

Political Parties

The parties dominate state and federal parliaments, provide all governments and oppositions, and frame the nature of political debate.

Australian Labor Party

The ALP is Australia's oldest political party, formed in 1890. The only party to have been continuously represented in the House of Representatives since 1901, it experienced three debilitating splits in the twentieth century and has governed federally for about one-third of the years since federation, most recently between 1983-96, under Bob Hawke and Paul Keating.

Liberal Party

Originally formed from a merger of the Protectionist and Free Trade parties in 1910, the Liberal Party has undergone several reformations, culminating in the present-day party that was formed by its iconic founder, Robert Menzies. Menzies governed for 16 years from 1949 and is Australia's longest-serving prime minister. The Liberal Party has governed in coalition with the National Party for 36 of the last 52 years.

The Nationals

Originally known as the Country Party, it has held seats in the federal parliament since 1919. Changing its name to the National Country Party in the 1970s, then to National Party in the 1980s, and finally to The Nationals in 2003, the rural-based party has seen a steady decline in its voter support base. Whilst still holding the balance of power in the House of Representatives and governing in coalition with the Liberal Party, it has struggled against the advent of One Nation, rural independents and Liberal Party competition

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Australian Democrats

Formed in 1977 by a disaffected Liberal, Don Chipp, the Australian Democrats is the most successful minor political party in Australian history. Whilst it has never won a House of Representatives seat, since 1981 it has held or shared the balance of power in the Senate. It is the only party to have elected not one, but five different women as leader. More recently, the party has suffered a debilitating internal split, departure from the leadership of Natasha Stott Despoja and plummeting opinion poll ratings. Its future is problematic.

Australian Greens

The Greens are a phenomenon of the 1980s, arising out of a number of environmental battles of that time, such as the fight to save the Franklin Dam in Tasmania. It has held the balance of power in the Tasmania's state parliament, attracts strong support in Western Australia and now has two representative in the Senate, including Bob Brown. In 2002, the party also won a seat in a House of Representatives by-election.

One Nation

Formed by a disendorsed Liberal Party candidate, Pauline Hanson, in 1996, One Nation rose to prominence in Queensland in the 1998 state election when it won 11 seats in parliament. It followed this by winning a Queensland Senate seat in 1998 and polling 8.43% of the primary vote in the House of Representatives, making it the third largest party in terms of voter support at that time. The party quickly went into decline amid internal bickering, lost its parliamentary representation in Queensland, and faced ongoing court battles over electoral funding. The party was routed in 2001, polling 4.35% of the primary vote, many of its supporters returning to the coalition parties.

Other Political Parties

A wide range of minor political parties exist in Australia, ranging from conservative religious groups to fringe anarchist organisations.