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Political Parties in Parliament

A political party is a voluntary group of people with a common ideology or similar views on issues and policies who establish an association to contest elections.

The main aim of political parties contesting elections is for their elected representatives to either form a government or to influence a government. Political parties:

- draw people together with similar viewpoints. People in groups can seek common causes and formulate policies and platforms;
- seek to win government or influence government policy;
- help organise the decision-making activities of government. These include managing some of the business of Parliament;
- attempt to educate voters about public affairs and their respective policies;
- encourage people to join their organization and may train party members in leadership skills; and
- choose candidates. At election time the candidates and their supporters distribute pamphlets, advertise in the media and visit voters to persuade them to vote for their candidates. At polling booths they usually hand out how-to-vote cards.

Political Parties in Western Australia

Although political parties fulfil important roles in the Parliament and Government of Western Australia, they are not recognised in Western Australia's constitutional documents or Standing Orders (rules of debate of each House).

Until 1900 there were no firmly established political parties in Western Australia. Before federation John Forrest, as Premier, had the support of most members of Parliament, sometimes labelled as 'Ministerialists'.

The first major political party to be formed was the Labor Party. Other groups gradually organised themselves into political parties.

One way of showing the history of political parties in Western Australia is to use the Labor and non-Labor (mainly Liberal and National/Country party) labels.

On this basis the 'ratio of rule' over the last century from 1908 to 2008 is about equal. This means that non-Labor parties have been in power for about the same length of time as the Labor Party.

In recent years the Labor/non-Labor classification has been challenged, particularly with the Upper House (Legislative Council) electoral success of the Australian Democrats, Greens (WA), and One Nation; together with several Independents and recently the Greens (WA) in the Lower House (Legislative Assembly).

Over the years parties change their policies and sometimes their names. The current political parties in Parliament are:

- **Australian Labor Party (ALP)**

The first meeting of the federal Labor Party took place one day before Federation in 1901.

- **Liberal Party**

The modern Liberal Party was formed in 1945 by combining several non-Labor parties.

- **The Nationals**

The Country Party in Western Australia first won seats at the 1914 State Election. During the late 1970s the Party changed its name to the National Party.

- **Greens (WA)**

The Federal Greens formed officially in 1992. The Greens have been represented in the Western Australian Legislative Council since 1993 and in the Legislative Assembly since May 2009.

Independent Members of Parliament

Independent members of Parliament are those who are not members of any political party. Each Independent member has different views and priorities, depending on their personal opinion.

It is necessary to examine the current platforms of the various political parties to find out what legislation each party is likely to seek or support in Parliament.

Registered Political Parties

Since 2000 provisions have been made for the registration of political parties in Western Australia. This procedure is administered by the Western Australian Electoral Commission.

Registration requires evidence of 500 members and compliance with certain provisions including satisfying guidelines for the name of the party.

Candidates of unregistered parties are not able to use a political party name on a ballot paper for either House of the Parliament.

The registration of political parties is not dependent on the platform of the party. Details of the policies of political parties are available on the websites created by the parties.

Sometimes there are variations in policies between the federal and state branches of parties. Such websites usually contain instructions about how citizens can become a member of the party.

Registered Political Parties

Registered Name	Ballot Paper Abbreviation
Australian Labor Party (Western Australian Branch)	Australian Labor Party
Christian Democratic Party WA	Christian Democratic Party WA
Citizens Electoral Council of Australia	CITIZENS ELECTORAL COUNCIL
National Party of Australia (WA) Incorporated	THE NATIONALS
The Greens (WA) Inc	Greens (WA)
The Liberal Party of Australia (Western Australian Division) Incorporated	Liberal
WAFAMILYFIRST.COM INCORPORATED	WAFAMILYFIRST.COM

(as at 18 January 2010)

Cancellation of Political Party Registration

The Electoral Commissioner may cancel the registration of a political party at the request of its secretary, or for reasons such as:

- the party no longer exists;
- the party is no longer a parliamentary party and does not have 500 members who are electors;
- the party has failed to endorse a candidate in a general election subsequent to registration;
- registration was obtained by fraud; and
- the party has not submitted the required political finance return.

There are provisions for a Supreme Court review of a decision by the Electoral Commissioner to reject or cancel a political party's registration.

Public funding

Although the public funding of political parties was introduced for federal elections in 1983 it did not become law for WA elections until 2006.

To receive public funding, a candidate for a state election or by-election can apply to be reimbursed for electoral expenditure incurred, subject to receiving more than 4 per cent of the valid first preference votes.

Candidates included in a Legislative Council group can receive payment if the group as a whole polls over 4 per cent. The amount of the payment is adjusted annually according to the Cost Price Index (CPI). For the 2008 election the amount was just over \$1.56 per vote.

According to the electoral legislation there are requirements for political parties, certain groups and entities and candidates to declare expenditures and donations. The WA Electoral Commission has the relevant forms on its website at www.waec.wa.gov.au.