



AIATSIS

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF ABORIGINAL
AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDIES

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Sources – electoral rolls and voter records

It's a common belief that the 1967 Referendum gave Indigenous people the right to vote. This isn't true. Aboriginal people could vote before 1967, but many didn't know their rights or were discouraged from voting.

Laws about who could and could not vote changed over time and differed between the states. For example, Point McLeay mission in South Australia got a polling station in the 1890s. Aboriginal men and women voted at Point McLeay in South Australian elections and voted for the first Commonwealth Parliament in 1901.

Also, many Aboriginal people were granted exemption from the protection and welfare laws and exercised their right to vote. Others were never caught by the protection and welfare system or 'passed' as other kinds of 'coloured' people and had the same rights as any other citizens.

So, it's worth checking if your ancestors ever enrolled to vote. You might find out the family's residential address or track changes of address over time. Electoral rolls can also help identify other adult family members living at the same address.

What are electoral rolls?

Electoral rolls are lists of people who registered to vote in state, territory or federal elections. They are updated before every election and may provide information such as:

- address
- occupation
- age
- other people registered at the same address
- other people who were neighbours.

What information do you need to search for electoral rolls?

To start researching you need to know:

- the name of the person you are researching
- the electorate, town or general area where they lived.



Where do you find electoral rolls?

Historical electoral rolls

- Electoral rolls can often be searched at your local library, state library or family history society.
- The [National Library in Canberra](#) keeps microfiche of the Commonwealth electoral rolls from 1901 to present. Some of these may be slightly imperfect. The library also holds a limited number of state electoral rolls on microfiche for the time prior to Federation in 1901. They provide a limited look-up service if you can't visit the library.
- [Ancestry.com.au](#) provides access to scanned and searchable electoral rolls from 1903 to 1980 for every state and territory, except South Australia, and earlier for New South Wales.

Current electoral roll

You can view an electronic copy of the current electoral roll (e-roll) at any office of the Australian Electoral Commission. See the [AEC website](#) for more information.

Other resources

- [Indigenous people and the vote](#) (Australian Electoral Commission)
- [Indigenous Australians – electoral timeline](#) (Australian Electoral Commission)

