

Representation

Athens was a direct democracy, because citizens voted directly on laws and decisions. Australia is so big in both area and population that it would be impossible to govern it in exactly the same way as was done in ancient Athens.

Australia is what is called a representative democracy. This means that, instead of voting directly on each law or decision, we vote for another person to represent us. Instead of every citizen going to the assembly to vote, we send someone else to do it for us.

Remember that in Athens only men could be citizens, and only if they and their parents had been born in Athens. Slaves could not be citizens.

In Australia today people born here are automatically citizens. Adults who have been permanent legal residents for at least three years are entitled to apply for citizenship. If you are an Australian citizen, you have the right and duty to vote to elect people to represent your views.

Australia is one of the very few countries in the world where voting is compulsory.

1c What other examples of representative democracy do you know? (Where else do people vote for others to represent them?)

The Australian Parliament

The assembly in Australia that makes the decisions for the nation – the **Australian** (or **Commonwealth**) **Parliament** – is located in Canberra. The Australian Parliament is divided into two houses:

House of Representatives

Australia is divided into areas called electorates with about 75,000 voters in each. In this way each voter carries equal importance. The candidate who gets the most votes in each electorate becomes the Member of Parliament for that electorate. The government of Australia is always the group that has the most members in the House of Representatives.

Senate

In voting for the Senate, each state, rather than each voter, is counted as equal. Each State elects 12 Senators with the Territories electing two each.

