

# Australian Politics For Dummies

## Cheat Sheet

Politics — it's everywhere. It affects everything in society, like taxes, the environment, health, education, the economy, international affairs, security and everything in between. So, knowing how political decisions are made and who the important actors are makes sense. Knowledge is power, and understanding how the Australian political system actually works gives you the power to get involved and influence politics yourself.

Explore the following:

- Voting in Australian Elections
- Considering Australian Political Parties and You
- The Role the Media Plays in Australian Politics
- Understanding Australian Political Campaigns

## Voting in Australian Elections

Voting is the cornerstone of a democratic system. But Australia has different methods of voting in elections, as well as having many elections. Here are a few tips so you'll go into a polling booth with greater confidence and cast your vote more effectively:

- \* **Get a handle on the voting systems.** Get to know the different ways to vote for the Senate and the House of Representatives.
- \* **Understand voting behaviour.** Knowing why people vote the way they do can make your own vote more effective.
- \* **Follow the election count and pick the winners.** Counting votes in elections can be complex. By understanding the process, you'll be able to analyse and understand the results.
- \* **Know who wins and why.** The Australian political system is designed to produce a clear winner. Understand how this process works, as well as how it affects the actions of government.

## Considering Australian Political Parties and You

Parties are crucial to Australian politics and play a critical role in Australia's democratic system. Despite common belief, all parties are not the same. Hey, you might even decide to join a political party, or even start one! Some important groups to consider include:

- \* **The major parties:** Australian political history has been dominated by the Labor and Liberal parties since the end of World War II. Find out these parties' origins and how their organisations work, and see the impact they make on Australian politics.
- \* **The minor parties:** Heaps of minor parties have emerged in Australian politics, but only a handful have ever won seats in parliament. Understand what makes minor parties tick and the role they play in the policy debate.
- \* **Independents:** Not everyone in parliament represents a party. So check out who these independents are and what they bring to Australian politics.
- \* **Interest groups and social movements:** Not everyone wants to make their impact on politics through parliament. Get to know these organisations and see how their actions can affect policy.

## The Role the Media Plays in Australian Politics

Politics is one of the most widely reported topics in the media. Examine how the different media present the news, as well as how politicians try to influence how news is reported. Understanding certain aspects of the media can help you analyse political news, including:

- \* **The role of the media:** In an age of busy lifestyles, people turn to the media to get their fix of political news. Check out the ideals of the media and what influences the political news they report in practice.
- \* **The Great Debates:** Debates are a great way to see how politicians perform under pressure. By transmitting and analysing these debates, the media can play a big role in deciding which politicians trump their political opponents.
- \* **Who's driving the message:** Interesting recent developments have seen politicians trying to control the key messages reported by the media. Understand how politicians use media experts and spin doctors in a world where information is everywhere.
- \* **Which media can cut to the chase:** Citizens want good-quality reporting on politics. After all, it affects almost everything in their lives. So, understand the best ways to 'sort the wheat from the chaff' in terms of political news.

# Understanding Australian Political Campaigns

The campaign period is showtime for political parties and politicians. It provides them with the opportunity to propose the policies and changes they hope to implement if they're elected. Some of the important aspects of the campaign period include:

- \* **Advertising:** Political parties employ media experts to design campaign advertisements to be broadcast throughout the media. See how important they can be in influencing people's voting intentions.
- \* **Meeting and greeting:** You see them in shopping centres and railway stations, and at local sausage sizzles, and some will even knock on your door. Check out some of the ways politicians try to win your vote.
- \* **Targeting seats:** Examine why some seats are classified as safe, marginal or swinging, and understand how outcomes in these seats shape which party wins or loses the election.

