



# PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA

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## Importance of the Number of Places to be Filled at a PR Election being an Odd Number

TOTAL NUMBER OF SEATS	APPROXIMATE QUOTA FOR FILLING OF EACH SEAT	BARE ABSOLUTE MAJORITY OF SEATS		NO. OF SEATS ONE BELOW AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY		
		Number of Seats	Minimum Vote to Entitle a Grouping to a Bare Absolute Majority of Seats	Number of Seats	Minimum Vote to Entitle a Grouping to Seats One Below an Absolute Majority	Maximum Vote that Could Give a Grouping Just One Seat Below an Absolute Majority
2	33.33%	2	66.6% + 2 votes	1	33.3% + 1 vote	66.6% - 1 vote
3	25.00%	2	50.0% + 2 votes	1	25.0% + 1 vote	50.0% - 1 vote
4	20.00%	3	60.0% + 3 votes	2	40.0% + 2 votes	60.0% - 2 votes
5	16.67%	3	50.0% + 3 votes	2	33.3% + 2 votes	50.0% - 2 votes
6	14.29%	4	57.1% + 4 votes	3	42.9% + 3 votes	57.1% - 3 votes
7	12.50%	4	50.0% + 4 votes	3	37.5% + 3 votes	50.0% - 3 votes
8	11.11%	5	55.5% + 5 votes	4	44.4% + 4 votes	55.5% - 4 votes
9	10.00%	5	50.0% + 5 votes	4	40.0% + 4 votes	50.0% - 4 votes
10	9.09%	6	54.5% + 6 votes	5	45.5% + 5 votes	54.5% - 5 votes
11	8.33%	6	50.0% + 6 votes	5	41.7% + 5 votes	50.0% - 5 votes
12	7.69%	7	53.8% + 7 votes	6	46.2% + 6 votes	53.8% - 6 votes
13	7.14%	7	50.0% + 7 votes	6	42.9% + 6 votes	50.0% - 6 votes
14	6.67%	8	53.3% + 8 votes	7	46.7% + 7 votes	53.3% - 7 votes
15	6.25%	8	50.0% + 8 votes	7	43.8% + 7 votes	50.0% - 7 votes
16	5.88%	9	52.9% + 9 votes	8	47.1% + 8 votes	52.9% - 8 votes
17	5.56%	9	50.0% + 9 votes	8	44.4% + 8 votes	50.0% - 8 votes

An Odd Number of Places is Needed - Not an Even Number: The advantage of setting an odd number of places to be filled at a proportional representation election is that an absolute majority of votes for a given grouping of candidates - however slight - produces an absolute majority of seats for that grouping, whereas with an even number of places, an absolute majority of votes for a grouping does not, unless it is high enough, produce an absolute majority of seats for that grouping.

Groupings: A grouping can be a formally organized political party, or it can be a group of like-minded candidates that have no formal or organized connection, but are perceived by the voters and commentators as being sufficiently similar in their past voting record if they are standing for re-election or in their promises if they are new candidates. A number of complete and utter independents can also be listed as a grouping in that capacity, in distinction to candidates that are more easily categorized. Groupings, not always recognized, exist at elections in all but unsophisticated and the least organized bodies.

An Even Number of Places Fails to Ensure a Majority Predominates: If the absolute majority is not large enough to produce an absolute majority of an even number of seats, the grouping gaining such an absolute majority of votes will only gain half the number of seats available, and the grouping, or groupings, that together gain only a minority of the seats, will gain the other half of the seats, which is less than satisfactory. It can also lead to stalemates. An early official awareness of the unfairly created [stalemate problem](#) appeared in Section 6 of Tasmania's [Report on General Election 1912](#). Examples of entrenchment to avoid an even number of places are:

- Section 4 (1) (a) of the [Proportional Representation \(Hare-Clark\) Entrenchment Act 1994](#) of the Australian Capital Territory entrenches the requirement that an odd number of members of the Legislative Assembly shall be elected from each electorate, and
- Section 16.2.5 of the [Constitution of the Republic of Ireland](#) requires the use of the system of proportional representation using the single transferable vote, and Section 16.2.6 requires that no constituency shall elect fewer than three members, which at least avoids the worst case of an odd number, where only 2 members are to be elected.

Definitive Report on the Problem: The late Dr George Howatt's 1958 classic thirty-page [report to the Parliament of Tasmania](#) on the defects of the original six-member electoral districts used in Tasmania's [Hare-Clark system](#) was a superb analysis of the problem, and its key recommendation was implemented when, before the 1959 Assembly elections, each of the five six-member Assembly electoral districts was changed to a seven-member district. Tasmanian Assembly districts were [changed to five-member districts](#) before the 1998 elections.

Municipal Councils: Municipalities with one or more electoral districts having an even number of seats can, with Victoria's change to PR for such districts, demonstrate the problem there, and Victoria's *ad hoc* restructuring of electoral districts can institute this problem, if the need for an odd number to be elected is not understood. See also [Proportional Representation for Municipal Councils](#).

Origin of the Senate Problem: The table below illustrates the problem with even numbers of places to be filled. See paragraph, in A Brief History of PR, on how having an even number of places to be filled has [affected Senate outcomes](#) since the number of senators to be elected in each State at a periodic election was first set at an even number, from 1984.

The Federal Parliament should have recognized the significance of that Tasmanian finding, although it did take Tasmania over fifty years to decide to resolve the problem. See a paragraph reporting the [confession by Dr Richard Klugman](#), the Inaugural Chairman, in 1983, of the Federal Parliament's *Joint Select Committee on Electoral Matters*, at the end of an account of the 50th Anniversary Celebration of the Senate's Use of PR.

The likely persistence of there being two senators for each of Australia's internal territories is a result of the deliberate "stalemate" effect of such an arrangement where representation is provided, but it is likely that such representation will not result in any net effect on the balance of the overall Senate vote, except in a particular Territory, in the unlikely circumstance that a given grouping of candidates receives more than 66.6% of the vote.

Prevent this problem by ensuring that the number to be elected by proportional representation is an ODD NUMBER.

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