# Inventing the Nation Through the Ballot Box*

*Marian Sawer*

**My Ancestress and the Secret Ballot,
1848 and 1851[1]**

*Put about, wee ship, on your Great Circle course,
don't carry Bella's Murray daughter and boys
to the British Crown's stolen Austral land.
In ten years the Secret Ballot will force
its way into law in those colonies...*

*Don't sail, don't sail, Great-grannie (cubed) dear:
wait just a century and there'll be welfare
in full, and you won't play the Settler role.
The polling booth will be a closet of prayer.*

*(Les Murray 1996)*

Australia has been described as the first nation created through the ballot box. Much of Australia's early identity as a nation revolved around its democratic experiments. In this paper I look at how Australian elections became family festivals rather than the

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[1] I am grateful to Mark McKenna for alerting me to the existence of this poem. A hundred years earlier William Kidston, later Premier of Queensland, also published a poem about the secret ballot, entitled 'The Ballot's The Thing' (*The Worker*, 4 April 1891).

drunken riots of Nineteenth Century Britain, focussing on the invention of the secret ballot. While the right to vote is frequently commemorated, the freedom to vote without intimidation or corruption and the abolition of open nomination and open voting is less often celebrated. Yet the elimination of violence and drunkenness prepared the way not only for fair elections but also for participation of what was called the 'fair sex'. It became possible for women not only to vote but also to stand for Parliament without any threat to their modesty.

## Elections before the ballot

In democracies we often take voting for granted, particularly in the 'old' democracies such as Australia where democratic institutions have been in continuous existence for most of our history. Indeed, we hear complaints that we have too many elections and we may be in danger of that new democratic complaint—'voter fatigue'. It is difficult to recall the intense struggles over the vote, and the belief in its power to make a difference. Both those struggling for the right to vote and those resisting thought important issues were at stake, such as the protection of property from the enfranchised working man or the defence of 'manly pursuits', such as war and alcohol, from enfranchised women.

It is not only the right to vote, but also the freedom to vote without intimidation or corruption, that is such a significant, though often forgotten, part of our political history. The violence, drunkenness and bribery associated with elections before the introduction of the ballot are vividly portrayed by the English painter William Hogarth in his series entitled 'An Election' that hangs alongside 'The Rake's Progress' at Sir John Soane's Museum in London. The series was inspired by the 1754 election in Oxfordshire and depicts in grotesque detail the abuses involved in all stages of the election, from 'treating' and canvassing through to polling and the declaration of the poll.

Such abuses became the stuff of great literature in the Nineteenth Century, when George Eliot wrote her election book, *Felix Holt, the Radical*. Eliot describes the nature of electioneering in the English Midlands immediately after the Reform Bill. Her theme is the systematising of bribery and intimidation as the pocket boroughs are abolished and elections become more competitive. One would-be voter in her novel, a gentleman farmer, puts on two greatcoats to protect himself from the violence and takes the added precaution of voting by nine o'clock in the morning. Felix Holt is the maverick who takes a stand against the system of 'treating' and the use of voteless men to cause mischief at nominations and elections.[2]

Charles Dickens' account of the Eatanswill election in *Pickwick Papers* is even more famous, reinforcing the picture of violence surrounding the hustings. Some writers were directly affected as when novelist Anthony Trollope stood as a Liberal candidate in Beverley in 1868. The Conservative agent was systematic in his approach to bribery, entering the names of voters and the amount paid to each. When the successful Conservative candidates arrived at the hustings, enraged Liberals tore down the barricades and threw rocks and beams of wood. Despite this, Trollope remained an opponent of the secret ballot on the grounds that it was unmanly.

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[2]     Eliot, George. *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866). Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 110.

In Australia, we need only dip into Samuel Shumack's *Tales and Legends of Canberra Pioneers* for similar vignettes of Nineteenth Century electioneering as observed in the New South Wales seat of Queanbeyan.[3] Squatters intimidated those, such as the local blacksmith, known to be supporters of free selection; they also put on free beer in the hotels, leading to riot. As in the United Kingdom, hotels played a central role in elections; election agents 'treated' voters there and hotel balconies or verandahs were frequently used for electioneering purposes.

The 1869 Braidwood election, the so-called 'pick-handle election', was another notorious example of intimidation. Polling in the goldrush settlement of Araluen was aborted when the supporters of one of the candidates 'armed to the teeth with pick-handles, shovel-handles, and bludgeons of every description' blockaded all approaches to the polling place (*Goulburn Herald & Chronicle*, 22 December 1869).[4] Nor was electoral mayhem unknown in South Australia, despite its more sedate reputation and lack of convict heritage. In the seat of West Adelaide in 1855, 'On election day there was a serious riot, some civilians and a constable were injured and it took mounted police to disperse the crowds.'[5]

**The introduction of the ballot and an end to the hustings**

In 1856 Victoria and South Australia started a global revolution in the way elections were conducted by introducing the secret ballot. This was a new system whereby voters had their names marked off on the electoral roll at the polling place, were presented with a printed ballot paper, and retired to separate compartments to mark their ballot paper in secrecy before depositing it in a locked box watched over by the presiding officer, poll clerks and scrutineers. It is the system now regarded as synonymous with voting in most countries, but it was only invented in 1856 by Henry Chapman, author of the pioneering ballot provisions in the Victorian Electoral Act of that year.[6] It was first used in the Victorian election on 23 September 1856. That election actually took one month to conduct, but the 23rd was the first day of voting.

Chapman was a philosophic radical and friend of John Stuart Mill, and had been influenced by his experience of elections in Canada during 1834, where he saw the power of employers to intimidate their workers under the open voting system. The ideas of the philosophic radicals were, along with Chartism, an important influence on Australia's electoral history. A significant number of Chartists had emigrated to the goldfields of Victoria after the collapse of the Chartist movement in Britain. They were veterans of the new techniques of mass action, which they brought with them to the colonies. The ballot was one of the six points of the People's Charter, although their views on how it was to be operationalised were somewhat vague.

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[3]   Shumack, Samuel. *An Autobiography or Tales and Legends of Canberra Pioneers*. Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1967.

[4]   The *Yass Courier*'s description underlined the ethnicity of the rioters by describing them as 'a mob of about 150 determined looking men, in shirt sleeves, carrying shillelaghs about two and a half feet long.' *Yass Courier*, 21 December 1869.

[5]   Pike, Douglas. *Paradise of Dissent: South Australia 1829–1857*. Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1957, p. 477.

[6]   Neale, R.S. 'H.S. Chapman and the "Victorian Ballot"', *Historical Studies*, vol. 12, 1967.

The other points of the Charter, first published by the London Working Men's Association in 1838, were universal (manhood) suffrage, annual elections, equal electoral districts, removal of property qualifications for parliamentary candidates and the payment of members of parliament. The six points were aimed at achieving the representation of the people, not property. To maximise their political impact, they were linked to local grievances such as the licence fee on the diggings, land reform in rural areas, or the eight-hour day campaign in town. The Chartist veterans provided leadership in a range of campaigns, in which radical journalism went hand-in-hand with petitions, mass meetings and people's parliaments. In Victoria three Chartist demands were achieved in three years: the secret ballot in 1856, manhood suffrage in 1857 and 'short parliaments' in 1858 (see Appendix). 'Short parliaments' were a compromise in terms of the original Chartist demand of annual parliaments but were a radical step in terms of reducing parliamentary terms to three years, while the British retained seven-year terms well into the Twentieth Century.

One Chartist demand that took longer to achieve in Victoria was the payment of members of Parliament. When the Chartist stone mason Charles Jardine Don was elected to Parliament in 1859, the 'first working-class representative in any legislature in the British Empire', he was in constant financial strife. After his election he had to continue working by day as a stonemason while working at night as Member for Collingwood.[7] Parliamentary salaries were finally introduced in Victoria in 1870.

Chartist agitation provided the backdrop to the achievement of the ballot and manhood suffrage in the 1850s, while Chapman provided the practical detail. An Irish observer of the first Victorian election after its introduction claimed there could be no greater contrast: 'An elector, exercising his franchise under the ballot, instead of running a desperate gauntlet through corruption, drunkenness, violence and uproar, walks, as it were, in an even frame of mind, through a smooth, private avenue to discharge the political duties of citizenship.'[8]

Even Anthony Trollope, as we have seen an opponent of the secret ballot on the grounds that it was unmanly, was forced to admit when visiting Australia in 1872 that it was generally popular and led to more orderly elections. There was none of the violence customary with open polling when numbers were near each other as the poll drew to a close. He questioned, however, whether tranquillity at elections was an unmixed blessing, feeling it might be akin to apathy and suggested that 'broken heads are better than political indifference.'[9]

The law and order issue helped secure the eventual passage of the Ballot Act in the United Kingdom in 1872, despite the lingering reservations over the un-Britishness of secret voting and other concerns. The House of Lords initially rejected the bill, on the grounds it would lead to the overthrow of the monarchy. Lord Shaftesbury had been

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[7] Wright, Raymond. *A People's Counsel: a History of the Parliament of Victoria 1856–1990*. Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 35.

[8] Kelly, William. *Life in Victoria, or Victoria in 1853 and Victoria in 1858*. London, Chapman & Hall, 1859, v.2, p. 318.

[9] Trollope, Anthony. *Australia and New Zealand*. London, Chapman & Hall, 1873, v.2, p. 245.

warned: 'Resist to the very last the introduction of the ballot; for, as a Republican, I tell you that the ballot can never co-exist with monarchical institutions.'[10]

The new electoral acts in the Australian colonies provided that polling using the ballot was all to be conducted on the same day (except where adjourned on account of riot!), eliminating some of the dubious practices occurring when polling was spread out over weeks as in the United Kingdom and Canada. In South Australia and Tasmania, the secret ballot was accompanied by the abolition of the public nomination of candidates, another practice associated with riotous behaviour. Up until this time in Australia (and until later in the United Kingdom and Canada), candidates were nominated and addressed electors from hustings—a temporary platform erected in a public place such as a market on nomination day. Then a show of hands took place for each candidate. After results were declared, a poll could be demanded by either a candidate or a specified number of electors.[11] In *Felix Holt,* the nomination experience included 'the hustling and the pelting, the roaring and the hissing, the hard hits with small missiles, and the soft hits with small jokes.'[12]

A mid-Nineteenth Century poem described the hustings in the following terms:

> *Now greeting, hooting, and abuse,*
> *To each man's party proves of use;*
> *And mud, and stones, and waving hats,*
> *And broken heads and putrid cats.*
> *Are offerings made to aid the cause*
> *Of order, government and laws.*[13]

In Victoria, the reform of nomination procedures came later than the secret ballot. The Irish observer we have already encountered singing the praises of the secret ballot was also an eloquent advocate of nomination reform: '… all that is wanting to render such an election a really halcyon scene from beginning to end, where the proudest civil rights may be exercised with all the peace and security of a religious ceremony, is … the abolition of the barbarous parody of bull-baiting that candidates undergo on the hustings, without use or object, and which, after all, is nothing more or less than pantomime in a frenzy.'[14]

One thing that is notable about Australia's electoral history is that modern political parties were relatively slow to emerge—there were factions and pressure groups but not parties in the period up until the 1890s. Then the Labour Party, with its new forms of party discipline over MPs, quickly became a catalyst for the transformation of Australian politics, forming its first minority government in Queensland in 1899. By 1910 a two-party class-based political system had taken shape and liberal reformers

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[10]  Cook, Hartley Kemball. *The Free and Independent: the Trials, Temptations and Triumphs of the Parliamentary Elector*. London, Allen and Unwin, 1949, p. 121.

[11]  See, for example, the New South Wales Electoral Acts of 1858 and 1880.

[12]  Eliot, op. cit., p. 242.

[13]  Quoted in Grego, Joseph. *A History of Parliamentary Elections and Electioneering: from the Stuarts to Queen Victoria*. London, Chatto & Windus, 1892, p. 394.

[14]  Kelly, op. cit., v.2, p. 318.

were no longer an independent force. Many of Australia's electoral reforms dated from the earlier period, when liberals and radicals were able to garner support on the floor of the house for democratic experiments.

**Election day: from free beer to family festival**

South Australia not only led the way with manhood suffrage in 1856, but also led the way with universal suffrage in 1894. Elimination of the free beer and rioting associated with elections earlier in the century, even in relatively sober South Australia, was reinforced by the advent of women's political rights on the 'watery tide of temperance'. It was not the case that women became 'coarsened' by the 'roaring, hustling and pushing at the polling booth' as had been anticipated by some (*Country*, 14 April 1894), but rather that women's suffrage, if anything, reinforced the trend towards more orderly elections. This was stressed by suffrage supporters such as Alfred Deakin and Andrew Fisher when supporting the cause in Britain. When in London for the coronation in 1911, Fisher said that women's suffrage had helped make elections more like what they ought to be, making polling day more like an ordinary church gathering than the rowdy entertainment he had seen in more than one country (*Morning Post*, 3 June 1911). Certainly the curbing of the violence and drunkenness associated with nomination and voting at the hustings helped prepare the way for women's political participation, as did the 'unmanly' practice of the secret ballot. Only the most conservative could argue that the polling booth (as contrasted with the hustings) was an inappropriate place for a woman.[15]

Another electoral innovation for which South Australia was responsible was legislation in 1896 to ensure that 'No day other than Saturday shall be fixed as polling day' (*The Electoral Code,* Clause 87). South Australia was followed by Queensland and then by the Commonwealth in 1911. Already by the end of the Nineteenth Century most Australian workers had a half-holiday on Saturday, making this the most convenient day for electors to vote.

The establishment of Saturday elections was the beginning of the great Australian tradition of the festive nature of polling day. The local primary school becomes a political market-place on election day, with the umbrellas and tables of the rival political parties and groups, the line of booth workers handing out 'how-to-vote' cards, and the Parents and Citizens Association running a sausage sizzle or a cake stall. Schools were already singled out as appropriate polling places in early electoral acts and helped make voting a family occasion.

The *Adelaide Observer* of 2 May 1896 provided a comprehensive account of polling on the previous Saturday—the first election in which women voted for the state Parliament. There were familiar features, such as the 'candidate cards and leaflets' that strewed the path to the poll, and the workers outside the booths who thrust flyers

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[15] For a different interpretation of these reforms see Vernon, James, *Politics and the People: a Study in English Political Culture, c. 1815–1867*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 158, who argues in the British context that they removed the disenfranchised from the electoral process: 'No longer could the disenfranchised vote at the nomination or hold a vigil beside the hustings to intimidate the voters …' For Vernon the Ballot Act meant 'the closing down of the public political sphere by officials who sought to replace the public and collective experience with an increasingly private and individual male one.' I maintain that the large-scale drunkenness, intimidation of voters and pelting of candidates with missiles were not gender-inclusive forms of political participation.

into the hands of electors as they walked into the polling booth. A slightly higher proportion of enrolled women than men voted (66 per cent), including the Dominican nuns who voted at the North Adelaide Temperance Hall. The *Adelaide Observer* was quite carried away by the refining influence of women voters: 'Never have we had a more decorous gathering together of the multitude than that which distinguished the first exercise of the female franchise.' The journalist suggested that pre-poll verses were borne out on the day, although not the aspersions on women's competence to vote:

> *Lovely woman, hesitating*
> *Round the booths in sweet dismay*
> *Her gentle bosom palpitating*
> *Lest she cast her vote away*
>
> *And when she glides in graceful, pretty,*
> *To vote in her most charming frock*
> *The poll clerks in suburb and city*
> *Will thrill with an electric shock.*

Provisions for postal voting had become permanent in South Australia in 1894 and some conservative politicians, such as Sir John Downer, the grandfather of our present Foreign Minister, believed that this was necessary to protect women's sensitivities. He suggested that every member of Parliament would sooner his lady relatives voted by post than 'amid the bustle of the open polling booth.'[16] In the event, women did not make as much use as expected of the right to cast a postal vote, preferring to attend the polling booth in person.

Ironically, the solidary character of the Saturday polling day and its status as a civic ritual has been threatened in the last decade by the deregulation of the labour market and the increasing prevalence of work on Saturdays. Pre-poll voting was largely introduced to cater for this phenomenon and represented about six percent of all votes cast in the 1998 federal election.

## Professionalising electoral administration

Meanwhile, the Australian colonies were not only introducing payment for MPs, but also developing a professionalised approach to electoral administration characterised by a centralised electoral administration and paid electoral officials. The absence of entrenched local authority structures encouraged this development and provided a significant contrast with the United Kingdom. Electoral administration was at first conducted by public servants in a standard ministerial department, but was later given increased independence by the creation of statutory bodies.

At the federal level, the establishment of the Australian Electoral Commission as an independent statutory body in 1984 was an important milestone, as was the establishment at the same time of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters. This parliamentary committee has proved an extremely important forum for obtaining bipartisan support for technical improvements in electoral administration. This had

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[16]   *South Australian Parliamentary Debates*, 17 December 1894.

previously been difficult to achieve even on such apparently straightforward matters as the closing time for polling booths.

The early development of specialist electoral administrators enabled other innovations such as continuous roll maintenance—where there was proactive canvassing to ensure eligible voters were on the electoral rolls and at the right address. This contrasted strongly with systems in use in other countries where voters had to wait for rolls to open. Other developments included arrangements intended to maximise access to voting such as the introduction of provisions for absent and postal voting in the Nineteenth Century and of mobile polling booths in the Twentieth.

South Australia had introduced postal voting as early as 1890, initially to ensure the voting rights of those working away from their electorate, such as seamen and railwaymen. The introduction of 'compulsory voting' (actually compulsory attendance) at both Commonwealth and state levels in the Twentieth Century, with financial penalties for non-compliance, meant that much more elaborate provision needed to be made for voters unable to attend a polling place.

The spirit of professional electoral administration was to maximise accessibility as well as integrity of the system. This spirit was often notably absent when it came to the administration of Aboriginal voting rights, as in the process whereby Aboriginal people 'lost the vote' at the Commonwealth level after 1901. As recently as 1977, electoral administrators, together with intimidatory party scrutineers, were found to have effectively impeded Aboriginal voting rights in the Kimberley. Another problem before 1980 was reliance on postal voting in remote areas, where many Indigenous voters had low literacy skills. Third parties providing assistance to such voters might abuse their position as intermediaries.

Mobile polling was first used extensively at the state and territory level in 1980 and at the federal level in 1984 to try to address this problem. Mobile polling booths with experienced officials would travel through sparsely settled remote areas collecting votes for a week or two leading up to polling day.

From the 1980s, Commonwealth electoral education targeted to Indigenous voters gradually became more effective in achieving a high level of formal votes, before being abruptly terminated by the newly elected Howard Government in 1996.

Other recent encroachments on the principle of access have included proposals for making enrolment more difficult and expensive for those who do not already possess the necessary documentary evidence, or closing the rolls immediately upon the issuing of writs for an election, often just when new voters or those who have changed address think about getting onto the roll.

**The right to stand but not to sit**

John Stuart Mill and his circle were of considerable importance in Australian electoral history, with supporters of women's suffrage or proportional representation clothing themselves in his intellectual authority. Mill famously wrote to Henry Chapman, on 8 July 1858, after the latter had become Attorney-General in Victoria, to congratulate him on the recent extension of the suffrage: 'The only thing which seems wanting to make the suffrage really universal is to get rid of the Toryism of sex, by admitting

women to vote.' Mill urged his friend to quote him on the issue of women's suffrage and also on the subject of the representation of minorities. It is interesting that Mill was able to write such lengthy letters during his working hours at East India House.

Mill continued urging women's suffrage on the Australasian colonies, while failing in his own attempt to achieve women's suffrage during his brief term as a British MP. It was one of Mill's followers who introduced the first women's suffrage bills into the South Australian Parliament and he also inspired suffrage leaders in the other colonies. The rise of the women's movement had political effects even before the achievement of suffrage, with male votes becoming conditional on behaviour towards wives under the New South Wales Elections Act of 1893. One disqualification for electors was having an outstanding maintenance order against them; another was a conviction for aggravated assault on their wife in the previous year. These disqualifications remained in the Act until 1928.

Soon after achieving the vote, suffragists were travelling to London to help the cause in the mother country. Attractive 'women voters' from Australia took the platform in the Albert Hall to demonstrate that political rights did not 'unsex' women. Others took more militant action, such as Adelaide-born Muriel Matters, who became known as the first woman to give a speech in the House of Commons—while chained to the grille of the Ladies' Gallery in 1908. She and her colleague from the Women's Freedom League were removed still attached to the grille.[17] Subsequently, she floated over the House of Commons at the time of the State opening of Parliament in 1909, in an airship inscribed 'Votes for Women'.

The airship photographed well, and the *Daily Mail* even provided fashion notes: 'Miss Matters wore a large green coat, motor cap and veil and woollen gloves. She also wore a rosette of the [Women's Freedom] League's colours—white, yellow and green—and took into the basket-car a large supply of handbills, flags and a megaphone.'[18] Unfortunately at this stage she was up about 3 500 feet so she was unable to use her megaphone but she did scatter a large quantity of handbills.

It was not only expatriates who enlisted in the cause; Federal Parliament also played its part. In 1909, a motion put forward by Prime Minister Alfred Deakin concerning the positive effects of women's suffrage in Australasia was unanimously passed in both houses. The following year, Senator Arthur Rae was responsible for another resolution being passed by both houses and cabled to the intransigent British Prime Minister, Asquith. The text of the resolution was drafted by Vida Goldstein and spoke of consequences in terms of 'more orderly conduct of elections' as well as of greater prominence being given to legislation particularly affecting women and children.[19]

The Woman's Press in London rushed out the text of the Senate debate under the title *Australia's Advice* (1910). Such advice was presented pictorially during the great coronation year suffrage procession when women voters, including the wife of Australian Prime Minister Andrew Fisher, marched behind the banner that depicted

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[17]  Holmes, Marion. 'Concerning Muriel Matters', *The Vote*, 19 February 1910.

[18]  *Daily Mail* (London), 17 February 1909.

[19]  *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 17 November 1910, p. 6300.

the young Commonwealth of Australia pleading with Britannia to 'Trust the women, mother, as I have done.'

Pride in democratic credentials was particularly true of those representing the first majority Labor government, newly elected that year. They had signalled the new order in Federal Parliament by doing away with the ceremonial wigs and gowns of the presiding officers. The President of the Senate was a former wharf labourer who had become Home Secretary in the world's first Labor government in Queensland in 1899. While the senators agreed Australia was a young country, they spoke of its seniority in democratic experience and expertise.

**Other democratic experiments**

Of course from the Nineteenth Century the Australian colonies were initiating many other democratic experiments such as the development of new voting systems. All the major forms of preferential voting—the alternative vote, the contingent vote and Hare-Clark, also known as the Single Transferable Vote (STV) were substantially developed here. Catherine Helen Spence played a major role in popularising STV in the late Nineteenth Century and, interestingly, was also the author of Australia's first civics textbook, commissioned by the South Australian Minister for Education in 1880.

The extent of electoral experimentation in some states was truly remarkable and quite unlike the stolid reliance on first-past-the-post voting in the United Kingdom and other dominions. New South Wales, for example, tried the second ballot from 1910, in the lower house, the single transferable vote 1918–1926, contingent voting 1926–1928, compulsory preferential 1929–1980 and optional preferential from 1981. In the upper house the single transferable vote was used from 1978.

Another crucial aspect in ensuring that elections mirror the nation's mind is the institution of compulsory registration and voting. Compulsory registration was introduced at the federal level in 1911 by the Fisher Labor government, which argued it was as much a part of democracy as compulsory education or compulsory arbitration. Australia was the first English-speaking country to introduce compulsory voting, starting with Queensland in 1914 and followed at the federal level ten years later. Belgium had led the way with the introduction of compulsory voting in 1893 (Article 48 of its new Constitution). In Australia compulsory voting was famously introduced at the federal level under a conservative government, without serious discussion either on the floor of the House or in committee, where only 15 minutes were spent on it. Both major parties had an interest in increasing turnout.

If we ask the question 'Whose vote does compulsion protect?' we find that compulsory voting plays a crucial role in reducing the social bias in turnout. In voluntary systems it is the poor and the marginalised who are the non-voters, something that decreases even further their capacity to influence government or achieve better welfare outcomes. Compulsory voting underpins all the other innovations in electoral administration found in Australia, designed to ensure the integrity of the rolls and accessibility of voting, whether voters are in prison or in the

outback or overseas.[20] It contributes to social capital by ensuring solidary participation in Australian elections, with doorknocking by electoral officials and birthday cards to 17-year-olds to ensure the rolls are as comprehensive as possible.

When so many other democratic experiments were taking place, it is perhaps not surprising that Australia's constitution-making process of the 1890s was also uniquely democratic in form. Whatever the flaws, no other country had created itself in this way. The process of federation was built around popular election of delegates to the Constitutional Convention of 1897/8 and popular ratification of the Constitution Bill. The delegates were also highly conscious of the advanced democratic nature of the provisions they were entrenching for the new Federal Parliament, such as the direct popular election of both houses and the ban on plural voting. The provision made for payment of members of the new Federal Parliament was regarded as another democratic advance pioneered in the colonial parliaments but highlighted by its inclusion in the Constitution of the new Commonwealth.

## Conclusion

Australia has long enjoyed stable democratic institutions, and at federation took pride in being a young country but an old democracy. Australia is now quite a different type of country than it was in 1901 and 'Britishness' no longer provides the flip-side of its democratic identity. We look back with condescension at the fear of the 'piebald ballot box' expressed by one senator when opposing the franchise for Aborigines or coloured aliens. For more than a decade we have been trying to articulate a national identity that is based on our democratic institutions and values but which is cut free from any one ethnicity.

In the light of popular reactions to the *Tampa* crisis, when a Norwegian ship was prevented from bringing the Middle Eastern asylum seekers it had rescued at sea to Australia, we are clearly still a long way from succeeding in this enterprise. There has been fear and resentment in some parts of Australia that immigrants no longer have to be of British origin or at least to assimilate to Britishness to become full citizens. This resentment has fuelled support for populist politicians who claim to be a voice for the people rather than for the political elite.

A civic identity capable of sustaining national cohesion needs to include some emotional identification with the history of the nation. Knowledge of Australian democratic struggles and accomplishments should be sufficient to promote such emotional identity without the need for racial pride. There is evidence from the 1996 International Social Survey Program that pride in Australia's democracy is very high by international standards, ironically exceeded only by Norway, and well ahead of Britain, Canada and New Zealand. While pride in democracy still plays such a large role in Australian national identity, there can be some optimism for the future, despite the insecurities of the present.

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[20] Similarly elaborate arrangements are made to ensure that Australians stationed at Antarctic bases are able to vote, although this is one category of elector for whom voting is not compulsory. The reason for this exception is that because of the uncertainty of communications, voting is not secret—the Antarctic Returning Officers have to telephone the votes back to Australia.

# Appendix
## Achievement of innovation in representational arrangements—Lower Houses[1]

| Parliament | Manhood Suffrage | Adult Suffrage[2] | Abolition of Plural Voting | Secret Ballot | End of Hustings[3] | Payment of Members | Compulsory Registration of Voters | First Election with Compulsory Voting |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| United Kingdom | 1918 | 1928 | 1948 | 1872 | 1872 | 1911 | _ | _ |
| Canada | 1920 | 1920 | 1920 | 1874 | 1874 | 1867 | _ | _ |
| New South Wales | 1858 | 1902 | 1894 | 1858 | 1893 | 1889 | 1921 | 1930 |
| Victoria | 1857 | 1909 | 1899 | 1856 | 1865 | 1870 | 1923 | 1927 |
| Queensland | 1859 | 1905 | 1905 | 1859 | 1872 | 1886 | 1914 | 1915 |
| South Australia | 1856 | 1894 | Never Existed | 1856 | 1856 | 1887 | _ | 1944 |
| Western Australia | 1907 | 1907[4] | 1907 | 1877[5] | 1895 | 1900 | 1919 | 1939 |
| Tasmania | 1901 | 1903 | 1901 | 1858 | 1858 | 1890 | 1930 | 1931 |
| Commonwealth | 1901 | 1902[6] | Never Existed | 1901 | Never Existed | 1901 | 1911 | 1925 |

1. Except for the final column, the legislative date is given, rather than date of coming into effect.
2. i.e. votes for women. But note some states did not enfranchise Aborigines or indigent inmates of state charitable institutions until later.
3. i.e. end of open nomination.
4. WA gave some women the vote in 1899 on the same restricted franchise then applying to men.
5. This was for the elective element of the old Legislative Council of the years before self-government.
6. In 1901, women generally in SA, and some women in WA, had a vote for the first Commonwealth Parliament, which in turn legislated for complete adult suffrage for subsequent federal elections.

Source: Adapted from L.F. Crisp, *Australian National Government,* Melbourne, Longman Cheshire, 1983.