

# **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

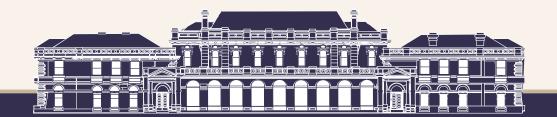
- selection of representatives to Parliament;
- determination of which political party, coalition or 'alliance' will either govern or be in opposition;
- provision of a guide for the direction of polices to be pursued in Parliament and government;
- · education of voters on public issues; and
- provision of a 'safety valve' enabling electors record their voice in peaceful. constitutionally approved form. 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 the Legislative Assembly and regions in the Legislative Council.

2013 State Election (State Wide Totals)					
	Legislative Assembly		Legislative Council		
Party	Seats	% Vote	Seats	% Vote	
Liberal	31	47.1	17	47.62	
Labor	21	33.13	11	32.51	
Greens	ı	8.39	2	8.21	
National	7	6.05	5	4.88	
Independent	ı	2.79	ı	1.6	
Family First	1	0.59	1	1.37	
Other	1	0.12	1	0.08	
Australian Christians	1	1.18	1	1.95	
Shooters & Fishers	-	-	1	1.78	
Total Seats	59		36		
Informal vote %	6.0		2.83		
Turnout %	89.2				

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 Disputed Returns disqualification or ineligibility of a Between 1890 and 1947, the Constitution required that when a member was appointed as a minister it was necessary for the member recontest the seat in a by-election. By-elections, apart from filling a vacancy in Parliament, are often regarded as significant





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indicators of the current electoral standings of the political parties. The poll ratings of party leaders can be affected by the performance of their party candidates in by-elections. Historically, it has been normal for a 'swing against the governing party' with turnout typically lower than for a general election. As by-elections normally create media interest, this provides the candidates with a higher than normal media profile.

### Referendums

Australia a referendum, referral Parliament of a policy or proposed law to the electors, is required to formally amend the commonwealth Constitution. To achieve a formal change to the Constitution, the proposition must be accepted by a majority of voters in a majority of states. Only eight amendments out of 44 attempts have achieved the double majority to change the Constitution. Referendums in Western Australia are not necessary to amend the state Constitutional documents unless the proposal is to abolish the office of Governor or abolish or reduce the size of the Legislative Assembly or Legislative Council.

When referendums are conducted, they are usually advisory. One significant very referendum in Western Australia's colonial history took place on 31 July 1900 when the decided constitutionally voters to be State' the Federation. 'Original in On 8 April 1933 voters decided to secede (withdraw) from the Federation. Of course this was only an advisory poll as Western Australia ultimately remained the Federation. Other referendums conducted in Western Australia have been about local option and prohibition questions as to whether the sale of alcoholic should beverages generally permitted to the public.

In conjunction with the 2005 general election one referendum question sought direction to the government Parliament and about extended retail trading hours on weekdays, with another referendum question focused on retail trading on Sundays. Both referendums resulted in 'no' strong votes. One very contentious matter that has gone to referendum four occasions whether daylight saving should be adopted during the summer months. On 8 March 1975, 7 April 1984, 4 April 1992 and 16 May 2009, electors of Western Australia rejected daylight saving with a very similar voting pattern of about 55 per cent 'no' and 45 per cent 'yes'. Country region electors have rejected four strongly the trials.

## Pattern of Regional Voting for Fourth Daylight Saving Referendum, 16 May 2009:

2009 Daylight Saving Referendum				
Region	Yes (%)	No (%)		
North Metropolitan	55.46	44.54		
South Metropolitan	51.35	48.65		
East Metropolitan	44.89	55.11		
Metropolitan Total	50.60	49.40		
South West	34.61	65.39		
Mining and Pastoral	34.11	65.89		
Agricultural	17.15	82.85		
Country Total	29.96	70.04		
State Wide Total	45.44	54.56		

Source: www.waec.wa.gov.au

Visit the Western Australian Electoral Commission website www.waec.wa.gov.au for more information on elections, byelections and referendums. For analysis of elections go to Information Services at www.wa.parliament.gov.au Election and Electorate Profiles. and see

