

Why is voting compulsory

in Australia?

information sheet

Compulsory voting was first used in Australia at the 1915 Queensland state election. Following this, Queenslanders turned out to state and federal elections in higher numbers than the national average.¹

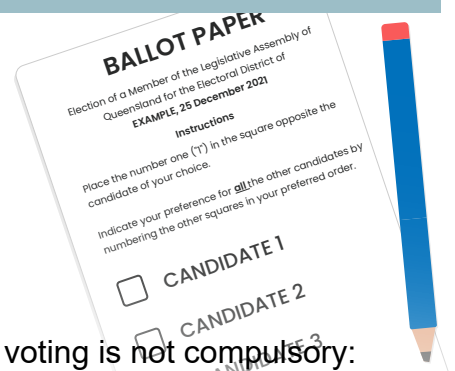
This increased voter turnout in Queensland encouraged changes at the federal level and in 1924, the Parliament of Australia amended the [Electoral Act](#) to make voting compulsory at federal elections.

Today, voting in Australia is compulsory at state and federal levels of government. It is compulsory at local government level in Queensland, however not all states compel electors to vote in local government elections.

Federal, state and territory electoral commissions continually monitor and improve procedures and practices to ensure the secrecy and integrity of the voting process.

Is compulsory voting better than voluntary voting?

It is argued compulsory voting ensures elected governments are viewed as legitimate, with nearly all electors having their say through voting. Whatever the outcome, the elected government is seen as the majority's choice: each vote is equal, every voice is equal.



Where voting is not compulsory:

- candidates and parties focus their policies on the minority of people who will vote, however their policies still effect the whole population – a minority is deciding for the majority, and
- a lot of time, money, and effort is spent by campaigners just to get people to enrol and vote.

Only 27 countries out of 195 worldwide (13.8%) have compulsory voting.²

To learn more about the importance of voting, go to the information sheet: [Why is voting important?](#)

Fast facts on voter turnout

According to the [Australian Electoral Commission](#), voter turnout at the 2019 federal election was nearly 92 per cent.

The United Kingdom (UK) has voluntary voting. The lowest turnout in a UK general election was 57.2% in 1918. In 2015, the turnout was 66.1%³ of eligible electors.

The United States of America (USA) also has voluntary voting. At the 2020 USA Presidential election, the turnout was 66.2% of eligible electors⁴, and was reported as a 'record turnout'.

¹ Parliament of Australia. Department of Parliamentary Services. 2005. Compulsory voting in Australian national elections p. 5 - https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/library/prspub/06SH6/upload_binary/06sh63.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22library/prspub/06SH6%22 – accessed 18 March 2021

² International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/voter-turnout/compulsory-voting>, accessed 17 March 2021

³ UK Parliament, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/chartists/contemporarycontext/electionturnout/>, accessed 17 March 2021

⁴ Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/01/28/turnout-soared-in-2020-as-nearly-two-thirds-of-eligible-u-s-voters-cast-ballots-for-president/>, accessed 17 March 2021