Participation in the election

Enrolment, voter turnout, and formal voting rates are useful indicators of the health of an electoral system. These participation indicators may be affected by the services provided by an electoral authority, interest in the election, the geography and demographic composition of the electorate, and even the weather on election day.

While more Victorians voted in 2018 than at any previous State election (see Figure 26), the turnout rate for the State as a whole was 90.16% – the lowest since the 1945 State election (see Figure 25). This was a disappointing result, particularly given the comprehensive communication campaign across social media and outdoor advertising. It is incumbent on the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) to try to account for this development.

Voter turnout was highest in Eltham District (93.49%) and lowest in Broadmeadows District (82.27%). The voter turnout was typically higher in country Victoria than in the metropolitan regions, though despite this the Eastern Metropolitan Region had the highest voter turnout (91.68%).

As in 2014, low voter turnout was concentrated in two types of district: four inner urban districts that have young and very mobile populations.

Voter turnout 1911–2018

Figure 25: Voter turnout in Victorian State elections 1911-2018. Two factors are responsible for the large increase between the 1924 and 1927 elections: the introduction of compulsory voting for Legislative Assembly elections in Victoria in 1926; and the election being held on a Saturday for the first time.
Direct enrolment

A large part of the explanation lies in the VEC’s sheer success in enrolling electors. Since 2010, the VEC and AEC have engaged in direct enrolment, using information from trusted sources to enrol electors instead of waiting – in some cases indefinitely – for people to do it themselves. As a result, the estimated proportion of eligible Victorians on the roll has increased from 90.85% in 2010 to 96.60% at the 2018 State election.

However, directly enrolled electors do not participate at the same rate as electors in general. Of the 324,501 electors who were directly enrolled from the start of 2017, only 234,347 voted at the 2018 State election – a turnout rate of 72.22%. If the directly enrolled electors had voted at the same rate as Victorians in general, there would have been more than 90,000 additional votes. There were some directly enrolled electors at the 2014 State election, but their numbers were too small to make a material difference. In 2018, the lower participation rate of directly enrolled electors significantly depressed the overall voter turnout.

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1 Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) is a product developed by the ABS which scores and ranks geographic regions based on relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage, economic resources, and education and occupation.
### Voter turnout by age 2014–2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>2018 turnout</th>
<th>2014 turnout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>70+ years</td>
<td>90.32%</td>
<td>91.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-69 years</td>
<td>95.29%</td>
<td>96.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-64 years</td>
<td>95.16%</td>
<td>96.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-59 years</td>
<td>94.77%</td>
<td>95.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-54 years</td>
<td>93.98%</td>
<td>95.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49 years</td>
<td>92.88%</td>
<td>94.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44 years</td>
<td>90.87%</td>
<td>93.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39 years</td>
<td>88.39%</td>
<td>91.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34 years</td>
<td>85.77%</td>
<td>88.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29 years</td>
<td>83.70%</td>
<td>86.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24 years</td>
<td>85.79%</td>
<td>88.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-19 years</td>
<td>90.36%</td>
<td>92.75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 27: Voter turnout by age, 2014–2018 Victorian State elections.

### Young people

Another factor appears to have been a decline in participation by young electors. There was a slight fall in participation in all age groups but the fall was greatest – and participation lowest – among 25-29 year olds, whose turnout dropped from 86.63% in 2014 to 83.70% in 2018 (see Figure 27). Independent tracking research over the election period supports the view that young people were less inclined to participate; the research found that young people became increasingly aware of the election and the VEC’s communication campaign, but this had no effect on their disposition to vote. The VEC will need to consider how to better engage young people. It is worth noting that the next largest decrease in participation was in the 35-39 year old age group, followed by 30-34 year olds and 40-44 year olds.

### Marriage equality survey

There was a surge in enrolments in the lead-up to the 2017 Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey. Observers wondered whether the mainly young people who enrolled for the survey would vote in following elections, and evidence from the Victorian election indicates that many of them did not vote. Of the 35,730 electors who enrolled for the first time in August 2017 and were still enrolled at the time of the 2018 State election, only 24,245 voted – a turnout rate of only 67.86%. Electors who were younger than 20 comprised 32.18% of the August 2017 enrollees, and in the State election these new electors had a highly satisfactory turnout rate of 91.03%. It was voters in their 20s (who made up 43.75% of the August 2017 enrollees) who were least inclined to vote – only 55.79% of them voted in the State election.

### Overseas travel

A further contributing factor to the low turnout rate may be Victorians’ increasing propensity to travel overseas. An estimated 240,000 Victorians returned from short-term overseas trips in November 2018. At this election, Victorians who were interstate or overseas could apply to have their ballot papers emailed to them, but then they would have to print them and, most importantly, post them back to reach the VEC before the deadline – which, at the 2018 election had been reduced from nine days after election day to just five days. In many cases, this was not practical. Some 5,600 Victorians voted in this way at the State election – a small proportion of the total overseas. Online voting, or at least the ability to email completed votes back to the VEC, would facilitate participation by Victorians who are overseas during the election period (see page 50).
Over the past four Victorian State elections, substantial increases have been observed in the number and proportion of electors voting early. At the 2018 State election, more than one third of electors voted early (1,372,190 people), compared with one quarter in 2014 (912,697 people).

The proportion of electors voting by post has remained fairly consistent since 2006, after a slight increase at the 2014 State election. In the 2018 State election 250,403 electors voted by post, compared to 294,571 in 2014. The proportion of electors voting outside their electorate on election day (absent voters) has remained steady since 2006, and the proportion of provisional voters remains comparatively small at less than 1%.

Changes in Parliament

There was a substantial turnover of members of Parliament in 2018. In the Legislative Assembly, 13 members stepped down at the election, one transferred successfully to the Legislative Council and 10 members were defeated at the election. These departures were replaced by 24 new members. The Legislative Council realised a higher proportion of changes, with four retirements, two unsuccessful transfers to the Assembly and nine members defeated. Fourteen new members were elected to the Legislative Council, and one member (the Hon Jane Garrett) transferred from the Assembly.

Overall, there were 17 retirements at the State election, comprising 10 members of the ALP, six Liberals and one Independent. Members stepping down included the Hon Louise Asher (deputy leader of the Liberal Party, 1999-2002 and 2006-2014), the Hon Richard Dalla-Riva (former Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations and for Manufacturing), the Hon Martin Dixon (former Minister for Education), the Hon Christine Fyffe (former Speaker of the Assembly), the Hon Telmo Languiller (former Speaker of the Assembly), the Hon Wade Noonan (former Minister for Police and Corrections, for Industry and Employment and for Resources) and the Hon Marsha Thomson (former Minister for Small Business, for Consumer Affairs and for Information and Communication Technology).
candidates in 2018. Seven parties that stood candidates in 2014 were de-registered in the three following years, while eight newly registered parties stood candidates in 2018: Aussie Battler Party, Australian Liberty Alliance, Derryn Hinch’s Justice Party, Health Australia Party, Hudson for Northern Victoria, Sustainable Victoria, Transport Matters Party, Victorian Socialists.

The total of 887 candidates was slightly below the record 896 candidates in 2014. The newly registered parties in 2018 tended to endorse slightly fewer candidates than most parties did in 2014.

The number of candidates declined in the Legislative Assembly while increasing slightly in the Legislative Council. The new parties concentrated their efforts on the Legislative Council, where they had more chance of being elected. Several parties, notably the Animal Justice Party and the Democratic Labour Party (DLP), stood more candidates than in 2014. The number of independent candidates increased slightly from 107 in 2014 to 111 in 2018.

The number of candidates per Legislative Assembly district ranged between three and 12, with five being the most common number (occurring in 30 districts). The average number of candidates per district was 5.8, compared with 6.2 in 2014. The number of candidates per Legislative Council region ranged from 45 (in five regions) to 53 (South-Eastern Metropolitan), with an average of 9.4 candidates for each of the 40 seats (a marginal increase from 8.8 in 2014). The youngest candidate was 18 years old and the oldest was 88 years old (see Figure 29). The youngest candidate to be elected was 25 years old and the oldest was 71 years old.

The number of women nominating as candidates was 347 (39.3% of the total) – an increase in both raw numbers and proportionally from the 2014 election (see Figure 30). The number of women in Parliament increased from 48 (37.5% of all MPs) after the 2014 election to 53 (41.4%) after the 2018 election. Nearly half (19 out of 40) of the members of the Legislative Council are women.

Candidates and Parties

Twenty registered political parties stood candidates, one less than in the 2014 State election. Three registered parties (the Australian Conservatives (Vic.), Pauline Hanson’s One Nation and the Socialist Alliance) did not stand candidates in 2018. Seven parties that stood candidates in 2014 were de-registered in the three following years, while eight newly registered parties stood candidates in 2018: Aussie Battler Party, Australian Liberty Alliance, Derryn Hinch’s Justice Party, Health Australia Party, Hudson for Northern Victoria, Sustainable Victoria, Transport Matters Party, Victorian Socialists.

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In 51 districts, the two-candidate-preferred (2CP) count constituted the two-party-preferred vote. These were districts where the 2CP count was between an ALP and a Liberal/National candidate, and where a preference distribution was not required because one candidate gained more than half of the first-preference votes (38 districts were in this position), or a preference distribution concluded with more than two candidates still in the count (there were 12 such districts), or, in the case of Benambra, the 2CP count was between a Liberal and an ALP candidate and the preference distribution was between Liberal and an Independent.

In 10 districts, there were special two-party-preferred counts. In these districts, neither the preference distribution nor the 2CP count was between the ALP and the Liberal/National candidates: in Brunswick, Melbourne, Northcote and Preston the final contest was between the ALP and the Greens; in Geelong, Morwell and Pascoe Vale it was between the ALP and an Independent; in Prahran it was between the Liberals and the Greens; and in Mildura and Shepparton it was between Liberals/Nationals and an Independent. In these districts the special count revealed the balance between the ALP and the Coalition.

For the first time, the two-party-preferred vote could not include all districts, as the Liberal Party did not stand a candidate for Richmond District.

In three districts both the Liberal and National parties stood candidates. In Bendigo East and Shepparton the Liberals were clearly the leading Coalition party, while in Morwell the Nationals overtook the Liberals in the preference distribution.

It is worth noting that the two-party-preferred vote is obtained for information purposes only. It provides a measure – for each district and for the State as a whole – of support for the parties most likely to form government. The two-party-preferred vote does not affect the result of the election in any district. The result is determined according to law by the count of first-preference votes and by preference distributions where required until one candidate has a majority, regardless of the party affiliations of the candidates.
In most State elections there are several cases where the ALP or Liberal/National candidates are not the two leading candidates in a district. There were nine such cases in the 2006 election, seven in 2010, six in 2014 and eight in 2018 (Brunswick, Geelong, Melbourne, Morwell and Northcote, where the Liberal candidate was third in terms of first-preference votes; Pascoe Vale, where the Liberal candidate was fourth; Mildura, where the ALP candidate was third; and Shepparton, where the ALP candidate was fourth). In each case, preferences were distributed to the ALP and to the Liberal or National candidate, in order to maintain a consistent approach and establish a two-party-preferred vote. In the 2018 State election, the two-party-preferred vote across the 87 applicable districts was 57.3% ALP and 42.7% Liberal/National.