

# Parliament of Victoria



Teacher guide

## Representation and democracy

# About this resource

Across the world, there are many different parliament and government structures that use different models of representation. The type of representation determines how decisions are made and therefore whether or not a parliamentary system is democratic. The definitions and activities in this resource are designed to help students explore these different models of representation and decision-making, and critically evaluate the benefits and limitations of each, including the models of democracy we have in Australia.

## ***Different forms of representation***

The first section looks broadly at different forms of representation across the world, how each model impacts decision-making, and how they compare and contrast to our parliamentary systems of democracy in Australia.

## ***Principles of democracy***

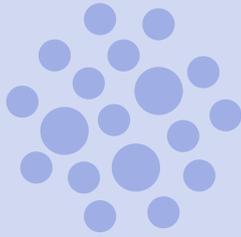
The second section considers the principles of democracy in more detail, including some activities for students to explore the benefits and limitations of direct and representative democracy.

## ***Democracy in Victoria***

The last section provides some more specific details about the Parliament of Victoria and asks students to consider how it demonstrates the principles of democracy and how these principles might be strengthened.

# Different forms of representation

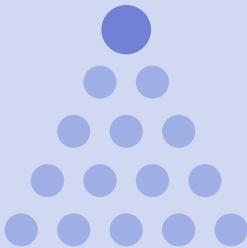
None



## Anarchy

When there is no functional or recognised government, and no one holds any authority over anyone else, meaning the absolute freedom of the individual.

One



## Monarchy

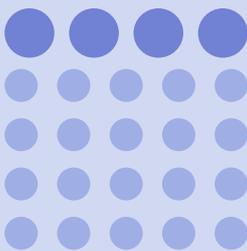
**Absolute Monarchy** is where the monarch retains all the power. There are some monarchies that also have representative bodies of some kind, but the monarch retains the majority of the power.

**Constitutional Monarchy** is where the country is a democratic state and the Monarch has a largely ceremonial role, sometimes with limited powers.

## Dictatorship

One person (or a small number of people) that have absolute power (i.e. do not have a constitution to limit their power).

Few



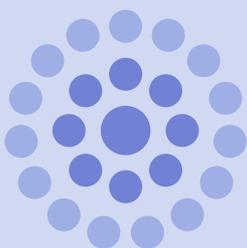
## Oligarchy

A form of government formed by a small group of privileged people or families.

## Junta

A military or political group that rules a country after taking power by force.

Many



## Democracy

A **direct democracy** is where all laws and policies are decided by the people themselves (the decision is based on what the majority decides).

A **representative democracy** is where the people vote for an elected representative to create laws and policies on the people's behalf.

## Consensus

A decision-making process where all group members positions are considered, and all group members develop and agree to support a decision that is in the best interest of everyone.

## Exploring different forms of representation

In order to explore the different types of representation and the effects on decision-making you might like to ask students to use the questions and prompts below as the basis for some written responses or small group activities. Alternatively, these questions and prompts could be used as the basis of class discussion, or adapted for an essay or research-style responses. There are additional resources in the 'other reading' section that might be useful for these activities.

Also, you might like to use Thinking Routines, such as the ones listed below, to help students explore some of the tensions between the different representation and decision-making models.

- [Options Diamond](#)
- [Step In – Step Out – Step Back](#)
- [Values, Identities, Actions](#)
- [Parts, Purposes, Complexities](#)
- [Compass Points](#)

### ***Questions and prompts for discussion***

- What might be some of the benefits and limitations of the different types of representation? Consider:
  - The size of population
  - Who is included and/or excluded in the decision-making processes
  - How many people are involved in the decision-making process
  - How the decision-making process works, and what the people in power are making decisions about
  - What limitations exist in the decision-making power and what accountability measures could be introduced
  - How well the person/people in power represent all their constituents, including minority groups, people under the voting age (where applicable)
- How do different forms of representation affect the decision-making process? Consider, for example:
  - The law-making process, the particular nation and/or international relationships, decisions about funding services and prioritising services and problem-solving issues.

Compare and contrast the Australian system of government with a system from another country, by:

- Completing a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis of the two different systems
- Comparing your chosen country's model of representation to either the federal or Victorian parliament. Consider:
  - The decision-making process and who is involved in the process (i.e. representation model)
  - How many people are represented by one person in the decision-making process (ratio)
  - How often people are able to have a say in who represents them
  - How they make decisions about the people they represent.

### ***Exploring further***

- Why do different countries use different ways of representing people? Consider:
  - Historical, cultural, geographical, religious reasons
- Why do different countries, or even different groups of people, have different ways of making decisions?
- What lessons, processes and approaches can Australian parliaments learn from looking at different ways of representing people and decision-making methods from around the world?

# Principles of democracy

There are some slight variations in how the word democracy is defined, depending on its historic and cultural use. For example, historically, the opportunity for ‘citizens’ to participate in democratic processes was restricted to men. In some cases political participation was further limited to wealthy men, nobility or landowners. Generally though, the principles of democracy include:

- A system for choosing and replacing the government through free and fair elections
- Active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and civic life
- Protection of the human rights of all citizens
- The rule of law in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens.

In Australia, our democratic principles also include:

- Separation of powers between the executive (the government), the judiciary (the courts) and the legislature (the parliament)
- Responsible government, that is answerable to the parliament for its actions.

## Exploring direct and representative democracy

Direct democracy is often referred to as true democracy as it offers every person an opportunity to have a say. However, representative democracy is often the model used in parliaments that are based on a democratic system.

The following activities provide students with an opportunity to experience both direct and representative democracy, and therefore compare and contrast the benefits and limitations of both.

Students are also asked to consider what options they have in a democracy, other than voting, to have their voices heard on an issue or a topic. This could be contacting a member of parliament (either federal or state) or a local council or shire member directly, or becoming involved in an advocacy group.

## **Activity 1: Direct democracy**

Vote yes or no to each statement. The results for each statement are recorded.

- There should be a four-day school week
- The voting age should be lowered to 16 years of age
- Social media should ban all political content
- Schools should not have tests
- Bikes, electric skateboards and scooters should all have license plates and pay registration fees

### **Reflection**

After students have voted, ask them to rate their responses to the prompts along the continuums below. This could either be done as a personal reflection and then discussed as a class, or as a class continuum line where students physically stand along the line in response to each of the statements. To develop the reflection further, you could ask students to elaborate on why they chose the particular point along the line.



## ***Activity 2: Representative democracy***

Divide the class into an odd number of groups (this will mean there will be a clear decision on each of the statements).

Ask each group to select a leader and then the groups should spend some time discussing each statement, considering any strengths, weaknesses or issues. Some sample topics have been provided below. Alternatively, the issues could be topical examples from recent news and media, or issues that the students propose.

### **Topics**

- The environment is more important than creating jobs
- Hospitals are more important than police
- Public transport is more important than education
- Students should spend more time at school

Depending on the size of each group, you may like to allocate about 5 minutes to each issue or longer if you would like students to investigate an issue in more detail.

Each group leader should listen to the discussion of the statements. Once the discussion is over, the leaders will represent their groups by voting on each of the statements. The leaders can determine how they represent their group to the rest of the class by either:

- Asking each member of the group how they would vote, and then presenting the group's decision to the class
- Deciding how the group would vote based only on listening to the discussion
- Voting based on what they personally think without asking or listening to the group

You may like to assign a different approach to representation to each of the leaders, or allow the leaders themselves to choose how they represent their group. This can provide opportunities to discuss how people's views can be represented in parliament, what it means to represent an electorate with varying and perhaps sometimes competing views, and the work of members of parliament more broadly.

## **Reflection**

After the group leaders have voted, ask the students to rate their responses to the prompts along the continuums below. This could either be done as a personal reflection and then discussed as a class, or as a class continuum line where students physically stand along the line in response to each of the statements. To develop the reflection further, you could ask students to elaborate on why they chose the particular point along the line.



## Comparing direct and representative democracy

The following questions and prompts can be used to compare and contrast the benefits and limitations of direct and representative democracies. Students can respond to these individually or in small groups, or they can be used as the basis of class discussions.

- Which type of democracy do you prefer, direct or representative? Why?
  - Which one is fairer? Why?
  - Which one is more efficient?
- How might population size or the physical size of a country affect your response?
- If a vote in either a direct or representative democracy doesn't go your way, what options might you have to ensure your views are represented in parliament? Consider the principles of democracy in your answer.
- Democracy is a system in which everyone has a say, but the majority is favoured. How might we strengthen the democratic process in both direct and representative democracy for people who are from minority backgrounds or demographics?

### There are many ways to have your say



Vote in  
an election



Take part in a  
peaceful protest



Sign a  
petition



Meet with your  
local MPs



Contribute to  
an inquiry



Stand for  
elected office

# Democracy in Victoria

## Direct democracy

There are limited examples in Victoria, and Australia, where methods of direct representation are used. The main method is by referendum.

The Victorian Constitution outlines when decisions must be made by referendum instead of by members of parliament. These decisions usually relate to major changes in the Victorian Constitution. For example, if parliament wanted to change the number of members in the Legislative Assembly and/or Legislative Council, the change must first pass with a majority in both houses, just like any other bill. After the change has passed both houses, the Victorian people would then vote on the change through a referendum.

All the provisions for a referendum in Victoria are set out in Part 9A of the [Electoral Act 2002](#).

In the Commonwealth Parliament a referendum is also used when the government of the time wants to change an aspect of the constitution.

The Parliamentary Education Office in Canberra provides a useful [overview of referendums and plebiscites](#), as well as a log of [the results of referendums and plebiscites](#) held since 1906.

## Representative democracy

All levels of government in Australia are representative democracies. We vote in elections to decide who we want to represent us.

Victorians elect their state representatives in the two houses of parliament, the Legislative Assembly (lower house) and the Legislative Council (upper house). Members represent 88 lower house districts and eight upper house regions.

The Victorian government is formed by the party, or coalition of parties, that holds the majority of seats in the lower house. The job of upper house members of parliament is to review laws that are passed by lower house members of parliament.

State parliament representation in Victoria		Number of electorates	Number of representatives per electorate	Number of people they represent	Voting method
Parliament of Victoria	Legislative Assembly (lower house)	88	1	Approximately 50,000	<a href="#">Preferential voting</a>
	Legislative Council (upper house)	8	5	Between 450,000 to 550,000	<a href="#">Proportional representation</a>

Download the Victorian Electoral Commission's electoral districts and regions maps.

[Regional Victoria](#)

[Metropolitan Victoria](#)

## Exploring democracy in Victoria

How does the Parliament of Victoria uphold the principles of democracy? You might like to consider the following in your discussion:

- The use of direct and representative democracy in decision-making
- The process used to make laws and the bicameral system
- The different opportunities for members of parliament to speak on behalf of their constituents
- Opportunities for people to have their say in parliament through members of parliament, signing petitions, or contributing to a committee inquiry
- The different ways people can find out what's happening in parliament.



Victorian state elections are operated by the [Victorian Electoral Commission](#) (VEC), an independent and impartial body established under Victoria's Electoral Act 2002. Photo courtesy of VEC.

# Further resources

## ***Parliament of Victoria***

- How laws are made in the Victorian parliament  
[parliament.vic.gov.au/about/how-parliament-works/how-a-law-is-made](https://parliament.vic.gov.au/about/how-parliament-works/how-a-law-is-made)
- A three-part video series explaining how laws are made, how committees work and how elections work.  
[parliament.vic.gov.au/teach-and-learn/Resources/parliament-of-victoria-explains](https://parliament.vic.gov.au/teach-and-learn/Resources/parliament-of-victoria-explains)
- The two houses: a description of Victoria's bicameral system.  
[parliament.vic.gov.au/about/how-parliament-works/two-houses](https://parliament.vic.gov.au/about/how-parliament-works/two-houses)
- Standing and sessional orders (the procedures for both the houses and parliamentary committees)  
[parliament.vic.gov.au/parliamentary-activity/orders](https://parliament.vic.gov.au/parliamentary-activity/orders)
- Parliament's sitting day schedule.  
[parliament.vic.gov.au/about/how-parliament-works/how-sitting-days-work](https://parliament.vic.gov.au/about/how-parliament-works/how-sitting-days-work)
- Parliamentary committee inquiries.  
[parliament.vic.gov.au/get-involved/inquiries](https://parliament.vic.gov.au/get-involved/inquiries)
- Petitions  
[parliament.vic.gov.au/get-involved/petitions](https://parliament.vic.gov.au/get-involved/petitions)
- Parliament news  
[parliament.vic.gov.au/news](https://parliament.vic.gov.au/news)

## **Victorian Electoral Commission**

- Victoria's state electoral boundaries: maps and search tools.  
[vec.vic.gov.au/electoral-boundaries](https://vec.vic.gov.au/electoral-boundaries)
- An explanation of how voting works in Victoria.  
[vec.vic.gov.au/voting/how-voting-works](https://vec.vic.gov.au/voting/how-voting-works)

## **Australian Electoral Commission**

- A worked example of proportional voting used in the upper house in both federal and Victorian parliaments.  
[aec.gov.au/learn/files/poster-count-senate-pref-voting.pdf](https://aec.gov.au/learn/files/poster-count-senate-pref-voting.pdf)

## **Other reading**

- The article 'What Are the Different Types of Governments?' provides top level details for a range of different government systems.  
[livescience.com/33027-what-are-the-different-types-of-governments](https://livescience.com/33027-what-are-the-different-types-of-governments)
- From the United Nations, this article describes the relationship between democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the work being undertaken around the world to strengthen democracies  
[un.org/en/global-issues/democracy](https://un.org/en/global-issues/democracy)
- This downloadable map from National Geographic provides a visual overview of the different forms of government in place around the world. (Note: some of these systems may have changed since publication).  
[education.nationalgeographic.org](https://education.nationalgeographic.org)
- The Electoral Council of Australia and New Zealand provides a useful summary of different voting systems, along with a PDF download that describes the systems in place across Australia.  
[ecanz.gov.au/electoral-systems/definitions-voting-systems](https://ecanz.gov.au/electoral-systems/definitions-voting-systems)