

AUSTRALIA

Date of Elections: October 25, 1969

Characteristics of Parliament

The Australian Federal Parliament is bicameral.

The House of Representatives, comprising 125 members (as opposed to 124 during the preceding legislature) elected for 3 years, represents the entire nation.

The Senate, with 60 members elected for 6 years and renewed by halves every 3 years, represents each of the 6 States of the Australian Commonwealth on an equal basis. However, Australian Federal Capital Territory and Northern Territory inhabitants, who are represented in the Lower House by two Deputies*, do not vote in Senate elections.

On October 25, 1969, one month before the normal expiry of the outgoing House, the electors went to the polls to renew the entire House of Representatives. On the same day elections were held to nominate 2 Senators to fill 2 casual vacancies in the States of South Australia and Victoria.

Electoral System

All British subjects of either sex, who have been resident in Australia for at least six months, are aged 21 and over, are mentally sane, enjoy their civil and political rights and appear on the electoral registers, are entitled to vote in elections to both Houses. Since 1966, soldiers and ex-servicemen who have not yet reached the age of 21 are also allowed to vote.

Voting is a duty and unwarranted abstention is punishable by law. Voting by correspondence is permitted.

All persons fulfilling the conditions required to vote and who have resided in Australia for at least three consecutive years can be elected to the House of Representatives or Senate. The law also establishes certain cases of ineligibility: for example, members of a State Parliament are not allowed to be candidates at federal elections.

The electoral system governing elections to the House of Representatives can be summarized as follows:

Although there is only a single ballot, Deputies — one for each constituency — are elected by an absolute majority of the votes cast. Thus, voters

* The voting right of the Representative of the Federal Capital is restricted to matters concerning that territory.

are required to indicate, on their ballot paper, an order of preference among all the candidates contesting the same seat, by marking the numbers 1, 2, 3 etc. in squares placed opposite each name. If none of the candidates in a given constituency obtains an absolute majority of the first preferential votes, a second count is held. At this point, the candidate with the least number of votes is eliminated and the ballot papers which he had polled in the first count are redistributed among his opponents on the basis of the second choice indicated by the electors. This procedure is repeated until such time as one of the candidates obtains an absolute majority.

Senators are elected in each State, which forms a single electoral college, by plurinominal vote with preferential ballot and proportional distribution of seats.

Each elector receives a ballot paper bearing the names of all the candidates for his State, grouped together according to political affiliation or cited as independent candidates. He then indicates his order of preference among **all** the candidates.

When the votes are counted, the number of first preferential votes obtained by each candidate, excluding void ballot papers, is recorded.

The electoral quota is then determined by dividing the total number of first preferential votes by the number of seats to be filled and increasing the quotient so obtained by one. Any candidate who has received a number of votes equal to or greater than the quota determined is declared elected.

Should there remain any seats to be filled, a second distribution is carried out on the same basis, using the second preferential vote after the surplus votes (i.e. the number in excess of the quota) of the elected candidates have been transferred to the continuing candidates.

There is no provision for substitutes for either Representatives or Senators; casual vacancies are filled by a by-election.

General Political Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

The legislative elections of October 25, 1969, were noted for a close struggle between the Government coalition of the Liberal and Country parties, led by Mr. Gorton, and the Australian Labour Party led by Mr. Whitlam. The latter party has not, however, been in power since 1949 and has governed the country for only 17 years since 1901 when the Federation was formed. Candidates were put forward for election by other formations such as the Democratic Labour Party (Catholic), the new Australia Party founded in 1969 by Dr. Turnbull, and the Communist Party; but neither attained representation in the Lower House.

The electoral campaign was dominated simultaneously by matters of social policy — retirement of workers, assistance to young married couples,

free university studies and reorganization of the health service — and by problems of foreign policy, over which the leaders of the 2 large formations were in complete opposition. In fact, whereas the leader of the Government coalition declared himself in favour of maintaining an alliance with Washington and Australia's presence in Vietnam, Mr. Whitlan criticized the country's engagements in south-east Asia. Members of the Labour Party were in favour of withdrawing not only the Australian troupes in Vietnam before June 1970, but also those stationed in Singapore and Malaysia, of abolishing military service etc., thus becoming champions of the cause of falling back within a "Fortress Australia"; this policy was vigorously opposed by Mr. Gorton, the outgoing Prime Minister.

The results of this election revealed both the resurgence of the Labour Party, which obtained 17 more seats in the new House than in the previous legislature, and also the failure of the Independent candidates, not one of whom was elected.

Transfers of votes in favour of the Labour Party took place particularly in the States of New South Wales, Western Australia and South Australia. In the last of these the Government lost 8 seats.

As far as senatorial by-elections are concerned, in the State of South Australia the seat previously held by a liberal was won by the Labour Party candidate, whereas in the State of Victoria, the liberal candidate was elected to fill the seat previously held by a member of his party.

Statistics

1. *Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats in the House of Representatives*

Number of registered voters	6,606,233
Voters	6,273,611 (94%)
Void or blank ballot-papers	159,463
Valid votes	6,114,148

Political Group	Votes obtained	%	Number of Seats in the Senate
Liberal Party) Government	2,126,987	34.79	46 (-13)
Country Party) Coalition.	523,242	8.56	20 (-1)
Australian Labour Party.	2,870,792	46.95	59 (+17)
Democratic Labour Party.	367,977	6.02	—
Communist Party.	4,920	0.08	—
Australia Party.	53,646	0.88	—
Others.	167,567	2.74	- (-2*)
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* In the previous House of Representatives there were 2 Independent members — one of whom had resigned from the Liberal Party and the other from the Labour Party.

** The House consisted of only 124 seats during the previous Legislature.

2. Distribution of Seats in the Senate after the 2 By-elections

Political Group	Number of Seats in the Senate
Liberal Party 1 Government	» (-1) 1
\ Coalition	1
Country Party J.	7(=) J
Australian Labour Party	28 (+1)
Democratic Labour Party	4(=)
Australia Party	K-)
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3. Distribution of Parliamentarians according to Sex

	House of Representatives	Sctmt.'
Men	125	57
Women		3
	125	60

Australia

4. *Distribution of Parliamentarians according to Age Group*

	House of Representatives	Senate
Under 30.	2	
30-39.	17	1
40-49.	41	10
50-59.	40	22
60-69.	20	23
70 and over.	5	4
	125	60