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DEBATE KIT: AUSTRALIAN POLITICS IS ALIVE AND WELL

TEACHING RESOURCE



DEBATING

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Introduction

Politics refers to the process and act of governing. In Australia, there are three levels of government – local, state and federal – and as a democratic nation, principles like fair and free elections, respect for the rule of law, and civic participation underpin the processes of governance. Australia has a unique system of voting that combines a secret ballot with compulsory preferential voting, and a proportional voting system in the Federal Senate. This process ensures that all eligible Australians participate in the democratic system and direct their votes as they choose.

Australia is regarded as having a strong democratic system with consistently high voter turnout compared to many other nations. At the same time, research indicates that some Australians have limited understanding of how the system operates and others are uncertain about how much influence their vote has. Shifting levels of confidence in public institutions, as well as evolving voting habits raise questions about how Australians engage with traditional politics.

This debate topic invites students to examine a range of credible evidence from reputable sources listed in this debate kit. These materials offer opportunities to explore different patterns of political engagement in Australia. It is a timely and valuable subject for thoughtful debate, encouraging students to consider how the state of Australian politics shapes the nation, society, and their own daily lives.

To help young people, this kit provides key points and website references about the debate topic to assist as starting points for research and debate planning. This kit is to accompany the 'Debate booklet' available at seriouslysocial.org.au.

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Debate topic: Australian politics is alive and well

Affirmative arguments

- Australia's compulsory and preferential voting system is often regarded as world-leading for the way in which it allows voters a comprehensive say in how their preferences are allocated. It is also considered one of the most accessible systems globally, which contributes to a high voter turnout at each election.
- Australia's democracy is ranked amongst the top twenty democracies in the world across measures of representation, rights, rule of law and participation according to independent data.
- The recent rise of independent candidates and minor parties provides a wealth of choice for voters and suggests increased engagement in Australian politics at a local level.
- Australia maintains the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) as an unbiased, free, national broadcaster that Australians can trust. Also, politicians and political candidates are more available and accountable to their constituents than ever due to the rise of social media.
- Large protest movements in recent times have demonstrated that Australians are engaged in politics and are prepared to peacefully advocate for policy change outside the polling booth.
- Young people who are not politically engaged are generally still likely to be involved in their community and contributing to civic participation rates.

Negative arguments

- Australia has low rates of perceived voter influence on the political system – this means that many people don't believe their vote makes a significant difference. Also, lobby groups are perceived to have too much power over politicians and policy, resulting in laws that protect and support the rich and powerful at the expense of the majority of the population.
- Statistics show low rates of understanding of the political system amongst Australian adults.
- Instances of micro-parties being elected to parliament with tiny fractions of the vote can cause fringe movements to gain higher levels of representation than is proportionate to numbers of their supporters in the community.
- Funding cuts to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) threaten its ability to provide unbiased and critical information to Australians free of charge. Also, a lack of laws around political mis- and disinformation harms our democracy as voters are not guaranteed to receive trustworthy information from political candidates.
- Laws that make it harder for groups to take peaceful protest actions reflect governments' attitudes to civic dissent and disregard for the participation of individuals in Australian politics.
- Young Australians are less likely to be engaged in the political system in traditional ways due to feeling unrepresented by the current system.

Web links

Australian politics is alive and well	
Topic	Web link
Parliament explained: Democracy Parliament of Australia	bit.ly/3W68HMW
Annabel Crabb's Civic Duty ABC	https://bit.ly/48yTgm7
Compulsion emboldens democracy: A deep dive into Australia's mandatory voting Harvard International Review	https://bit.ly/4817Xyn
"Feral Senate": How voters keep the Government on its toes ABC News	https://bit.ly/49Jo6d3
Leadership spills and policy reversals: How healthy is our democracy? SBS News: Our House podcast	https://bit.ly/4ojZwDd
Australia: Global democracy ranking International Institute for Democracy and Election Assistance	https://bit.ly/4okFWGS
The global state of democracy initiatives International Institute for Democracy and Election Assistance	https://bit.ly/44nCyDP
GSDI global democracy rankings International Institute for Democracy and Election Assistance	https://bit.ly/48xRfGW
The civic health of Australia: A national portrait in 30 charts The Australian Leadership Index	https://bit.ly/4ojTrGG
Trust and satisfaction in Australian democracy survey report APS Reform	https://bit.ly/4ogyigl

Web links

Australian politics is alive and well	
Topic	Web link
Australia's trust in democracy declining, study finds ABC News	https://bit.ly/4pwhRxQ
Who are the biggest political donors in Australia? Empact News	https://bit.ly/44pMywf
House of Representatives current numbers Parliamentary Education Office	https://bit.ly/4ppFmbG
Senate current numbers Parliamentary Education Office	https://bit.ly/4pADVHD
Who are Australia's minor parties? SBS News	https://bit.ly/3JXzeZk
Small Parties, big changes: The evolution of minor parties elected to the Australian senate Parliament of Australia	https://bit.ly/4iq6TaS
Be informed, get involved: Participate in Australia's democracy National Library of Australia	https://bit.ly/3LRLN9b
Everyone in Australia can protest, but the finer details differ depending on where you live ABC News	https://bit.ly/4px2SDL
Explainer: Truth in political advertising The Australia Institute	https://bit.ly/48yVZfm
Alternative paths to politics: how young people engage in politics in Australia The Global Institute for Women's Leadership	https://bit.ly/43RRc65



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