



Australia — Va-PoReg Country Report

Kailitz, Steffen, et al., 2026: Varieties of Political Regimes (Va-PoReg). Country Report Australia, Dresden: Hannah Arendt Institute for Totalitarianism Studies.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/JYEL7U>

01/26/1788 Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom]: The British government determined on settling New South Wales in 1786, and colonization began on 01/26/1788.¹ In the period from 1788 to 1901 there were six British colonies on the Australian continent: New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia. In 1894 universal suffrage was granted in the colony of South Australia and in the colony of Western Australia in 1899. Since legislative multiparty elections took place during this period, we code this period as an indirect rule colonial regime. In this timeframe, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are comprehensive. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. According to LIED multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period.

01/01/1901 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Electoral Oligarchy]/Start (Monarchical) Electoral Oligarchy (Patriarchal): On this date, the six British colonies on the Australian continent became independent from the United Kingdom. The transition to democracy in Australia began with the Federation in 1901, uniting these six British colonies under a single constitution.² This federation resulted in the creation of the Australian parliament. On 03/29 & 30 the first federal national elections for a parliament took place.³ From 1901 immigration was restricted by a series of historical policies that were enacted by the Australian government to restrict non-European immigration to Australia. These policies were implemented in the early 20th century and were a defining feature of Australia's immigration laws until the mid-20th century (White Australia Policy). LIED classifies political liberties as absent in 1900 and as present in 1901. According to V-Dem's PCLI political liberties were present. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive was subordinate to or held equal power with other institutions, indicating executive parity or subordination. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also comprehensive. From this period onwards, based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were present, which aligns the observations of LIED. With the Commonwealth Franchise Act 1902 Australia granted universal vote for non-indigenous people.⁴ Indigenous Australian women (and men) were granted the vote in South Australia in 1895, but this right was revoked in 1902 for any Aboriginal person not already enrolled. Indigenous Australians were not given the right to vote in all states until 1962.⁵ In 1902, the Commonwealth Parliament enacted the Commonwealth Franchise Act, extending federal voting rights to men and women across all states of Australia. However, the Act explicitly excluded Aboriginal natives of Australia, Asia, Africa, or the Pacific Islands (excluding New Zealand) who did not already possess voting rights in state elections at the time of the Act.⁶ For this reason, Australia is until 1962 classified as an electoral democracy. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. During the entire time competitive elections were held (LIED). V-Dem's CEI scored cleanliness since 1902, and V-Dem's EF&FI declares free and fair election conditions except between 1917 and 1918 somewhat freedom and fairness was scored. LIED classifies political liberties as absent from 1914-1918, as well as from 1939-1945. V-Dem's PCLI classifies political liberties as present since 1900. According to FH, Australia in the whole regime period is classified as free.⁷ While almost all indicators we use point in the direction of a liberal democracy according

to our coding rules the denial of voting rights to Aborigines at the federal level until 1962 is such a significant democratic deficit that we classified Australia as an electoral democracy. Based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, the executive was either equal to or subordinate to other institutions, demonstrating strong constraints on decision-making authority. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive.

05/21/1962 End (Monarchical) Electoral Democracy/Start (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy: On this date the Commonwealth Electoral Act stipulated that Indigenous Australians possessed the right to register and cast their votes in federal elections, encompassing those held in the Northern Territory; however, enrollment was not mandatory. Any attempt to coerce Indigenous individuals into either enrolling or abstaining from voting through undue influence or bribery was considered an offense under the Act.⁸ On 05/27/1967 an amendment to the Australian constitution passed, which introduced the inclusion of the native population in the census and gave the Commonwealth Parliament the power to introduce laws specifically concerning the native population.⁹ On 05/06/1966, the „Migration Act 1966” went into effect, relaxing immigration requirements and signaling the move away from the previous „White Australia” policy, which had been aimed at preventing non-White people from immigrating.¹⁰ In 1975, Australia experienced a constitutional crisis. Governor-General John Kerr dismissed the government led by Prime Minister Gough Whitlam of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) over a parliamentary deadlock regarding federal finances. Kerr then appointed Malcolm Fraser of the Liberal Party (LP) as Prime Minister and urged him to call new elections.¹¹ Elections were held on 12/13/1975 and Malcolm Fraser was confirmed as Prime Minister.¹² The „Australia Act 1986” came into effect on 03/03/1986, eliminating the United Kingdom's ability to impose legislation with effect in Australia. With these two legislative acts, by the parliament of the United Kingdom and Australia respectively, formally severed all legal ties between Australia and the United Kingdom.¹³ A referendum proposing to amend the constitution to establish the Commonwealth of Australia as a republic and to replace the Queen and Governor-General with a President was held on 11/06/1999 but failed. From 06/24/2010 to 06/27/2013 Julia Gillard of the ALP served as Australia's first female Prime Minister.¹⁴ Australia is a parliamentary democracy with a bicameral system. A governor-general, appointed upon the prime minister's suggestion, serves as the representative of the United Kingdom's monarch as the head of state. The monarchy's powers are greatly constrained.¹⁵ Today Australia's democratic quality is reflected in its robust electoral system, respect for rule of law, civil liberties, political stability, inclusiveness, strong social policies, transparency, and active civil society. While historically there were significant issues with inclusivity, particularly regarding Indigenous Australians and immigrants, Australia has made considerable progress. The revocation of the White Australia Policy and legal reforms have moved towards a more inclusive society. The High Court of Australia, established in 1903, plays a crucial role in interpreting the constitution and ensuring that laws comply with democratic principles.¹⁶ Australia generally ranks well in global indices measuring corruption and transparency. Efforts to maintain high standards of public service and government accountability contribute to the quality of its democracy. Australia has developed a comprehensive welfare system, including healthcare, education, and social security, reflecting a commitment to social justice and equity. On 05/21/2022 a federal election was held. After nearly a decade in opposition the Labor Party regained power by securing 77 seats in the House of Representatives, allowing them to form a majority government. The Labor Party's dominance was strongly reaffirmed in the 2025 federal election, which resulted in a massive victory, securing a record 94 seats for a single party and granting Anthony Albanese a second term.¹⁷ An independent federal agency, the Australian Electoral Commission, is responsible for organizing federal elections, referendums, defines electoral boundaries and keeps the electoral rolls. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED has always characterized elections as competitive. Elections and electoral laws have always been deemed clean, free and fair by V-Dem's EF&FI and CEI. Compulsory voting requires registered voters to participate, and not voting may result in a small fine.¹⁸ According to FH, the country is classified as free with a score between 2 and 4 and falls under the free category in our interpretation.

Political liberties are classified as present by LIED and V-Dem's PCLI. As per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was on par with or below that of other branches, reflecting executive parity or subordination. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

(Monarchical) Liberal Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Bolton 1900, Butler 1976, Hughes 2004, Macintyre 1999)

Notes

- ¹ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Australia/History>
- ² https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Australia_1985?lang=en
- ³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1901_Australian_federal_election
- ⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonwealth_Franchise_Act_1902
- ⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage
- ⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voting_rights_of_Indigenous_Australians#Queensland
- ⁷ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/australia/freedom-world/2024>
- ⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voting_rights_of_Indigenous_Australians#Queensland
- ⁹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1967_Australian_referendum_\(Aboriginals\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1967_Australian_referendum_(Aboriginals))
- ¹⁰ <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/law/migration-act-1966>
- ¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1975_Australian_constitutional_crisis
- ¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1975_Australian_federal_election
- ¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australia_Act_1986
- ¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julia_Gillard
- ¹⁵ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/australia/freedom-world/2023>
- ¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_Australian_history
- ¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2025_Australian_federal_election
- ¹⁸ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/australia/freedom-world/2023>

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