

Governments in Australia and voting

Understanding Government in Australia

Australia has three levels of government: federal, state and territory, and local. Each level has its own responsibilities and functions. The federal government is based in Canberra, the capital city of Australia. It is responsible for national issues like defence, health, foreign affairs, and trade. The Prime Minister leads the federal government.

Each state and territory has its own government. There are six states and two territories in Australia. State governments are responsible for areas such as schools, hospitals, emergency services and transportation within their state or territory. The leader of a state government is called the Premier. In the territories, the leader is called the Chief Minister.

Local governments, also known as councils, manage community services like waste collection, public parks, and local roads in their municipality. Each local council is led by a Mayor. These three levels of government work together to serve the people of Australia.

The Voting Process in Australia

Voting is an important part of Australian democracy. Citizens aged 18 and over are required by law to vote in federal, state and territory, and local elections. This means everyone has a responsibility in helping to shape how the country, states and territories, and local areas are run. Voting in Australia is conducted through a secret ballot, ensuring privacy and fairness.

In federal elections, Australians vote for Members of Parliament (MPs) who represent them in the House of Representatives and senators who represent them in the Senate. Each MP represents a specific geographical area called an electorate. The Senate is elected by proportional representation across the states and territories, so that its composition closely reflects the voting pattern of the electors.



State elections work similarly, with voters choosing representatives for their state parliaments.

In local government elections, voters select council members who will make decisions for their local communities.

To vote, citizens must enrol on the electoral roll. This is a list of people who are eligible to vote. Enrolling is simple and can be done online or by mail. On election day, voters go to polling places, where they mark their choices on a ballot paper. Postal voting and early voting options are available for those who cannot vote in person on election day.

Political Parties in Australia

Political parties in Australia serve several key purposes in the democratic process. Firstly, they provide a structured way for individuals with similar political beliefs and goals to come together and work towards common objectives. This organisation helps in formulating policies, selecting candidates for elections, and mobilising voters. By presenting a unified platform, political parties make it easier for voters to understand the choices available to them and to make informed decisions at the ballot box.

Secondly, political parties play a crucial role in the functioning of the government. At a federal level, the party (or coalition of parties) that wins the majority of seats in the House of Representatives forms the government and is responsible for implementing its policies and managing the country's affairs. The opposition parties, on the other hand, scrutinise the government's actions, propose alternative policies, and hold the government accountable. This dynamic ensures a balance of power and promotes transparency and accountability in the political system.

Australia has several major political parties that play a significant role in shaping the country's policies and direction. These major political parties, along with smaller parties and independent representatives, contribute to the diverse and dynamic political landscape in Australia. Understanding the political parties in Australia and their beliefs and priorities can help in navigating a new environment and participating actively in civic life.



Importance of Participation

Participating in the voting process is a key responsibility for Australian citizens. It ensures that everyone's voice is heard and that leaders are accountable to the people they serve. Voting also helps to maintain a healthy democracy by encouraging civic engagement and informed decision-making.

For migrant teachers, understanding the government and voting process is essential. In addition to supporting student learning about their civic duty, it can assist in integrating into Australian society and contributing to a new community. Being informed about your rights and responsibilities as a voter will empower you to make a positive impact in your personal and professional life.

Familiarising yourself with Australia's government and voting system is an important step in your migration journey. By actively participating in the democratic process, you can help shape the future of your new community and home.

Further information

- **Enrol to vote:** The [Australian Electoral Commission website](#) provides the information required to complete your enrolment to vote.
- **Stay informed:** Sign up to receive any available council newsletters in your local area and learn about services, programs and what's happening in your community.
- **Learn more:** Browse the [Parliamentary Education Office website](#)'s resources and information to find out more about Australian parliamentary democracy.