



The 2018 Governor-General's Undergraduate Essay Prize

This year's questions focus on the constitutional workings of the Australian Parliament and whether they can be improved.

Competition entries must answer one of the following ten questions:

1. Section 53 of the Constitution says that, apart from being able to introduce or amend money bills, the Senate has equal power to the House of Representatives. Do you think the Australian Senate is too powerful? Should the Senate retain its power to reject supply? You may like to compare upper houses in nations who have a similar parliamentary democracy.
2. Why did the writers of our Constitution, as described in section 7, give the States equal membership in the Senate? Do you think the Constitution should be altered so that each State has proportional representation in the Senate?
3. Does the Senate today represent political parties or the States? Would it ever be possible to remove politics from the Senate and, if so, how?
4. Would Australia be better served if the Senate seats for each State were split between urban and regional areas? Say six seats for the cities and six for the regions (or 8:4, or any other split)? Or could there be another way to split the Senate seats for the States? Would we need a referendum for your proposal or does section 7 of the Constitution already allow such a division of the States?
5. Are six year terms for Senators too long? Why did the 1900 Constitution give Senators six year fixed terms and Members of the House of Representatives three year maximum flexible terms?
6. Should we move to fixed terms for the House of Representatives? This has already been introduced in some States. If yes, how long should the fixed term be and how would you organise a campaign to ensure this change occurred through a referendum.
7. The number of Senators in the Parliament is linked to the number of Members in the House of Representatives in section 24 of the Constitution. Some commentators believe that we are underrepresented in the House, but are not inclined to support a boost to the numbers because this means we would also have to increase the number of Senators. Do you think the linking of these numbers was a wise decision by the people who wrote our Constitution? Why did they do it? Do you think there could be a better system?

8. The Constitution stipulates disqualifying factors for Parliamentarians in section 44. Through the 45th Parliament the High Court has disqualified a number of Federal Parliamentarians. This was because they held dual citizenship, or had a pecuniary interest, were convicted and waiting to be sentenced, or held a Government job. Our nation has changed significantly since the Constitution was drafted in the 1890s. Do you think section 44 needs an update through a referendum? If so, how? If not, why?
9. Section 57 of the Constitution stipulates how disagreements between the two Houses of Parliament are resolved through a double dissolution. If you would like to see changes to this section, what would they be and how would you convince other Australians in a referendum? If you feel strongly that there should be no change to this section, how would you convince Australians that no change is needed?
10. Section 68 gives the Executive the power to choose whether we go into conflict in other parts of the world, without any obligation to seek parliamentary approval. Should legislation be introduced so that there is some Parliamentary oversight in the decision making process? Do you think more members of Parliament outside of cabinet, including the opposition, should have a say before we go to war?

The essay must not exceed 2,500 words. All sources must be cited, however footnotes and bibliography are not included in the word count.

The closing date for entries is 31 December 2018. For more information please contact Phuong Van at pvan@cefa.org.au