**Unit Four**

**A c c o u n t a b i l i t y o f t h e C o m m o n w e a l t h P a r l i a m e n t**

definitions

election: procedure allowing eligible citizens to hold elected officials to account for their previous term in office, and to delegate popular sovereignty to elected officials for the next term of office

through elections

*elections*

* the means by which mandates are given to representatives and governments
* must be free from intimidation or influence by those seeking office (run by an independent statutory authority - the australian electoral commission)
* must allow a fair expression, the will of the majority, and protect minority rights (preferential voting in the lower house and proportional voting in the upper house)
* must be regular and reasonably frequent (sections 7 & 28)

*electoral accountability in theory*

* parliament is theoretically accountable for how well it performs its functions
* house of reps should be the house of the people & where government is formed
* senate should be the states’ house and a house of review

*electoral accountability in practice*

* parliament is an arena where political parties contest with each other
* citizens vote on performance of parties rather than parliamentarians (partisanship)

electoral accountability of the house of representatives

* elected for three year terms using the preferential voting system adopted in 1919
* based on single member electorates
* majoritarian system

*majoritarian electoral system*

* amplifies a small majority of votes into a larger majority of seats (winner’s bonus)
* creates strong majorities and therefore strong governments that remain more stable
* may distort the judgement of voters by skewing the results in favour of the government
* may misrepresent true voting intentions of voters aiming to hold members accountable

*single member electorates*

* voters choose one representative for their electoral division
* high standard of accountability as voters can easily identify and get to know their local mhrs
* a local member’s position on issues, how they voted on bills, and their record of speeches in the house is readily available in the public space
* media provides a constant stream of information about members, especially personal or political failing, wrongdoing, or corruption

*examples*

* craig thomson used health services union (hsu) funds to allegedly pay for sex workers, leading to him losing his seat in 2013 and was later convicted
* clive palmer lost much voter support in the leadup to the 2016 election due to questions surrounding the management of his company, queensland nickel, and its donations to the palmer united party. he announced shortly before the 2016 election that he would not recontest his seat
* sophie mirabella lost her seat to an independent in 2013 following a public perception that she was prioritising her role as a shadow minister over her electorates’ interests
* rob oakeshott, tony windsor, and andrew wilkie were heavily scrutinised by the media and the opposition for how they performed the responsibility functions of mhrs while supporting gillard’s minority government (2010-2013)

electoral accountability of the senate

* elected for six year terms using proportional voting system adopted in 1949
* based on multi-member electorates
* all states get equal representation despite their population size

multi-member electorates

* elections based on multi-member electorates are weak in terms of accountability
* if a state is poorly represented, a voter cannot know which of twelve senators to hold to account

proportional voting

* senate is elected using the single transferrable vote proportional voting system
* ballot paper can be up to a metre long and have almost 100 candidates listed
* voters may vote for parties above the line and control their preferences but cannot control which person is selected from that party (90% of voters do this)
* voters may vote below the line which may be time consuming and allow mistakes to be made but they retain control of their vote in all ways

term length

* the length of a senator’s term means voters are less likely to react to and remember misconduct of a particular senator

examples

* william heffernan served twenty years between 1996 and 2016 and only faced the electorate twice
* lisa singh ran a below the line campaign to secure votes after being placed sixth on her party’s group ticket and won a senate seat (2016). this shows that voters may exercise greater choice and reduce party control of vote outcomes, and individual senators are more directly vulnerable to voters’ wishes

through the house of representatives and senate privileges committees

within the procedures and processes of parliament

through judicial review