

AUSTRALIA

Date of Elections: December 10, 1977

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all the members of the House of Representatives and half (34) of the Senate following premature dissolution of the House on November 11, 1977. Previous general elections had been held in December 1975.

Characteristics of Parliament

The Australian Federal Parliament is bicameral, consisting of the House of Representatives and the Senate.

The House of Representatives, according to the Constitution, must be, as nearly as practicable, twice the size of the Senate. The number of Representatives in each of the country's six States is in proportion to the population, but must be at least five. At present, the membership of the House is 124 members, which includes members for the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory. All Representatives are elected for 3 years.

The Senate comprises 64 members. Of this total, 10 Senators represent each of Australia's six States, being elected for 6 years and renewed by halves every 3 years, while residents of the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory are each represented by two Senators, elected at each House of Representatives election.

Electoral System

All British subjects who have been resident in Australia for six consecutive months, are aged 18 and over, and appear on the continuously revised electoral registers are entitled to vote for members of Parliament. Persons of unsound mind, attainted of treason, under sentence for any offence punishable by imprisonment for one year or more, or persons who are holders of temporary entry permits under the Migration Act, or are prohibited immigrants under that Act, are barred from registering as electors.

Voting is a duty and unwarranted abstention is punishable by fine of up to A\$ 10.

All persons fulfilling the conditions required for electors who have resided in Australia for at least three years can be elected to the House of Representatives or Senate. Undischarged bankrupts, persons under allegiance to a foreign State, holders of an office of profit or pension payable by the State,

as well as certain persons having a pecuniary interest through an agreement with the Government cannot be members of ParUament.

Candidates to Parliament must be nominated by six qualified electors and make a payment of A\$200 (Senate) or A\$100 (House). This monetary deposit is reimbursed if the candidate polls more than 10% (Senate) or 20% (House) of the average or total number, respectively, of first preference votes polled by the successful candidates in the election.

Representatives are elected in single-member constituencies according to a system of preferential, or alternative, vote. Under this system, Representatives — one for each electoral division — are elected by an absolute majority of the votes cast. Voters are required to indicate, on their ballot paper, an order of preference among all the candidates contesting the same seat. If none of the candidates in a division obtains an absolute majority of the first preference votes, a second count is held. At this point, the candidate with the least number of votes is eliminated and the votes which he had obtained 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 according to the single-transferable-vote form of proportional representation. Under this system, each elector indicates his order of preference among all the candidates in his constituency. Once the number of first preference votes obtained by each candidate has been recorded, an electoral quota is determined by dividing the total number of first preference votes by the number of seats to be filled and increasing by one the result so arrived at. Any candidate who has received a number of votes equal to or greater than the established quota is declared elected. Should there remain any seats to be filled, a second distribution is carried out on the same basis, using the second preference votes, after the surplus votes (that is, the number in excess of the quota) of the elected candidates have been transferred to the continuing candidates.

A by-election is held to fill any seat which becomes vacant in the House of Representatives between general elections. Vacancies in the Senate are filled by choice of the Houses of ParUament of the particular State or, if the ParUament is not in session, through appointment by that State's Governor.

General Political Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

On October 27, 1977, Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser (Liberal Party) informed the ParUament that the Governor-General had agreed to the Government's recommendation that the House of Representatives be dissolved and that a general election be held in order to synchronize baUotting for House and

Senate seats. He stated that the conditions under which real economic growth could proceed were being restored but that to have further progress Australians had to be convinced that the current economic recovery would continue not just for months but for a number of years ahead. An election would provide an early opportunity to end election speculation and the resulting uncertainty as to the policies that would thereafter be followed. Subsequent to this announcement, Mr. Gough Whitlam (Labor Party), Leader of the Opposition, stated that the desire for a premature election was an admission that the Government had failed in its economic management, especially as to inflation and unemployment.

During the three-week election campaign, much speculation centred on the support which might be achieved by a new party, the centre Australian Democrats, headed by Mr. Don Chipp.

On polling day, the Government obtained a decisive victory in the elections to the House, and maintained its supremacy in the Senate. Mr. Fraser announced a reconstruction of his Government on December 19, with an overall increase in the number of Ministers from 26 to 28.

Statistics

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

Number of registered electors.	8,553,780
Voters.	8,127,762 (95%)
Blank or void ballot papers.	204,912
Valid votes.	7,922,850

Political Group	Number of Candidates	Votes obtained	%	Number of Seats	Number of Seats won at Previous Elections
Liberal Party.	107	3,017,894	38,1	87	68
National Country Party	30	793,445	10,0	19	23
Australian Labor Party	124	3,141,048	39,6	38	36
Australian Democratic Party.	116	743,365	9,4		
Others.	128	227,098	2,9		
				124*	127

* Total number of seats reduced as a consequence of a High Court decision.

2. Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats in the Senate

Number of registered electors	8,553,780
Voters	8,127,762 (95%)
Blank or void ballot papers .	731,555
Valid votes	7,396,207

Political Group	Number of Candidates	Votes obtained	%	Number of Seats won at 1977 elections	Total number of Seats
Liberal Party-					
National Country Party .	20	3,369,842	45.56	18	35**
Australian Labor Party . .	22	2,718,876	36.76	14	26
Australian Democratic Party	24	823,550	11.13	2	2
Others	80	483,939	6.55	—	1
				34*	64

* Includes elections for all four Territory Senators.

** Liberal Party 28, National Country Party 7.

3. Distribution of Members of Parliament according to Professional Category

	Senate	House of Repre- sentatives
Farmers and graziers . .	11	19
Solicitors and barristers	10	20
Medical practitioners . .	3	4
Union or party officials	9	9
Company directors . . .	5	10
Accountants	3	7
University and teaching	4	7
Others	21	49
	64	124

4. *Distribution of Members of Parliament according to Sex*

	Senate	House of Representatives
Men	58	124
Women	6	—
	64	124

5. *Average Age of Members of Parliament*

Senate	50 years
House of Representatives	47 years