

Federal elections

The Australian Constitution sets out some of the rules governing federal elections, but most are contained in the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* and can be changed by the federal Parliament.

When are elections held?

A federal election must be held at least once every three years. The Australian Constitution sets the maximum term of the House of Representatives at three years, but the Prime Minister can request an election earlier. Elections are usually held for half of the Senate at the same time as House of Representatives elections, however, they can be held separately.

Double dissolution elections

If there is a deadlock between the House of Representatives and the Senate over one or more proposed laws (bills), the Prime Minister can request a double dissolution election. This means all the seats in both houses of Parliament are up for election. Double dissolution elections have occurred seven times: in 1914, 1951, 1974, 1975, 1983, 1987 and 2016.

Senate casual vacancies

If a senator resigns, dies or is disqualified by the High Court of Australia, the former senator's state or territory parliament chooses someone to fill the vacancy for the remainder of the term. The new senator must be from the same party as the previous senator.

By-elections

If a member of the House of Representatives resigns, dies or is disqualified by the High Court of Australia, their electorate votes to elect a new member. This is called a by-election.