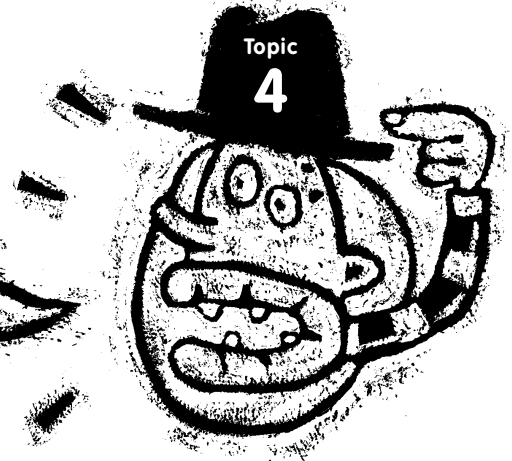


THE RIGHT TO VOTE

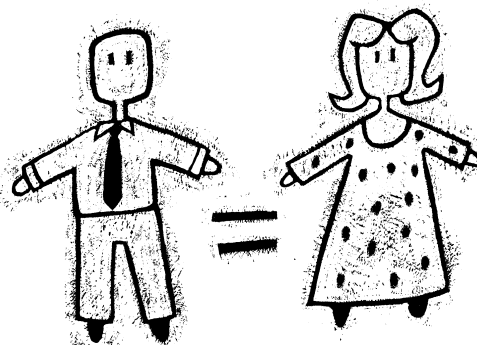


The right to vote is special. It allows citizens to elect governments that will protect or extend our other rights. The vote, in fact, protects the right to have rights.

In Victoria, male adults who own property have held the right to vote since parliamentary government was established in 1856. However, it took more than 100 years for the system to include all adult citizens on a 'one vote, one value' basis. The timeline below indicates the main steps in developing representation in Victoria.

- 1856** Male property owners aged over 21 could vote for both Houses. Some citizens had more than one vote (plural voting), if they had property in more than one electorate. Victoria was the first place in the world to use the secret ballot. Persons with the right to vote were excluded if they were in receipt of charitable relief (e.g. food handouts).
- 1857** All resident males aged over 21 could vote for the lower house. Only wealthy adult males could vote for the upper house.

- 1899** Plural voting was abolished for the lower house.
- 1908** Adult women were given the vote, (Victoria was the last State to allow this).
- 1911** Victoria adopted the preferential voting system.
- 1926** Voting for the lower house is made compulsory.
- 1950** Property requirements for the upper house abolished.
- 1973** The voting age reduced from over 21 to 18 years or over.
- 1982** 'One vote, one value' established through electorates having equal numbers of voters.
- 2003** Legislation introduced for proportional representation voting for the upper house.



Who can vote now?

To be eligible to vote at Federal and Victorian State Government elections, you need to:

- be an Australian citizen;
- be 18 years of age or over; and
- have lived at your current address for at least a month.



Research the following questions:

1. Not everyone in Australia has the right to vote. Who is currently excluded from voting and why?
2. How did women get the vote?
3. Although aboriginal people in Victoria were never specifically excluded from voting by legislation at State level, how might legislative criteria for voting in the past have excluded them as well as other people?
4. What are the ways you can protect your rights if you don't have the right to vote?