



Australia's Democratic History



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Word watch

Look out for the 'Word watch' feature,
which explains the meanings of words
shown in **bold**.

Democracy in Australia

You might have heard someone say, 'Aren't we lucky to live in a democratic country?' Living in a **democracy** means we are free to speak our mind and have a say in who governs us. We can all aspire to be the leader of our country.

What is democracy?

Good question! Basically, democracy is a form of government in which the people of a country have an equal say in who governs them. American President Abraham Lincoln came up with possibly the best and simplest definition of democracy. In 1863, he said that democracy was 'Government of the people, by the people, for the people.'

Has Australia always been a democracy?

Australia has not always been a democracy. In the years following European settlement, the governor of the **colony** of New South Wales issued orders and everyone had to obey them. In fact, even when the first **federal** parliament was elected, many people were not allowed to vote. However, today, everyone over the age of 18 can vote for their local, state and federal governments.



▲ In Australia, during elections everyone's vote is equal, whether they are rich or poor, male or female, employed or unemployed.

Are all countries democracies?

Not all countries are democracies. There are other forms of government, such as:

- ✱ dictatorship: government by people who have seized power by force and who use force (or the fear of force) to maintain power
- ✱ monarchy: government by a single ruler (such as a king or queen), often from a particular family
- ✱ oligarchy: government by a few people (such as members of one family or a few military leaders)
- ✱ theocracy: government by religious leaders who enforce the law of God.

Features of a democracy:

- the right to vote
- every vote is of equal value
- the fate of the government is in the hands of the people
- a constitution that outlines how the country is to be governed
- freedom of thought
- freedom of religion.

▶ North Korea is a dictatorship and is ruled by Kim Jong-il. His father was the leader before him, and his youngest son is expected to be the next leader.

In this book ...

... you can learn how democracy developed in Australia, read about landmark events and important people who helped establish Australia's system of democracy, and investigate the arguments for and against Australia becoming a **republic**.



republic a nation where the head of state is elected or chosen rather than given the position because of birth

A timeline of Australia's democratic history

This timeline provides a snapshot of major events that have played an important part in the development of Australia's democratic system of government.

► Use the page reference to find more information about that event on the timeline.

abolish get rid of
conscripted to be forced to join
High Court of Australia the highest court in the land
legislation laws
referendum a vote to adopt or change the Constitution
head of state the official head of a country (who is sometimes but not always the head of the government)

| Date | Event | Date | Event | Date | Event | Date | Event |
|------|---|------|---|------|--|------|--|
| 1780 | Before 1788 Indigenous people occupy Australia. Their societies are not democratic, instead favouring 'men over women and the mature over the young'. ► page 8 | 1880 | | 1910 | | 1970 | 11 November 1975 Prime Minister Gough Whitlam is sacked by Governor-General Sir John Kerr. ► pages 26–7 |
| 1790 | 26 January 1788 The First Fleet arrives from Britain and disembarks at Sydney Cove to establish the settlement of New South Wales. The Europeans claim the land is <i>terra nullius</i> , the 'land of no one', and deny Indigenous Australians any right to the land. ► page 22 | 1890 | 1891 Suffragettes present the Monster Petition to the Victorian Parliament, raising the profile of women's rights. ► pages 16–17 | 1920 | 1914–1918 During World War I, many Australians originally from countries that are at war with Australia are detained in camps within Australia. ► page 24 | 1980 | 13 December 1975 Australians elect a new government. ► pages 26–7 |
| 1800 | | | 1892 The trade union movement forms the Australian Labor Party, a political party that will fight for worker's rights. ► page 15 | 1930 | 1931 The High Court of Australia rules that New South Wales Premier Jack Lang does not have the legal right to abolish the upper house of the New South Wales Parliament. ► page 21 | 1990 | 1992 The High Court of Australia rules in the Mabo Case that Australia was not <i>terra nullius</i> . ► page 22 |
| 1810 | 26 January 1808 The New South Wales governor William Bligh is overthrown by what becomes known as the Rum Rebellion. ► pages 10–11 | | 1894 Women in South Australia win the right to vote. ► page 17 | 1940 | 1939–1945 Australian troops fight for democracy in World War II. Many Australians originally from countries that are at war with Australia are detained in camps within Australia. ► page 24 | | 1997 The report on the Stolen Generations exposes the practice of taking Indigenous children from their families without permission. ► page 23 |
| 1820 | | 1900 | 1899 Women in Western Australia win the right to vote. ► page 17 | 1950 | Some Australian men are conscripted into the armed forces. ► page 18 | 2000 | 1999 Australians vote in a referendum to keep Australia as a monarchy and reject the option of having an Australian as head of state . ► page 31 |
| 1830 | 1830s The first trade unions are formed in Australia to improve workers' rights. ► pages 14–15 | | 1 January 1901 The Australian Constitution comes into effect, outlining the way that Australia's system of government is to work. ► page 21 | | 1950–1953 Australian troops fight for democracy in the Korean War. ► page 19 | | 2003 Australian troops enter Afghanistan to fight for democracy against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. ► page 19 |
| 1840 | | | 1902 Women in New South Wales win the right to vote. ► page 17 | | 1951 The High Court of Australia rules that the Australian Government does not have the legal right to ban the Communist Party, even though the party is anti-democratic. ► page 21 | | 2000s The arrival of 'boat people' leads to debate within Australia as to whether they are illegal immigrants or genuine refugees with the democratic right to seek a new home. ► page 25 |
| 1850 | 1850s Anti-Chinese feeling on the goldfields causes the Victorian Government to limit the number of Chinese people coming to Victoria. ► page 24 | | Women in Australia win the right to vote in federal elections. ► page 17 | | | | |
| 1860 | 3 December 1854 The Eureka Rebellion takes place, resulting in the deaths of miners and soldiers, but leading to improved rights for the 'common people'. ► pages 12–13 | | 1903 Women in Tasmania win the right to vote. ► page 17 | 1960 | 1962 The federal government passes legislation to allow all Indigenous Australians to vote at federal elections. | | |
| 1870 | | | 1905 Women in Queensland win the right to vote. ► page 17 | | 1962–1972 Australian troops fight for democracy and against communism in the Vietnam War. Some Australian men are conscripted into the armed forces. ► pages 18–19 | | |
| | | | 1908 Women in Victoria win the right to vote. ► page 17 | | | | |



◀ A Chinese gold digger on the goldfields in the 1850s



◀ Australian troops fight wars to protect democracy.

Establishing a colony: no room for democracy

In 1788, the First Fleet sailed into Sydney Harbour after a long voyage from Britain. The prisoners and military set up the camps that marked the establishment of a new British colony – New South Wales. At this time, the governor made all the decisions about how to run the colony and the settlers had no say.

Did Indigenous Australians live in a democracy?

There is no single group of Indigenous Australians. Hundreds of individual groups (or nations) were living on the continent before the arrival of Europeans and each nation had its own belief systems. The histories and ways of life of Indigenous Australians were passed down verbally from generation to generation, so there are no written records of nations that no longer exist. However, it is fair to say that democracy was not a key feature of Indigenous nations. According to *The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia*, 'the organising **principles** of Aboriginal society favour men over women and the mature over the young'. This means that power was held by male elders in most Indigenous nations.

- ▼ Older Indigenous men, such as this elder (right) from the Central Desert in the Northern Territory, are the main decision-makers in most traditional Indigenous communities.



Tweet of the week

@historyteacher: By studying history, we can learn from the mistakes of the past.

Word watch

principles beliefs

How democratic was the colony of New South Wales?

In the late 1700s, democracy did not exist as it does today. Most European countries were governed by a royal family or by a government that was chosen or elected by the wealthiest male members of society. Women and the lower classes had no say in the way they were governed. And remember, the colony of New South Wales was set up as a **penal** colony. Even today, prisoners lose many of the rights they had before they were imprisoned. So, in the early years of the colony of New South Wales, all the power resided in the hands of the governor, who received his instructions from the British Government.



- ▲ Governor Arthur Phillip was the first governor of New South Wales. There were no democratic rights under his rule.

One of the world's first democracies

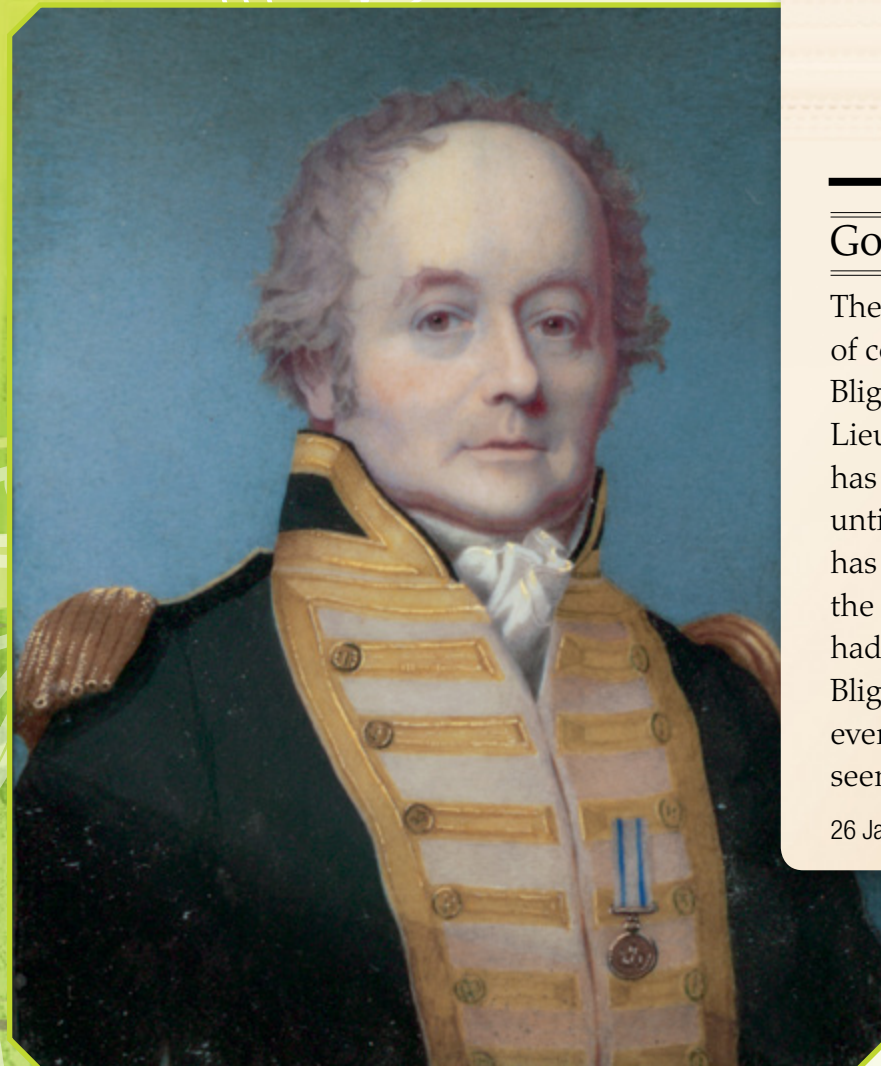
In the mid-1700s, American **colonists** began protesting against the British Government that controlled America. Although the colonists paid **taxes**, they had no right to elect their political representatives. Their protest slogan was 'No taxation without representation'. Within two decades the United States had gained its independence from Britain and would become one of the world's first democracies.

Word watch

colonists people who live in a colony
penal prison
taxes fees charged by a government on a product, income or activity

The Rum Rebellion: overthrowing a leader

In 1808, governor William Bligh was stripped of his authority and replaced. This uprising became known as the Rum Rebellion. It was the first major uprising in Australia's colonial history.



COLONY NEWS

GOVERNOR BLIGH ARRESTED

The colony of New South Wales is in a state of confusion tonight, with Governor William Bligh placed under **house arrest**. His deputy, Lieutenant Governor, Major George Johnston has declared himself the Acting Governor until a new one is appointed. Major Johnston has the backing of the colony's military force, the New South Wales Corps, whose members had become increasingly angry with Governor Bligh's rule. What impact today's dramatic events will have on the colony remains to be seen.

26 January 1808

◀ William Bligh had a military background and ran the colony as though it was an army. He expected his orders to be obeyed without argument.

Why was it called the Rum Rebellion?

Bligh had attempted to stop the illegal trade of rum that many members of the New South Wales Corps were engaged in. This action by Bligh, together with the jailing of John Macarthur, an important and wealthy **colonist** and supporter of the Corps, was behind the Corps' decision to help get rid of Bligh.

Did the Rum Rebellion lead to greater democracy?

William Bligh was a strong-minded individual who wanted to run the colony his way. However, the new leadership of Johnston, Macarthur and the New South Wales Corps was no more democratic in their governing. They did not intend to give more rights to others in the colony, just to themselves and their supporters. One undemocratic leader had been replaced by another. Johnston remained in charge until the arrival of a new governor, Lachlan Macquarie, who proved to be both more popular and more democratic than previous governors.



▲ Governor Macquarie was also known as 'The Builder' because of the many constructions he ordered and oversaw.

Guilty!

Three years after their role in the removal of William Bligh from power, both George Johnston and John Macarthur were punished for removing Bligh from power. Johnston was found guilty of **mutiny** and thrown out of the armed forces, while Macarthur was banished from New South Wales.

Word watch

colonist someone who lives in a colony
house arrest imprisonment in one's home rather than in jail

Word watch

mutiny a rebellion that results in a leader being overthrown

The Eureka Rebellion: fighting against authority

In 1854, miners in the goldfields near Ballarat in Victoria clashed with police and soldiers in armed conflict. This uprising became known as the Eureka Rebellion and it is sometimes referred to as Australia's **civil war**.

What happened at Eureka?

On 3 December 1854, about 500 miners clashed with police officers and soldiers at Eureka, near Ballarat in Victoria, over the high price of mining licences. More than 30 miners, police officers and soldiers were killed. After the rebellion, the Victorian Government did away with mining licence fees and later allowed 'normal **citizens**' such as miners to stand for parliament.

▼ Rebels swore their allegiance to the Southern Cross flag before the Eureka Rebellion.

Tweet of the week

@patriot1854: I reckon the Southern Cross flag would make a good Australian flag.



GOLD MINING WEEKLY

EDITORIAL COMMENT

This week's rebellion by miners at Eureka should be **condemned** by everyone. It was nothing more than a vicious attack against authority. Imagine if we caved in to the leaders of the rebellion and gave them more of a say in colonial affairs. It would be a disaster. They have shown by their actions that they do not respect the law and those who uphold the law. They should be punished in the strongest possible way – certainly not rewarded.

6 December 1854

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor

I am writing to express my support for the miners who stood up for their rights at Eureka this week. For too long they have had to put up with appalling conditions and high licence fees with little or no say in how they work and live. It is time that the government realises that they are governing for all of us, not just those with money and **influence**.

Alan Williams, Melbourne

Peter Lalor

Peter Lalor (1827–1889) was born in Ireland and moved to the Victorian goldfields in 1852. He became an outspoken leader of the miners and led the Eureka Rebellion. Lalor went into hiding after the Rebellion and, by the time he re-emerged, the Victorian Government had dropped plans to arrest him. Lalor went on to serve in the Victorian Parliament.



▲ Peter Lalor went on to serve in the Victorian Parliament from 1855 until his death in 1889.

What does the the Southern Cross flag symbolise?

The miners fought under a flag of the Southern Cross, also known as the Eureka flag. Peter Lalor, leader of the rebellion, motivated his men by urging them: 'We swear by the Southern Cross to stand truly by each other, and fight to defend our rights and liberties.' The flag has become a symbol of rebellion and protest. Since the 1850s, many construction unions have used the Southern Cross flag to symbolise their fight for democratic rights.

► Southern Cross flag



Word watch

condemned
opposed
influence
power

Word watch

citizens people who have full rights within a country
civil war a war between people from the same country

The trade union movement: fighting for workers' rights

For thousands of years, societies were controlled by the wealthy and the powerful. The poor had little choice in how they lived, often working under terrible conditions for very little money. Complaining meant losing your job – until trade unions came along.

What is a trade union?

A trade union is an organisation that represents workers and **negotiates** on their behalf for better working conditions and pay. A trade union, representing many workers, has more **influence** than an individual worker negotiating directly with their employer.

Tweet of the week

@alicewindsor: How about a trade union for school kids? Then we could go on strike.



▲ Trade unions stood up for the rights of workers, such as these people working at a boot-making factory in Brisbane in 1900.

When were trade unions formed?

In Australia, trade unions were formed as early as 1830, despite anti-trade-union laws existing in Britain and applying in Australia. By the 1880s, the trade union movement in Australia was very strong and often called their workers out on strike to pressure employers to agree to better conditions. Workers were not paid when striking, but companies could not do without workers, so deals were often done more quickly to get the workers back on the job.



▲ Miners in Broken Hill, New South Wales, went on strike in 1909 to pressure their employers for better conditions.

Are trade unions still around?

Trade unions exist today, but their role is not as important as it once was. Over the years, many laws have been introduced that protect the rights of workers. Trade unions have acted as a democratic voice for workers to help bring in these changes.

Trade unions and the Labor Party

In the late 1880s, the Australian trade union movement decided that they would have more influence if they formed a political party and stood for government. In 1892, they formed the Australian Labor Party.

Word watch

influence power
negotiates bargains

The suffrage movement: women fighting for the right to vote

Around 100 years ago, women did not have the right to vote in Australia. They did not have the right to stand for government either. So, men made laws that favoured men. It doesn't seem fair, does it? The **suffragettes** didn't think it was fair either.

What is suffrage?

Suffrage is the right to vote. So, the suffrage movement was made up of women who fought for the right to vote. They were known as suffragettes. Suffragettes existed in most Western countries where women were excluded from voting or sitting in parliament.

What was the Monster Petition?

Suffragettes collected signatures in support of women's right to vote. These signatures were collected into petitions, which were presented to the relevant parliaments. In 1891, some suffragettes collected almost 30 000 signatures in Victoria and presented it to the Victorian Parliament. This petition still exists and has become known as the Monster Petition. The petition is 260 metres long.

Tweet of the week



@GoGirl01: I wonder what the men in 1900 would have thought about a female Prime Minister.



- ▲ In the 1900s, women around the world fought for their right to vote.
- ▶ The Monster Petition

When did women get the vote?

By the late 1800s, many women (and some men) had formed groups to pressure governments to give women the vote. From the 1890s, they began having success. Australian women were granted the right to vote and stand for federal parliament in 1902. Some already had the right to stand and vote for their state parliaments, although others had to wait several years longer.

Democracy for women: state by state

| State | Right to vote | Right to stand for parliament |
|-------------------|---------------|-------------------------------|
| South Australia | 1894 | 1894 |
| Western Australia | 1899 | 1920 |
| New South Wales | 1902 | 1918 |
| Tasmania | 1903 | 1921 |
| Queensland | 1905 | 1915 |
| Victoria | 1908 | 1923 |



Vida Goldstein: a leading suffragette

Vida Goldstein (1869–1949) was one of the leading suffragettes, as well as a campaigner for workers' and prisoners' rights. She stood for federal parliament five times and received thousands of votes, but was never elected.



▲ In 1903, Vida Goldstein was the first woman to stand for election to federal parliament.

▲ A **polling booth** at the Queensland state election in 1907, the first election in which Queensland women were allowed to vote.

Word watch

polling booth a place where people vote

Australia at war: shedding blood for democracy

Conscription

During several wars, Australian men have been conscripted to fight. This means they were forced into the armed services whether or not they wanted to join. Many people fought against conscription because they saw it as undemocratic.

Australia's belief in democracy was an important reason behind its involvement in several wars. These wars include World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and the more recent war in Afghanistan.

Why did Australia fight in World War II?

During World War II, Australia and other countries fought against fascism. Fascism is a system of government in which a **dictator** makes decisions that benefit one particular group of people, usually because of their cultural background. Fascism is the opposite of democracy. In World War II, Germany was led by the fascist dictator Adolf Hitler, who invaded many European countries and had more than six million Jews killed.



▲ Adolf Hitler addresses a mass meeting in Dortmund, Germany, in 1933. Even many of those who opposed Hitler and his fascist **policies** were too scared to speak out against him.

Word watch

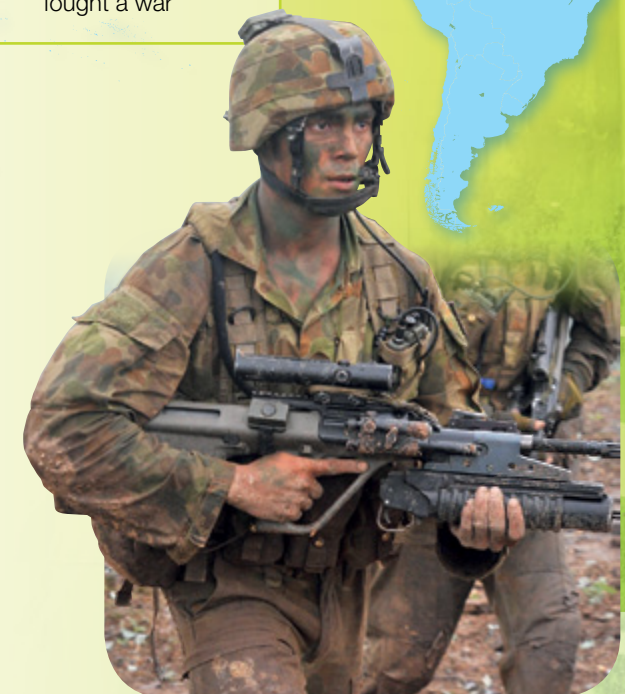
dictator a ruler who runs a country according to their own rules
policies courses of action planned by a government



▲ In recent decades, Australia has fought wars in other countries to help protect democracy.

Why did Australia fight in the Korean and Vietnam wars?

The Korean and Vietnam wars were also about a political ideal that was opposite to democracy. Australians joined several other countries fighting against communism. Communism is a system of government in which a few people make decisions believed to be for the equal good of everyone. However, most benefits are not shared by everyone, and there is no opportunity to vote for another system or political party.



▲ Australian troops are trained in Australia before being sent to fight for democracy in other parts of the world.

Why did Australia become involved in Afghanistan?

Australian troops were sent to Afghanistan in 2003 for two reasons. One reason was to track down leaders of the organisation Al-Qaeda, a **radical Islamic group** behind the September 11 attacks on the United States. Many people saw the September 11 attacks as a strike against democracy. The other reason was to fight the Taliban. The Taliban is a radical Islamic group that has ruled Afghanistan in the past and which does not believe that non-Muslims or women have the same rights as Muslim men.

Word watch

radical Islamic group a group of extreme followers of the religion Islam

History of the High Court: democracy and the law

The **High Court of Australia** was established in 1901 by the federal parliament and it is located in Canberra. Every Australian has the democratic right to take a legal case to the High Court of Australia.

The judicial power of the Commonwealth shall be vested in a Federal Supreme Court, to be called the High Court of Australia ... The High Court shall consist of a Chief **Justice**, and so many other Justices, not less than two, as the Parliament **prescribes**.

– *Australian Constitution*, Section 71

Tweet of the week

@justiceforall: The high cost of a High Court case means that it is not democratic, because most people can't afford it.

What does the High Court do?

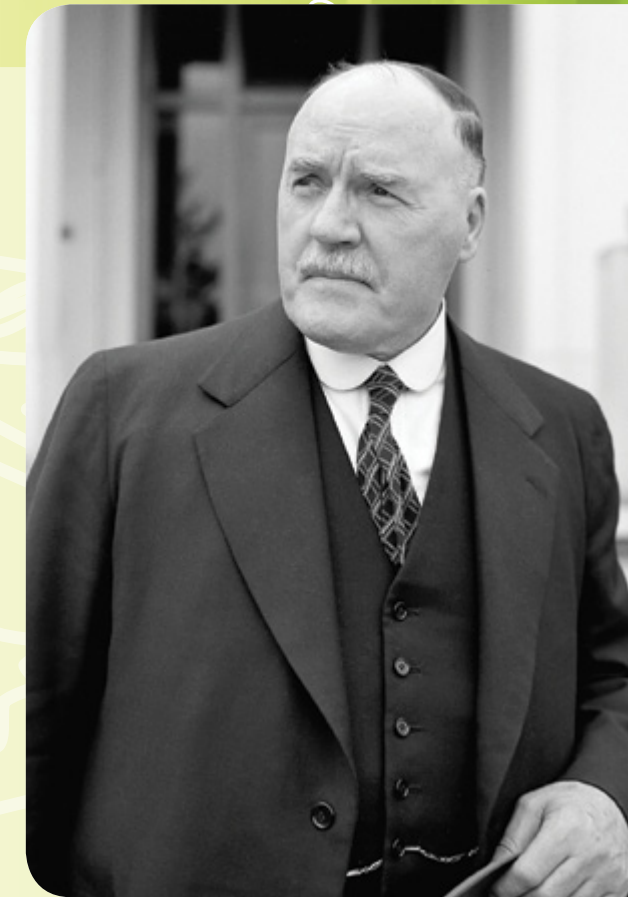
The High Court of Australia makes sure that laws introduced by Australian governments obey the Australian Constitution. Individuals and organisations can take action in the High Court if they believe that certain laws are unfair according to the Australian Constitution. This means that the High Court is an institution that promotes democracy, because anyone has the right to take a case to the High Court.



▲ While every Australian has the democratic right to take a case to the High Court, the participation of many lawyers makes it very expensive to do so.

Which High Court cases have protected Australian democracy?

- ✱ In 1931, New South Wales Premier Jack Lang attempted to **abolish** the upper house of the New South Wales Parliament because it disapproved of some of his actions. Houses of parliament represent the wishes of the general population, so Lang's move could be seen as an attack on democracy. The High Court ruled that his attempt was illegal.
- ✱ In 1951, the federal government tried to ban the Communist Party of Australia. Although communism is an undemocratic system of government, a democracy such as Australia believes that everyone has the right to believe in whichever system of government they wish. The High Court ruled that the Government's action was illegal.



▲ The High Court ruling against Premier Jack Lang's attempt to abolish the New South Wales upper house was made in the interest of promoting democracy.

The Australian Constitution

The Australian Constitution was drawn up in the late 1890s and came into effect on 1 January 1901. It has 128 sections contained in eight chapters.

- ▶ The eight chapters of the Australian Constitution cover important areas that relate to the government of Australia.

- Chapter 1** The make-up of parliament
- Chapter 2** The government
- Chapter 3** The law courts and judges
- Chapter 4** Finance and trade
- Chapter 5** The rights of the states
- Chapter 6** Establishing new states
- Chapter 7** A mixture of issues
- Chapter 8** How to change the Constitution

Word watch

constitution a document that outlines how a country is to be governed
High Court of Australia the highest court in the land
justice judge
prescribes lays down in law

Word watch

abolish get rid of

Indigenous rights: redressing the wrongs of the past

The rights of Indigenous Australians were crushed after Europeans landed at Sydney Cove in 1788. Indigenous Australians had no say. They were murdered, their children removed and their lands stolen by the Europeans.



▲ This painting from 1852 by Godfrey Charles Mundy is entitled 'Rencounter'. *Rencounter* is an old word meaning 'a hostile meeting'.

What is *terra nullius*?

When the British settled on the Australian continent, they claimed the land was *terra nullius*. *Terra nullius* is a Latin term that means 'land of no one'. The British knew that Indigenous people were living in Australia when the First Fleet arrived, but because there were no social, legal and political systems like those in Britain, the British believed they had the right to do what they wanted. It was not until 1992, in a case known as the Mabo case, that the **High Court of Australia** finally ruled that Australia was not *terra nullius* before the Europeans arrived.

▲ Eddie Mabo with members of his legal team in the 1980s. Their case to fight for Indigenous rights became known as the Mabo case.



Word watch

High Court of Australia
the highest court in the land

Who are the Stolen Generations?

During the late 1800s and much of the 1900s, Indigenous children were taken from their parents without their permission. They became known as the Stolen Generations. Governments and church groups believed they were doing the right thing by taking the children, but they totally ignored the democratic rights of the children or their parents. In 1997, the Australian Government released a report that criticised this practice of removal. In 2008, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made an official apology to the Stolen Generations on behalf of the nation.



▲ Meal time at the Kai Kai Aboriginal Mission, Queensland, in about 1915. Some of these children would have been forcibly removed from their families.

Sorry Day: remembering past wrongs

On 26 May every year, many Australians commemorate Sorry Day. This is the day when Australians think about the Stolen Generations and other injustices suffered by Indigenous Australians.

Should I climb Uluru?

Uluru is a huge sandstone rock in the Northern Territory. It is of great spiritual significance to the Mutitjulu people. They request that people not climb Uluru. However, thousands of people climb Uluru each year. This is an example of two democratic rights in conflict – the rights of the Mutitjulu people for others to respect their wishes versus the rights of an individual to climb the rock. What would you do?

Advance Australia (un)Fair: how democratic is discrimination?

Although Australia is recognised as a country that has opened its arms (and borders) to people from many different backgrounds, there have been times that people have been discriminated against and had their democratic rights ignored.

How were the Chinese treated during the Gold Rush?

In the 1850s, tens of thousands of Chinese people moved to Australia to search for gold. People from all over the world were coming to the goldfields but the Chinese looked different, which made them a target for racist attacks. The Victorian Government was worried that the unrest on the goldfields would spread, so they introduced a law that limited the number of Chinese arriving in Victoria by ship. Many got around this law by landing in other colonies and then making their way to Victoria on horseback or foot.

Why were some people imprisoned in Australia during the World Wars?

During both World War I and World War II, the federal government detained in camps many people originally from countries that were at war with Australia. The government did this because they were not sure of the people's loyalties and were concerned they might act in a way not in Australia's best interests. During World War I, people with German, Austrian, Hungarian, Italian and Turkish backgrounds were detained. During World War II, this applied to people with German, Japanese and Italian backgrounds. It did not matter if they had previously been **law-abiding** Australians, their rights as Australians were taken away from them.

- ▶ During World War I, Germans living in Australia were discriminated against because of Germany's involvement in the war. They were imprisoned in camps, such as this one at Holsworthy, New South Wales.



- ▲ When Chinese people arrived in Australia to mine for gold, they faced terrible racism.

Are 'boat people' illegal immigrants or refugees?

'Boat people' is the term given to people who arrive in Australia by boat, without seeking permission. While many Australians believe that 'boat people' are illegal immigrants, the **United Nations** considers people with a 'well-founded fear of being **persecuted**' to be refugees and therefore entitled to seek **refuge** in another country. Many 'boat people' flee undemocratic countries where their lives are at risk for holding views that are not allowed. They are seeking a more peaceful life in a democratic country, such as Australia, where all views are tolerated.

Fleeing from communism

The first people to arrive on Australian shores by boat without seeking permission were from Vietnam in the 1970s. They were fleeing Vietnam because they did not believe in the communist system of government, or because their views on communism put them at risk of being imprisoned. Today, Vietnamese communities exist in most large cities in Australia.



- ▲ In April 2010, 'boat people' on their way to Australia were detained by the Australian government on Christmas Island. This sparked national debate about the rights of 'boat people'.

Word watch

persecuted mistreated
refuge shelter, safety
United Nations an international organisation that tries to improve health, education and human rights around the world

Word watch

law-abiding obeying the law

1975: the year the Prime Minister was sacked

In some countries, the overthrow or dismissal of the country's leader could lead to violence and bloodshed. In Australia, the people express their views on how their leader is running the country by voting at an election.

“

Well may we say 'God save the Queen', because nothing will save the Governor-General! ... They won't silence the outskirts of Parliament House, even if the inside has been silenced for a few weeks ... Maintain your rage and enthusiasm for the campaign for the election now to be held and until polling day.

”



▲ Sacked Prime Minister Gough Whitlam addressed reporters outside Parliament House in Canberra after his dismissal by Australia's Governor-General on 11 November 1975.

Why was the Prime Minister sacked?

A government is the political party that holds the most seats in the **House of Representatives**. However, to pass laws, they also need the support of the **Senate**. Not all governments have a **majority** of seats in the Senate. In 1975, the **opposition** parties had control of the Senate and they refused to pass important laws unless the government called an election. The Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, refused. This position lasted for several weeks until the Governor-General, Sir John Kerr, decided that the only way to change the situation was to sack the government and have an election.

Word watch

House of Representatives the lower house of federal parliament
majority more than half
opposition the political party (or a combination of parties) that has the second most seats in parliament
Senate the upper house of federal parliament

Debating the rights and wrongs

The dismissal of the Whitlam Government by the Governor-General, Sir John Kerr, was one of the most dramatic political events since **Federation**. Those who opposed the dismissal argued that the government had been elected by the people and therefore had the right to serve its full **term**. Those who agreed with the dismissal argued that the government had made many mistakes and that the Australian people deserved a chance to have another vote, before an election was normally due. When the election was held, the Australian voters elected a new government, but debate raged for years afterward.



◀ Sir John Kerr, who dismissed the Whitlam Government, was Governor-General of Australia from 1974–77.

A big mistake

Prime Minister Gough Whitlam had appointed Sir John Kerr as Governor-General. After his sacking, Mr Whitlam greatly regretted appointing Sir John Kerr.

Word watch

Federation the joining together of different states under a central government
term length of time a government serves between elections

Australia in a global community: multiculturalism and democracy

For more than 100 years, Australia was a British colony and its form of democratic government, legal system and customs were largely based on those in Britain. Since World War II, many migrants and refugees from other countries, with very different cultures and beliefs, have settled in Australia to begin a new life. Today, Australia is a **multicultural** society.

Democracy and a changing Australia

Many of the migrants who have made a new life in Australia are from undemocratic countries, such as Vietnam and Afghanistan. This does not mean that they want to make Australia an undemocratic country. They have chosen to come here largely because of their wish to live in a democratic country. Becoming an Australian **citizen** means accepting Australia's democratic society and its laws. However, it is also important for those already living in Australia to be tolerant of different beliefs and ways of life.

Tweet of the week

@democrat28: Living in a democracy means being able to tweet whatever I like.



Word watch

citizen person who has full rights within a country
multicultural from many different cultures

- ▲ When immigrants become Australian citizens, they are agreeing to be a part of Australia's democratic society and to conform to its laws.

Why is Christmas a public holiday if Australia is home to so many religions?

An important aspect of democracy is the right to follow any religion you choose. Since European settlement, most Australians have followed Christian religions. As a result, Australian society adopted traditional Christian days of worship, such as Easter and Christmas. However, more and more people are settling in Australia who do not follow Christian religions.

What can the Australian Government do when Australians break the law in other countries?

Just as people who come to Australia are expected to live by its laws and democratic way of life, Australians who go to other countries are expected to live by those countries' laws, even if they are not democratic. The Australian law does not apply to Australians in other countries. The Australian Government may not be able to help an Australian who breaks the law of another country. Some countries have a death penalty for certain crimes, and Australians have received the death penalty, even though such a penalty does not exist in Australia.



- ▲ Penalties for Australians who break the law in other countries may be different to penalties in Australia. In 2005, an Australian citizen, Tuong Van Nguyen, was executed in Singapore following a conviction for drug smuggling. These Australians showed their support for Van Nguyen by holding a candle-lit vigil.

First Muslim in federal parliament

At the 2010 federal election, Ed Husic became the first Muslim to be elected to Australia's federal parliament.

You decide: republic or monarchy?

Whether Australia should remain a monarchy or become a republic has been debated for a long time. Those in favour of a republic say that Australia cannot be a true democracy until an Australian is the official **head of state**. Those in favour of a monarchy say that the democratic laws and form of government inherited from the United Kingdom have served us well and should not be changed. Read on and see which side you believe is right.

Viewpoint 1: Australia should remain a monarchy!



I believe that when something is not broken, there is no need to fix it. Australia has been a monarchy for more than 220 years and we are one of the few countries not to have had a **civil war** or any other major internal conflicts. Monarchs are brought up knowing that they may one day be the head of state, so they are trained for the job.

On the other hand, elected leaders may have little training. Let's face it, many of our politicians have not exactly proven themselves to be the smartest people in the world. We live in one of the world's most beautiful countries, with one of the strongest economies – so let's not change anything.

Word watch

civil war a war between people from the same country

head of state the official head of a country (who is sometimes but not always the head of the government)

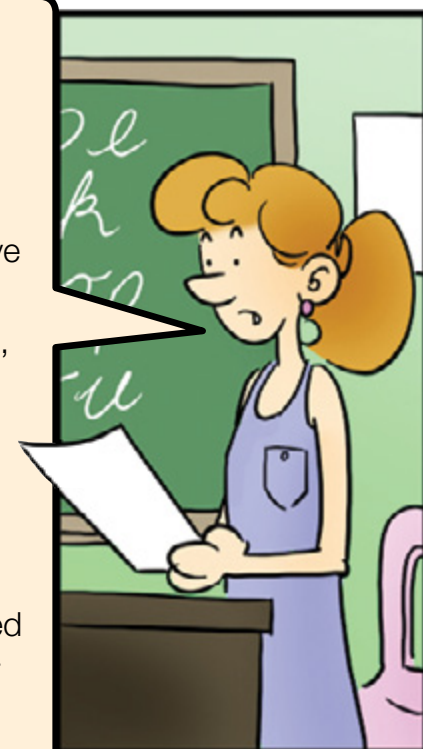
What's the difference between a monarchy and a republic?

Australia is a constitutional monarchy. This means that the head of state is a monarch whose powers are laid down in a **constitution**. The Australian head of state is the monarch of the United Kingdom and is represented in Australia by the Governor-General. A republic has a head of state who is elected by the people or chosen by the government that has been elected by the people.

Viewpoint 2: Australia should become a republic!

I believe that it is time that an Australian became head of state of this country. It's ridiculous that every other important position is held by an Australian but the most important one is off-limits. It may have been appropriate to be a monarchy when we were governed by the United Kingdom, but we have had our own national parliament for more than 100 years.

The Australian population has changed so much that most do not have ties to the United Kingdom any more. And what if Australia was ever at war against the United Kingdom? Our head of state would be our enemy. Wouldn't that be ridiculous?



Word watch

constitution a document that outlines how a country is to be governed

referendum a vote to adopt or change a constitution

1999 referendum: Australians have their say

In 1999, Australians voted in a **referendum** on whether to become a republic or remain a monarchy. The republic model planned did not appeal to all republican supporters, and more Australians voted to remain a monarchy.

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