

Election results

Counting House of Representatives votes

Counting the votes starts at 6pm when polling places close to the public.

Votes cast at polling places are counted at that polling place on election night. The likely result at each polling place for the House of Representatives is usually known within a few hours of counting. The result for the electorate can take several weeks to formally finalise.

One person from each electorate is elected to the House of Representatives.

To be elected, one candidate must gain support from more than half of the voters — an absolute majority.

At each polling place, polling officials sort all ballot papers by first preference votes, which are counted for each candidate. Informal votes are identified and removed from the count.

All the '1' votes are counted for each candidate in an electorate. If a candidate gets more than 50% of these formal first preference votes — an absolute majority — they are immediately elected. Even though they are elected, a full preference count is completed to show how the electorate voted.

First-past-the-post

Before 1918, representatives to the federal Parliament were elected on a 'simple majority' or 'first-past-the-post' basis. This meant that the candidate who had the most votes after one count was elected — even if they did not have more than half of the votes. This system is still used in many countries including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, India and Papua New Guinea.

If no candidate has an absolute majority, the candidate with the fewest votes is excluded from the count. The votes for this candidate are then transferred to the candidate numbered '2' on each of their ballot papers, the voters' 'second preference'. This process continues until one candidate has more than half the total formal votes cast and is then declared elected.

Formal and Informal votes

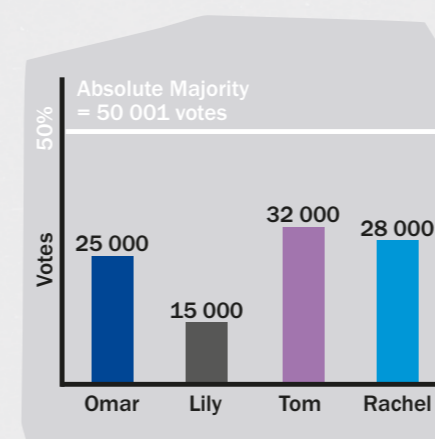
When a ballot paper is marked correctly and completely, it is known as a 'formal vote', and will be counted toward the election result.

When a ballot paper has not been fully completed, is completed incorrectly or you can identify the person who voted, it is known as an 'informal vote', and will not be counted toward the election result. At federal elections, nationally around 5% of votes are informal.

When a ballot paper is numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 etc in the same order that the candidates appear, it is known as a 'donkey vote'. Donkey votes could be a voter not understanding how to vote correctly, or not caring how they vote, or could actually express the voter's true preferences. If all the boxes are numbered, donkey votes are formal and count toward the election result.

An example of counting House of Representatives votes

Four candidates, Omar, Lily, Tom and Rachel stand for election to the House of Representatives in the electorate of Arcadia. After the election, the ballot papers are counted and there are 100 000 formal votes. The absolute majority needed to win the seat of Arcadia is 50 001 votes — more than 50% of the total number of formal votes.

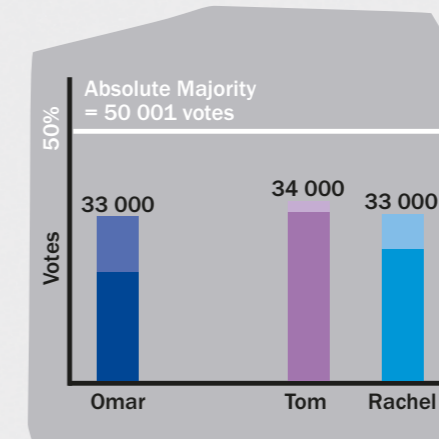


First count

No candidate has an absolute majority:

- Omar has 25 000 first preferences
- Lily has 15 000 first preferences
- Tom has 32 000 first preferences
- Rachel has 28 000 first preferences.

The person with the lowest number of votes is Lily with 15 000 votes.

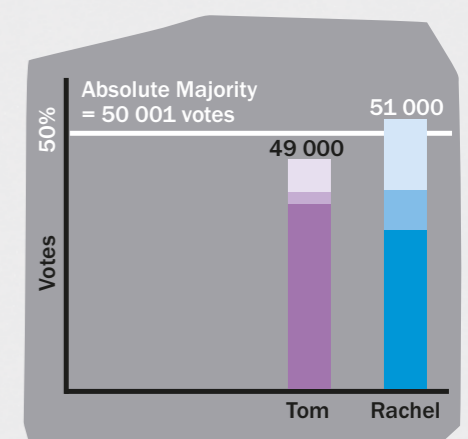


Second count

Lily is excluded and her votes are distributed to the second preferences marked on these ballot papers:

- Omar gains 8 000 second preferences, taking his total to 33 000 votes
- Tom gains 2 000 second preferences, taking his total to 34 000 votes
- Rachel gains 5 000 second preferences, taking her total to 33 000 votes.

No candidate has an absolute majority.



Third count

Another candidate must be excluded. Omar and Rachel both have 33 000 votes. In this situation the candidate with the lowest number of votes in the first count is excluded. Omar is excluded and his votes are distributed by the next preference marked on those ballot papers:

- Tom gains 15 000 votes, taking his total to 49 000
- Rachel gains 18 000 votes, taking her total to 51 000.

Rachel has an absolute majority, and becomes the elected representative for the electorate of Arcadia. Rachel was not the candidate who had the most votes in the first count, however she gained an absolute majority on preferences. In this election, voters' first, second and third choices were needed for a final result.