

FOLLOW A VICTORIAN STATE ELECTION



Following an election is a great way to see our democratic process in action. You can see first-hand the people and groups involved in an election and the important roles that each has to play.

From beginning to end, an election involves hundreds of people and organisations. Your task is to research and monitor the process from when the election is announced through to its end. Given the magnitude of the task, it may be appropriate to form small groups and share tasks across the class when gathering information.

For example:

- Group A could focus on local papers.
- Group B could focus on State papers.
- Group C could focus on national papers and magazines.
- Group D could focus on television.
- Group E could focus on other electronic media including the Internet.
- Group F could focus on leaflets and other direct mail.



1. Before you start the process of monitoring and analysing the election, see if you can predict the election outcome. Also estimate the likely percentage of votes to be won by each party and the number of seats.
2. Graph the predicted results for the class.
3. The predicted results can then be compared with actual results at the end of the election.

Preparation – organising the information collection reports

Prepare a folder for storing and organising media reports of the election. Use the variety of sources described above. (A loose-leaf folder, with dividers will help to categorise the articles collected.)

During the election – collecting and sorting the information

Scan local, state and national media for stories and advertisements.

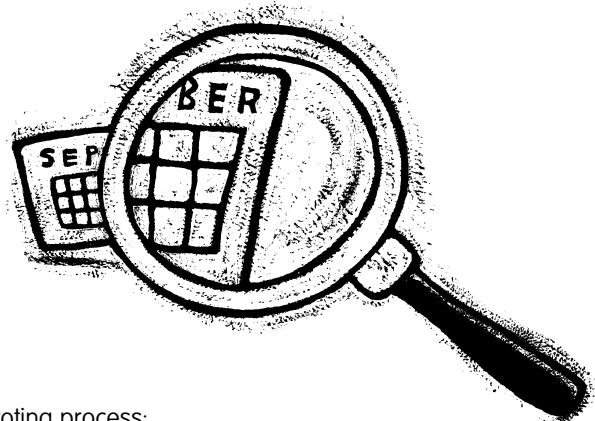
It is important to collect the advertisements placed by the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) that explain the electoral process.

For each piece collected:

- note the name and date of the publication;
- prepare a short summary of the content of the report, including the nature and purpose of any images and slogans used; and
- record the type of information contained in the VEC advertisements.

As your collection grows, sort the articles into categories, for example:

- issues;
- events, such as campaign launches;
- community response, such as opinion polls;
- profiles of individuals, including politicians; and
- comments published via letters, cartoons, editorials and feature articles.

**The election****Complete the following tasks at the voting centre:**

- record the main steps taken during the voting process;
- take note of any display materials;
- collect samples of how-to-vote cards; and
- comment on the number of people, their attitude and the general approach displayed to the voting process.

After the election – an analysis of the event

- draw up a timeline identifying key events during the election period. Include the immediate pre- and post-election periods as appropriate;
- identify and discuss the issues and events that captured the most public attention;
- mark these issues on the timeline.

- collect the results of all the opinion polls published about the election. Sort them into various types of polls, for example doorstep or telephone polls;
- determine how accurate the polls were at predicting the election outcomes; and
- use the class folio to investigate the response of the major parties to each key issue.

After the election – draw conclusions

Write up an individual report that answers the following:

- What were the results in the State as a whole, such as the number of seats won by each party?
- What was the election result in your electorate and how did it compare with the result over the State as a whole?
- Were there any major changes of parties winning certain electorates?

Go back to your predictions on the election

- Compare the actual results with the predicted results made by the individual students and the class prior to the election. Explain why the predictions were accurate/inaccurate.



Special Project: A new system for Victoria's Upper House

At the 2006 State election, a new system will operate for Victoria's Upper House (Legislative Council). The table summarises the changes:

Feature	Old System	New System
Number of members	44	40
Number of electorates	22 provinces	8 regions
Members per electorate	2 (1 elected at each State election)	5 (All elected at each State election)
Size of electorate	4 electoral districts	11 electoral districts
Electors per electorate	152,000	418,000
Voting system	Preferential voting	Proportional representation

The new system is likely to affect both the number of candidates and parties standing for election and the election results.

1. Victoria is divided into eight regions, and voters elect five members for each region.

Check the census statistics for your region on the VEC website. How is your region distinctive? How do you think the nature of your region will affect the election results?

2. On the ballot paper, most candidates are organised into parties or groups, though there are also ungrouped independent candidates. Voters can vote either 'above the line' for their preferred party or group, or 'below the line' for at least five candidates in the order of their choice. If a voter votes 'above the line', the voter's preferences are distributed according to a 'voting ticket' lodged by the party or group.

How many voters do you think will vote 'above the line'? In Federal Senate elections, more than 90% of voters vote 'above the line', but in those elections people who vote 'below the line' have to fill out every square. Do you think the fact that 'below the line' voters in Victoria have to fill out just 5 squares will make a difference? Check the results after the election.

Check the party voting tickets for your region on the VEC website. Draw up a table showing where each party's preferences go. How do you account for any differences between the tickets?

The order of the groups is determined by a random draw, but the parties themselves decide the order of the candidates within the group. There can be keen competition within the parties for the top position in the group, which gets all the 'above the line' votes. Check the media for examples of competition within parties.

3. The ballot papers show the localities where the candidates are enrolled.

Check the candidates' localities for your region. Do the candidates come from within or outside your region? Are they concentrated in one part of your region, or are they spread all over it? Is there any evidence of people being inclined to vote according to where candidates come from?

4. To be elected, a candidate needs to get a 'quota' of one sixth of the formal votes plus 1.

Any candidate getting more votes than a quota is elected. The candidate's surplus votes (the difference between the total votes and the quota) are then transferred to the other candidates at a reduced value, calculated by dividing the surplus votes by the total votes for the candidate. If all surplus votes have been distributed and there are still vacancies to be filled, preferences are distributed from the lowest scoring candidates until a candidate has a quota. This candidate's surplus is then transferred to the candidates who are still in the race. This process of transferring surpluses from elected candidates and distributing preferences from excluded candidates continues until five candidates are elected.

Check the election results for your region. Who has been elected, what are their parties, and what order are they elected in? Who achieved a quota on first-preference votes? Which elected candidates needed transfers of surpluses and distribution of preferences from other candidates, and who were these other candidates?

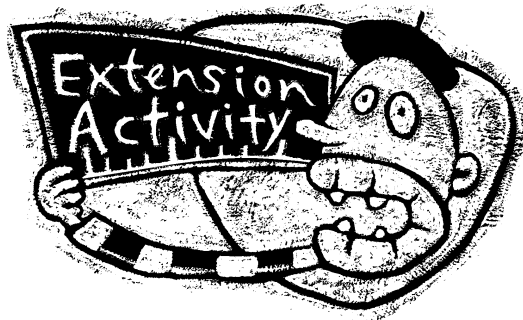
5. Under the old system, a candidate needed more than 50% of the votes after distribution of preferences to be elected. Under the new system, a candidate needs a quota of $1/6$ of the votes after distribution of preferences to be elected. This lower threshold means that there is less of a barrier to the election of candidates from smaller parties and independents.

Compare the number of candidates and parties contesting the Legislative Council election in 2002 and 2006. Can you explain any differences? Refer to page 44 for the 2002 State election statistics.

What are the media, party spokespeople and candidates saying about the chances of minor party candidates and independents winning seats? After the election, check how many minor party candidates and independents actually did win seats. Why do you think there were any differences?

6. One characteristic of proportional representation is that one party is less likely to get a clear majority than under preferential voting.

Check the results for Victoria. How many seats has each party won? Do the results seem to support this characteristic?



1. The election timetable

- a. The Victorian State election will be held on 25 November 2006. Find out from the Victorian Electoral Commission website (www.vec.vic.gov.au)
- when enrolments close;
 - when nominations close; and
 - how many days after the issue of the writs is election day.

Draw a timeline showing these key election events.

- b. Look for enrolment and nomination advertisements, published by the Victorian Electoral Commission.
- When do enrolments close?
 - Who can enrol?
 - How do voters enrol?
 - What is the date for close of nominations?
 - How do candidates nominate?

2. The candidates and the political parties

- a. Who are the new candidates standing for your Legislative Assembly District and your Legislative Council Region?
 - How many candidates are there altogether?
 - Which District or Region has the most candidates?
 - How many are there?
 - How do these figures compare with the last Legislative Assembly election results? (See page 43)

(Find the list of candidates in newspapers or on the VEC website (www.vec.vic.gov.au) after the close of nominations.)

- b. Find the names of the major and minor political parties that nominated candidates in the State and in your electorate.
 - How many electorates is each party standing for?
 - Why do you think the numbers vary?
 - Why do some parties not contest all seats?



3. The issues

- a. Identify the main issues of the election as described by the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition.
- b. Report on what the candidates and political parties are saying about particular issues (for example, health, education, conservation, law and order) both in the State and in your electorate.
- c. Describe the key local issues in your electorate.

4. Pressure groups

- a. Identify any pressure groups actively involved in this election. Describe their main objectives.
- b. How are the pressure groups trying to influence public opinion (news stories, letters to newspapers, advertisements, demonstrations, how-to-vote cards)?

5. The role of the media

Try to observe a number of television interviews with candidates and political leaders about the forthcoming State election.

- a. How important is the media?

Do you think the media influences the way people vote at elections?
- b. What stories does the media like to investigate during elections?

How does the person being interviewed answer?

Does the media give equal treatment to political leaders?

6. The polls

a. Collect newspaper cuttings of the polls leading up to the State election. For each poll, answer these questions:

- What does the poll predict will be the result of the election?
- How many people were surveyed for the polls?
- What was the method of survey (telephone, face-to-face home visits, phone-in, random street interviews)?
- Is there any indication of the reliability of these polls?
- Is the poll prediction different to the previous poll prediction? If so, why do you think it is different?
- Over a period of time, do the polls show a change in the predicted outcome of the election?

b. Once the election is over, compare the election result with the result predicted by the polls. Do you think that polls have some influence on how people vote? If so, in what way?

7. Counting the votes

a. Where and when will votes be counted for the State election?

- Are all the votes counted on election night?
- What percentage of the vote does a candidate need to win?

b. On election night, a two-candidate preferred count for the Lower House District is conducted at every voting centre.

The preferences of 'minor' candidates are distributed to the two candidates who are expected to come first and second in the election. Usually, but not always, these will be the candidates representing the ALP and the Liberal and National Parties.

What is the purpose of the two-candidate preferred count, and what additional information does it give?

8. Election day

a. On election day, visit a voting centre and get copies of how-to-vote cards for candidates in your electorate.

b. Did all the candidates and parties standing for your electorate have representatives outside the voting centre handing out how-to-vote cards? If any candidates did not have representatives, why do you think that was the case?

c. Why weren't the candidate and/or party representatives inside the voting centre?

9. Election night

Follow one of the telecasts from the tally room on election night.

- a. Who are the experts giving the commentary on the election?
Why do you think each of them was chosen?
- b. At what precise time do the first election results come through? At what precise time do the commentators believe the result of the election is clear? Do all the commentators agree?
- c. Which seats are the commentators giving most attention to and why?
- d. Are commentators more interested in the results from Districts or Regions?
Why do you think this is?
- e. Which Districts are 'marginal' and why?

10. After election night

- a. After the election, provide answers to these questions:
 - What were the results in the State as a whole? For example, number of seats won by each party.
 - What was the election result in your electorate and how did it compare with the result for the State as a whole?
 - Were there any major changes of parties winning certain electorates?
 - Outline some of the factors that influenced the election results.
- b. Provide an opinion on these aspects.
 - To what extent did the timing of the election suit one side more than the other?
 - Did any publications take a partial view – for which side?
 - To what extent did the campaign of either party influence the mood of the electorate?
 - Did any particular statements appear to have had an impact on the election outcome?

