

# Elections, By-Elections and Referendums

## Elections

The conduct of regular and fair elections is one of the central features of a modern representative democracy. For many citizens voting is one action that they recognise as being political.

In Western Australia general elections are constitutionally required for both houses of Parliament at least once every four years. By-elections may also be necessary for the Legislative Assembly, and the filling of 'casual vacancies' for the Legislative Council may take place. Referendums may also be conducted to assess electoral opinion.

## Roles of Elections

Elections fulfil many roles including the:

- selection of representatives to Parliament;
- determination of which political party, coalition or 'alliance' will either govern or be in opposition;
- provision of a guide for the direction of policies to be pursued in Parliament and government;
- education of voters on public issues; and
- provision of a 'safety valve' enabling electors to record their voice in a peaceful, constitutionally approved form. The outcomes of elections are closely dependent upon who exercises voting rights, which voting systems are employed and the division of the electorate into constituencies. In Western Australia, electorates are called districts in the Legislative Assembly and regions in the Legislative Council.

Party	Legislative Assembly		Legislative Council	
	Seats	% Votes	Seats	% Votes
Labor Party	41	42.20	14	40.41
Liberal Party	13	31.23	9	26.71
The Greens	..	8.91	4	8.60
The Nationals	5	5.40	4	4.43
One Nation	..	4.93	3	8.19
Australian Christians	..	2.10	..	1.94
Independent	..	1.84	..	1.15
Shooters, Fishers, Farmers	..	1.31	1	2.37
Micro Business party	..	1.00	..	0.55
Julie Matheson for WA	..	0.46	..	0.39
Animal Justice	..	0.21	..	1.10
Flux the System!	..	0.17	..	0.44
Family First	..	0.11	..	0.84
Socialist Alliance	..	0.05	..	0.10
Liberal Democrats (unaffiliated)	..	0.04	1	1.77
Others	..	..	..	..

*Compiled by Antony Green for the WA Parliamentary Library*

## By-elections

A by-election is an election held to fill a vacancy in the Legislative Assembly between elections. Such elections may result from death, resignation, absence without leave, a Court of Disputed Returns decision, disqualification or ineligibility of a member. Between 1890 and 1947, the Constitution required that when a member was appointed as a minister it was necessary for the member to recontest the seat in a by-election. By-elections, apart from filling a vacancy in Parliament, are often regarded as significant

