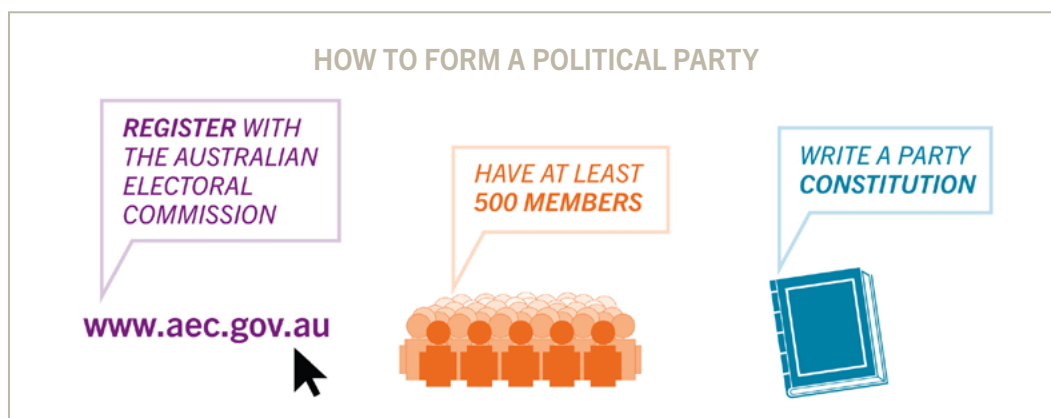


POLITICAL PARTIES



A political party is an organisation that represents a particular group of people or set of ideas. It aims to have members elected to Parliament so their ideas can affect the way Australia is governed.

Political parties have branches located around Australia. Party members in each branch suggest ideas for party policies. They help choose, or pre-select, party candidates for local, state and federal elections. They also assist with election campaigns, distribute ‘how to vote’ cards on Election Day, and help scrutinise the counting of votes. Before a political party can enter a candidate in an election, it must officially register with the Australian Electoral Commission. It also has to meet certain regulations under the Electoral Act, such as having a written constitution and at least 500 members who are eligible to be on the electoral roll.

The two biggest parties in Australia are the Liberal Party of Australia and the Australian Labor Party. Smaller parties, also called minor parties, include the Nationals, the Australian Greens, the Country Liberal Party, Katter’s Australian Party, the Nick Xenophon Team, Pauline Hanson’s One Nation, Derryn Hinch’s Justice Party, the Jacqui Lambie Network, the Liberal Democratic Party and Family First.

Parliamentary parties

A political party becomes a parliamentary party when it has party members elected to a parliament at the federal, state or territory level.

Parliamentary parties are powerful because their members work as a team and generally vote the same way on issues before the parliament.

Coalitions

A coalition is formed when two or more political parties join together. In a parliament, parties may form a coalition to create a bigger group and gain more power.

In the federal Parliament, parties that form a coalition sit next to each other in the House of Representatives and Senate. They generally vote the same way, although they may have different ideas on particular bills (proposed laws). Each party in a coalition usually holds separate party meetings.

A coalition that forms federal government may choose several ways of working together. For example:

- the Prime Minister is usually drawn from the larger party
- the Deputy Prime Minister is usually drawn from the smaller party
- ministries may be shared between the two parties according to the ratio of seats held by the two parties.

The Liberal Party of Australia and the Nationals have formed the longest-running coalition in the federal Parliament. These two parties are currently running a coalition government and have also done so in the three periods 1949 to 1972, 1975 to 1983, and 1996 to 2007.

Minor parties

Minor parties only have a small number of members elected to Parliament. They may form part of the government or the opposition through a coalition or agreement with another party. If this is not the case, they sit with the Independents on the seats that curve around at the end of each chamber. These seats are called non-government seats in the House of Representatives and cross-benches in the Senate.

Sometimes minor parties can hold the balance of power. This means that their vote may decide the outcome of an issue if the government and opposition disagree.

Party meetings

During sitting weeks, each parliamentary party has a party meeting which is held in their party room.

The main purpose of party meetings is to decide how the party will work as a team in the Parliament. In party meetings, members of parliament may:

- elect office-holders such as the party leader, ministers and the whips (team managers)
- debate and make decisions about party policy
- discuss tactics and organise party members to speak on particular bills
- resolve potential conflict and differences of opinion to ensure party unity.

Party meetings are only for party members and are confidential.

When not in Parliament, political parties also hold branch meetings. These meetings are generally open to all members of the party, as well as members of the public who are interested in becoming involved.

History

In the first decade after federation, the major parties in the federal Parliament were the Free Trade Party, the Protectionist Party and the Australian Labor Party. The Australian Labor Party is the oldest Australian political party and was formed by the trade union movement in the 1890s.

LINKS

APH website

Members

www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Members

Senators

www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Senators

Other websites

Australian Electoral Commission: *Current Register of Political Parties*

www.tinyurl.com/AECpolitical-parties



Parliamentary party logos from top: Liberal Party of Australia, Country Liberal Party, The Nationals, Australian Labor Party, Liberal Democratic Party, Pauline Hanson's One Nation, the Jacquie Lambie Network, the Nick Xenophon Team, The Australian Greens, Family First, Derryn Hinch's Justice Party, Katter's Australian Party.