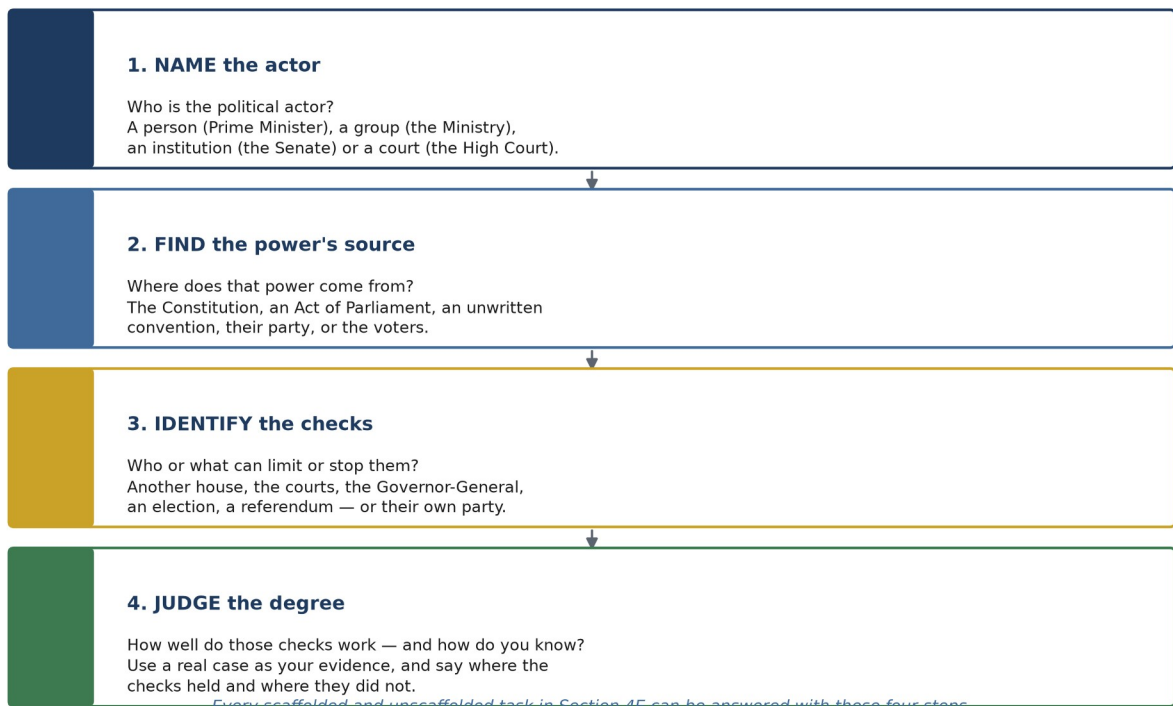
Both positions use real, checkable facts. Your task is not to pick a side for the teacher — it is to weigh the evidence and show your reasoning.

A two-column table presenting two positions in their strongest form. Yes — they hold power to account: the High Court ruled the 1951 law invalid and the people then rejected the referendum; the Senate blocks, changes and questions bills; voters changed the government in 2022 and kept it in 2025; only 8 of 45 referendums since 1901 have passed. Not always — the checks are weaker: a PM with a House majority usually gets bills through; party discipline turns the House into a supporter; key rules are unwritten and one broke in 1975; most checks wait up to three years for an election.

A fair evaluation argues each side at its strongest before choosing. Notice that **both columns are built from the same checkable facts** — 1951, 1975, 2022, 2025, party discipline, the three-year clock. The disagreement is about **how much weight** those facts carry. That is what the word *degree* in elaboration .E01 is asking you to judge.

The four-step explanation model

The four-step model — explain how a political actor exercises power



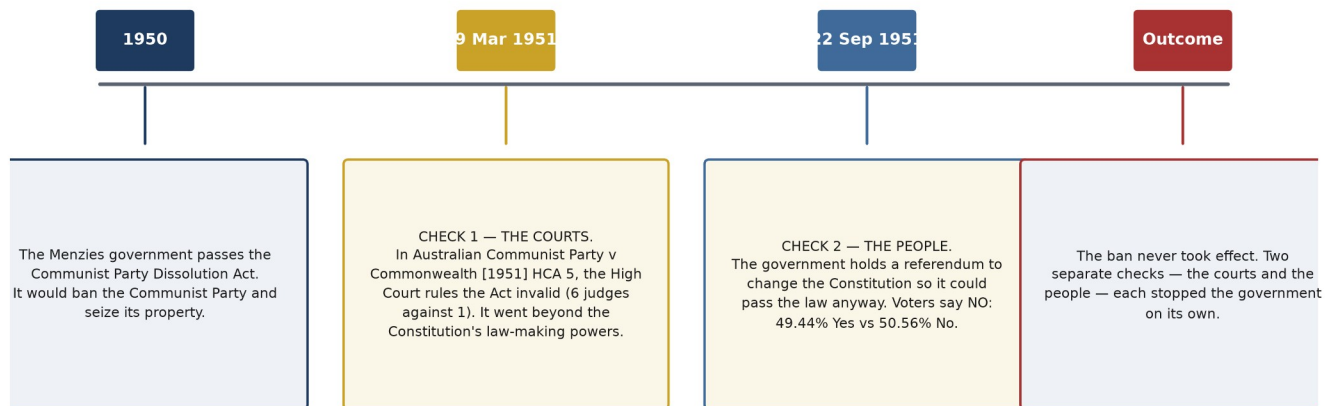
A four-step ladder for the section's skill. 1 Name the actor: a person, a group, an institution or a court. 2 Find the power's source: the Constitution, an Act of Parliament, an unwritten convention, a party, or the voters. 3 Identify the checks: who can limit or stop the actor, and how. 4 Judge the degree: how well the checks work, with a real case as evidence.

Every task in this section uses these four steps. They turn the task “explain the power of political actors” from a vague request into a method you can run on any actor — a Prime Minister, a Senate committee, a Governor-General, a court, or the voters themselves.

Worked case studies

Worked Case Study 1 — the Communist Party case, 1950–51

Worked Case Study 1 — stopping a law: the Communist Party case, 1950–51



What it shows: even a government with a strong Parliament majority can be checked — by an independent court and by a vote of the whole people.

*A four-stop timeline. 1950: the Menzies government passes the Communist Party Dissolution Act to ban the Communist Party. 9 March 1951: in *Australian Communist Party v Commonwealth* the High Court rules the Act invalid, six judges to one. 22 September 1951: a referendum to change the Constitution so the law could pass is rejected by voters, 50.56 per cent No to 49.44 per cent Yes. Outcome: the ban never took effect; two separate checks each stopped the government.*

What happened. In 1950 the Menzies government, which controlled both houses of Parliament, passed the *Communist Party Dissolution Act 1950* to ban the Communist Party of Australia and take over its property. The Act was challenged in the High Court. On **9 March 1951**, in *Australian Communist Party v Commonwealth*, the Court ruled the Act **invalid**, six judges to one: it went beyond the law-making powers the Constitution gives the Parliament. The government then asked the people, at a **referendum** — a national vote in which Australians decide whether to change the Constitution — on **22 September 1951**, to change the Constitution so the law could be re-made. Voters said no — **50.56 per cent No to 49.44 per cent Yes** — and the ban never took effect.

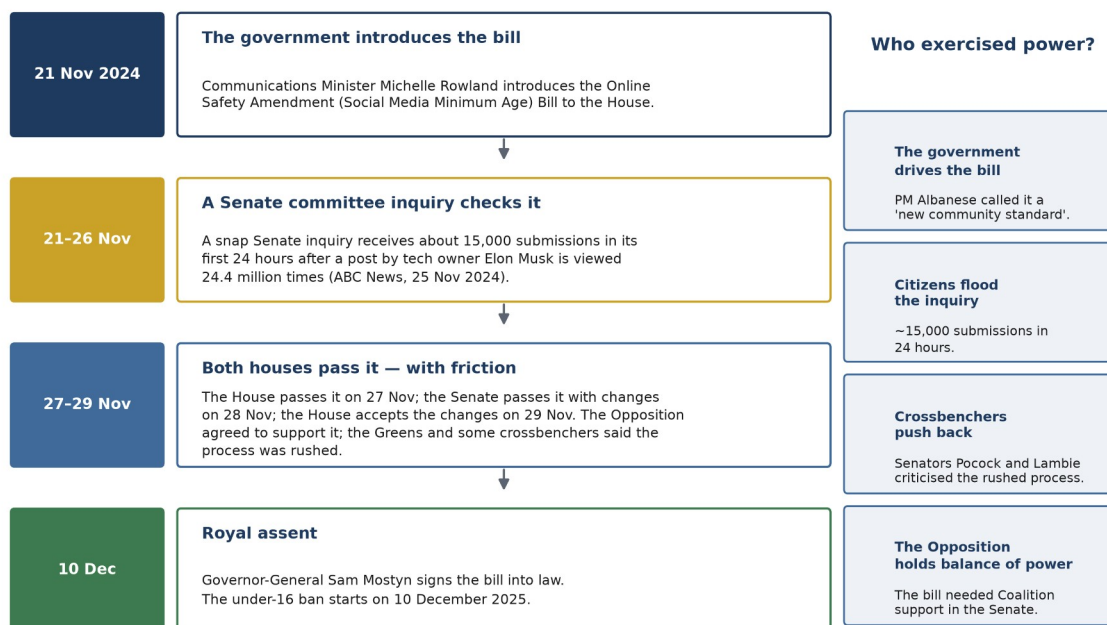
Who was involved. The government (Prime Minister Robert Menzies and his majority Parliament); the High Court; and the voters. Each is a political actor in the section's sense.

Which concept it shows. The *degree* question at full strength. Here two different checks — an independent court and a direct vote of the people — **each stopped** a government that controlled the Parliament. Checks and balances did not just slow power down; they stopped it twice.

Worked four-step answer (the skill in action): *Explain how the High Court exercised power in 1951.* **(1) Name the actor:** the High Court of Australia. **(2) Source of power:** Chapter III of the Constitution, which makes the Court the interpreter of the Constitution and of Commonwealth laws. **(3) Checks on the actor:** the Court cannot start a case by itself — a challenge must be brought to it — and it cannot make new laws; its rulings can be worked around only by a successful referendum or a valid new law. **(4) Judge the degree:** in 1951 the check bit fully: a 6–1 ruling declared the Act invalid, and the government's only route around it — the referendum — also failed. This is a strong-check case.

Worked Case Study 2 — the social media minimum age law, 2024

Worked Case Study 2 — power in action: the social media minimum age law, 2024



What it shows: one law needed the government, the Parliament, a committee, the Opposition, citizens and the Governor-General — each a political actor with power.

A flow of the law from 21 November to 10 December 2024: the government introduces the bill; a Senate committee inquiry receives about 15,000 submissions in its first 24 hours; both houses pass it with the Opposition's support while Greens and crossbench senators criticise the rushed process; the Governor-General gives royal assent on 10 December 2024 and the under-16 ban begins on 10 December 2025. A side panel names the actors: the government, citizens, crossbench senators and the Opposition.

What happened. On **21 November 2024** the Albanese government introduced the *Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Bill* to ban Australians under 16 from social media accounts. The Senate referred it to a committee **inquiry** — a formal investigation by a Senate committee — that received about **15,000 submissions** (written views sent to the committee) **in its first 24 hours** — after a post by the owner of the platform X was viewed more than 24 million times. The House of Representatives passed the bill on 27 November; the Senate passed it with changes on 28 November; the House accepted the changes on 29 November. The Governor-General, **Sam Mostyn**, gave it **royal assent** — the formal signing that turns a bill into a law — on **10 December 2024**, and the ban began on **10 December 2025**.

Who was involved. The **government** (which set the timetable and called the law a “new community standard”); the **Opposition** (whose support the bill needed in the Senate, and which agreed to back it); **Greens and crossbench senators** — senators who belong to neither the government nor the main Opposition party — (who argued the process was rushed but could not stop it); **citizens and interest groups** (through the flood of submissions); **the media and platform owners** (whose coverage and posts shaped the debate); and the **Governor-General** (royal assent).

Which concept it shows. The *degree* question at its other end. Unlike 1951, **no check stopped this law** — and yet every check worked. The Senate inquiry slowed the bill and forced its reasons into the open; the Senate's changes had to be accepted by the House; the government needed the Opposition's agreement to move the bill at that speed. A check can be real without being a veto.

Worked four-step answer: *Explain how the Senate committee exercised power over the bill.* (1) **Name the actor:** a Senate committee (the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee). (2) **Source of power:** the Senate's power to order inquiries and demand answers — a power of the Parliament, run under its rules. (3) **Checks on the actor:** a committee can question and recommend but cannot itself change or block the law; its report can be ignored by the chamber. (4) **Judge the degree:** the check bit softly but visibly: in days, it pulled about 15,000 public

submissions and a hearing into the record, and critics used it to name the process “rushed”. It changed the debate more than it changed the law — a soft check, working as designed.

Skill practice — scaffolded

Use the four-step model (Figure 9) where it fits. Sentence starters are given to help you begin, not to limit you.

Q1. Figure 1 shows two designs. Name each design and give **one** difference in how the branches of government are arranged in each.

Q2. Fill each gap with one of these terms: *convention, confidence, separation of powers, responsible government*. (a) The Constitution splits law-making, law-running and law-interpreting between three branches — that is the _____. (b) The Governor-General appointing the leader of the majority party is a _____, not a written law. (c) A government that loses a vote of no confidence has lost the _____ of the House. (d) The rule that a government without that support must resign or call an election is _____.

Q3. From the checks web (Figure 4), list **three** different actors that can check the government, and for each give the check shown in the figure.

Q4. Figure 2 shows five steps to a Prime Minister. For **steps 1, 3 and 5**, name the political actor exercising power at that step (for example, step 2’s actor is “the 151 elected members, taking their seats”).

Q5. Match each Prime Ministerial power on the left with its check on the right (Figure 3). *Powers:* (a) chooses the Ministers and chairs Cabinet; (b) advises the Governor-General on the election date; (c) decides the government’s agenda and bills. *Checks:* (i) the Senate can block or change the bills; (ii) the party can ballot for a new leader at any time; (iii) a House election must be held at least every three years.

Q6. In Case Study 1, two checks stopped the government. Name each check and state in one sentence what each one did. Start with: “The first check was ..., and it ...”

Q7. In Case Study 2, name **four** different actors and one thing each did to exercise power over the bill.

Q8. Sort these rules into **written law** and **unwritten convention**: (a) Ministers must be or become members of Parliament within three months (Constitution s 64); (b) the Governor-General appoints the leader of the party with majority support in the House; (c) the government must keep the support of the lower house to stay in office; (d) a House of Representatives election must be held at least every three years.

Q9. Run steps 1 and 2 of the four-step model on **the Senate**: name the actor and find where its power to check the government comes from.

Q10. Now steps 3 and 4 on the Senate. Start with: “The Senate can be checked by ..., and in Case Study 2 its check worked by ...”

Q11. True or false? Fix any false statement in one sentence. (a) Australians vote directly for the Prime Minister at a federal election. (b) The office of Prime Minister is named in the Australian Constitution. (c) The High Court can rule a Commonwealth law invalid. (d) Between 2010 and 2018, four Prime Ministers left office through a federal election loss.

Q12. From the steelman table (Figure 8), choose **one** fact from each column and explain in one sentence each how it supports that column’s position.

Skill practice — unscaffolded

Answer in full sentences. Every answer needs the actor, the power’s source, the checks, and a judgement of how far the checks worked — with a named case as your evidence.

Q13. Explain two ways the Prime Minister exercises power in Australia, and the source of each power.

- Q14.** Explain two checks on the Prime Minister's power and judge how well each one works, using one case from this section as evidence for each.
- Q15.** Using the 1975 dismissal, explain how the Governor-General can exercise power even though the office is unelected. Name the kind of power used and one check on it.
- Q16.** Explain how the High Court checked the Parliament in Case Study 1. Include where the Court's power comes from.
- Q17.** Explain how the voters checked the government in Case Study 1, and why that check is the hardest one for a government to argue with.
- Q18.** Using Case Study 2, explain how citizens and a Senate committee exercised power over the social media bill, even though the law passed.
- Q19.** In Case Study 2, compare the power of the government and the power of the Opposition while the bill moved through Parliament. Who set the pace, and who held a key the government needed?
- Q20.** Compare the House of Representatives and the Senate as checks on the government. Why is the Senate usually the stronger check? (Hint: think about who controls each chamber.)
- Q21.** "Between 2010 and 2018, the most powerful check on an Australian Prime Minister was their own party." Do you agree? Explain with the four spills as evidence.
- Q22.** "The courts are the strongest check in the Australian system." Evaluate this claim using Case Study 1 and one limit on court power.
- Q23.** In Case Study 2 no check stopped the law. Explain what the checks did instead, and whether a check that slows rather than stops still counts as a check.
- Q24.** Choose any political actor you met in Chapters 1–3 (for example: the media, an interest group, a backbench member, an independent senator) and run the full four-step model on it in one paragraph.
-

Extended response

ER1. "*Australia mixes the Westminster system with the separation of powers. Together they produce strong checks and balances.*" Evaluate this claim. Use at least **two** cases from this section (for example 1951, 1975, 2010–2018, 2024), argue the strongest case on **both** sides before you decide, and finish with a judgement of the *degree*.

Marking guide — reasoning, not conclusion. Full marks go to a response that: defines *checks and balances* and *Westminster system* in the section's senses; names the assumption in the claim (that "strong" means "able to stop"); uses two named cases as evidence; presents each side in the form its own supporters would accept; and states a reasoned degree ("strong when ..., weaker when ..."). Two students reaching opposite conclusions can both earn full marks.

ER2. *Who exercises the most power in Australia's system — the Prime Minister, the Parliament, or the people?* Explain your answer with evidence from at least two cases. Define what you mean by *power* before you begin, and say one thing your answer cannot settle.

Marking guide. Full marks go to a response that: states the section's working definition of power (or a clearly defined one of its own); compares all three actors, not just its favourite; uses two named cases; and names one limit of its own argument (for example, an unelected check like 1975 sits awkwardly under "the people").

Answers and model responses

Q1. Design 1 is the separation of powers; Design 2 is the Westminster system. Difference: in Design 1 the three branches sit apart, while in Design 2 the executive (PM and Ministers) sits **inside** the Parliament.

Q2. (a) separation of powers; (b) convention; (c) confidence; (d) responsible government.

Q3. Any three of: the House of Representatives — a vote of no confidence can remove the government; the Senate — can block or change the government's bills and question it in committees; the courts — can rule the government's laws or actions invalid; the Governor-General — reserve powers, as in 1975; the citizens — elect both houses and can vote the government out.

Q4. Step 1: the voters of each electorate. Step 3: the party whose members won the seats (in 2025, the Labor Party). Step 5: the Governor-General.

Q5. (a)–(ii); (b)–(iii); (c)–(i).

Q6. The first check was the High Court, and it ruled the *Communist Party Dissolution Act* invalid on 9 March 1951 because it went beyond the Constitution's powers. The second check was the voters, and at the 22 September 1951 referendum they refused the constitutional change (50.56% No).

Q7. Any four, e.g.: the government — introduced the bill and set the fast timetable; the Senate committee — ran the inquiry and gathered about 15,000 submissions; the Opposition — agreed to support the bill, which the government needed in the Senate; crossbench senators — criticised the rushed process; citizens — flooded the inquiry with submissions; the Governor-General — gave royal assent.

Q8. Written law: (a) and (d). Unwritten convention: (b) and (c).

Q9. Step 1: the Senate, the upper house of the Commonwealth Parliament (76 senators). Step 2: its checking power comes from the Constitution's grant of law-making power to the Parliament (the Senate shares it), and from the Senate's own rules for inquiries and questions.

Q10. Step 3: the Senate is checked by the voters (half of it faces election every three years) and by the courts (its laws can be ruled invalid). Step 4: in Case Study 2 its check worked softly — it delayed the bill, amended it, and put 15,000 submissions on the record, but it passed the bill within days once the Opposition agreed.

Q11. (a) False — voters elect local members; the PM is the leader of the party that can win the House's support. (b) False — the office exists by convention; the Constitution never names it. (c) True. (d) False — those four (Rudd, Gillard, Abbott, Turnbull) left through party ballots; only Rudd (2013) of that group then lost a federal election as leader.

Q12. Example pair. "Yes" fact: the High Court ruled the 1951 Act invalid and the referendum then failed — this shows two checks stopping a majority government. "Not always" fact: a PM with a House majority usually gets bills through — this shows the main check (the House) often supports rather than checks its own government.

Q13. Two ways with sources, e.g.: chairing Cabinet and choosing Ministers (source: convention and party leadership); setting the government's agenda and bills (source: control of the Cabinet and of the government's majority in the House). Advising the Governor-General on the election date is also acceptable.

Q14. Any two checks with a judged degree and a named case, e.g.: the party room — worked four times in 2010–2018, a strong and fast check; the Senate — slowed and amended the 2024 bill but passed it in days once the Opposition agreed, a softer check; the courts — stopped the 1951 law in full, the strongest check when a case reaches them.

Q15. In 1975 the Governor-General used **reserve powers** (source: unwritten convention attached to the office, not spelled out in the Constitution) to dismiss a PM who still held the House. One check on the power: the dismissed government's successor had to face the voters within weeks — the 13 December 1975 election decided who governed.

Q16. The Court's power comes from Chapter III of the Constitution. In *Australian Communist Party v Commonwealth* (1951) it ruled the Dissolution Act invalid, 6–1, because the Parliament had legislated beyond the powers the Constitution gives it — the Court's check stopped a law both houses had passed.

Q17. At the 22 September 1951 referendum the voters refused the change 50.56% to 49.44%. It is the hardest check to argue with because the government itself put the question to the people and lost; no chamber, party or court was between the government and the result.

Q18. Citizens exercised power through about 15,000 submissions in 24 hours, forcing reasons into the public record; the committee exercised the Senate's inquiry power, holding a hearing and reporting in days. Neither stopped the law, but both slowed it, amended the debate and gave critics (Greens, crossbenchers) the material to name the process "rushed" — a soft check working as designed.

Q19. The government set the pace: it chose the timetable and called the law a national standard. The Opposition held a key: in the Senate the government lacked the numbers, so the bill needed the Coalition's agreement to pass at that speed. Government power here was real but conditional.

Q20. The House usually has a government majority, so it rarely defeats its own government; the Senate is elected by a different method and the government rarely controls it, so it can block, amend and question. Hence the Senate is usually the stronger day-to-day check.

Q21. An agreed answer should note: the four spills show the party room ended four terms that elections did not, a fast and strong check; against that, party ballots are private, small and unelected, and between spills the same discipline weakens the House as a check. Either conclusion is acceptable if both facts carry weight.

Q22. For: in 1951 the Court stopped a law a majority government strongly wanted — no other check can do that. Limit: the Court cannot act on its own; it must wait for a case to be brought, and it rules only on legal power, not on whether a law is wise. A good evaluation holds both.

Q23. The checks slowed and shaped the law: the inquiry gathered 15,000 submissions, the Senate amended the bill, and the government still needed the Opposition's agreement. A slowing check still counts as a check — a check is a limit a power-holder must answer to, not a veto; on the section's definition it made the government answer for the bill in public.

Q24. A model run on the media (from Section 1D): **(1)** actor: news organisations and platform owners; **(2)** source: no constitutional power — their power is attention, shaping what voters and MPs think; **(3)** checks: no formal check, but their influence depends on being believed, and other media can answer them; **(4)** degree: in Case Study 2 one platform owner's post drew 24 million views and flooded a Senate inquiry — a real, fast influence on the process, though it could not pass or stop the law itself.

ER1 — model response (outline). A strong response defines the terms as the section does, then splits the evidence. For "strong": in 1951 two checks each stopped a majority government — a 6–1 High Court ruling and a lost referendum — and in 2022 and 2025 voters peacefully changed and then kept a government. For "weaker": the office of PM rests on unwritten convention; a PM with a House majority usually passes their bills because party discipline turns the lower house into a supporter; and in 1975 an unelected Governor-General broke a convention to resolve a deadlock the written rules could not. It then states a reasoned degree — for example, checks bite hardest at the edges (courts, referendums, elections, crises) and bite softest day-to-day, where a disciplined majority governs with few delays — and notes that 2024 shows the soft end: every check worked and none stopped the law. Both conclusions earn full marks when the cases and the degree are handled this way.

ER2 — marking points. The response must define *power* (the section's make/carry-out/stop definition or a clear one of its own); compare PM (conventions, agenda, party), Parliament (law-making, supply, questions, the Senate's block) and the people (elections, referendums as in 1951); use two named cases; and name one thing the answer cannot settle — for example that 1975 put decisive power in one unelected person for a short time, which sits awkwardly under any of the three labels.

Key terms at a glance

Key terms at a glance — Section 4E

Term	Working definition used in this section
separation of powers	Splitting government's work across three branches: Parliament makes the laws, the executive puts them into action, and the courts interpret them.
Westminster system	The set of practices Australia's system kept from Britain's parliament: a government formed by the party with the most support in the lower house, with its
responsible government	The rule that the government must keep the support of the lower house, or resign, or call an election.
convention	An unwritten rule that everyone follows even though no law puts it in words — for example, the Governor-General normally acts on the advice of ministers
reserve powers	Extra powers of the Governor-General, not spelled out in the Constitution, used in a crisis — such as dismissing a government in 1975.
checks and balances	The ways each part of the system limits the power of the others, so that no single actor has it all their way.
confidence	The support of a majority of members in the lower house. The government holds office while it keeps that support.
balance of power	When neither big party holds a majority, the smaller parties or independents whose support decides who can govern.

These terms are defined for this section. Other sources may give some of them a different meaning.

A table of eight terms with working definitions: separation of powers; Westminster system; responsible government; convention; reserve powers; checks and balances; confidence; balance of power. A footer notes the terms are defined for this section and that other sources may give some of them a different meaning.

Sources and retrieval dates (Section 4E)

- **2025 federal election result** (date, seats: Labor 94 of 151, Coalition 43, Greens 1, others 12): Australian Broadcasting Corporation, *2025 federal election results*, abc.net.au — retrieved 26 August 2026.
- **Social media minimum age law** (introduction 21 Nov 2024; ~15,000 submissions in 24 hours; House 27 Nov; Senate with changes 28 Nov; House 29 Nov; royal assent 10 Dec 2024; ban begins 10 Dec 2025; Musk post ~24.4 million views): ABC News, “Social media age ban inquiry flooded with 15,000 submissions after Elon Musk weighs in”, 25 November 2024, and the Act’s parliamentary record (*Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024 (Cth)*) — retrieved 26 August 2026.
- **Communist Party case** (*Australian Communist Party v Commonwealth* (1951) 83 CLR 1, decided 9 March 1951, 6–1) and the **1951 referendum** (22 September 1951, Yes 49.44%, No 50.56%, not carried): High Court of Australia judgment and Australian Electoral Commission referendum records, checked against the published record — retrieved 26 August 2026.
- **The 1975 dismissal** (11 November 1975; Kerr dismisses Whitlam; Fraser caretaker; 13 December 1975 double dissolution election won by the Coalition) and the **leadership spills of 2010, 2013, 2015 and 2018**: parliamentary and National Archives records of the Whitlam, Fraser, Rudd, Gillard, Abbott, Turnbull and Morrison prime ministerships — retrieved 26 August 2026.
- **Constitution details** (s 64 Ministers must sit in Parliament; House term at most three years; the office of PM not named in the text): *Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act* — the text itself.