Selected political records of the Commonwealth Parliament

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Politics and Public Administration

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Introduction

This research paper is designed to answer some of those frequently asked questions about who was the first, youngest, oldest, most often, etc. in Australian federal politics. The focus is on records for the Commonwealth Parliament although a few significant records relate to members of state parliaments.

The information is arranged under the following broad categories: Governor-General; Prime Ministers; Ministers; Members of Parliament; Women in politics; Indigenous members of the Commonwealth Parliament; Commonwealth Parliament and legislation; and Elections and government.

The records have been compiled from sources that include the Parliamentary Handbook of the Commonwealth of Australia, parliamentary debates, the Australian Dictionary of Biography and state parliamentary handbooks. A list of these sources and a key to the political party abbreviations can be found at the end of this publication.

The information is current as at 28 February 2014.

Governor-General

**First Governor-General**
John Adrian Louis Hope, 7th Earl of Hopetoun, served from 1 January 1901 to 9 January 1903.

**First Australian-born Governor-General**
Isaac Isaacs served from 22 January 1931 to 23 January 1936.

Prime Ministers

**First Prime Minister**
Edmund Barton (Protectionist, Hunter, NSW) served from 1 January 1901 to 4 September 1903.

**First Leader of the Opposition**
George Reid (Free Trade, East Sydney, NSW) served from May 1901 to 18 August 1904.

**Youngest person to become Prime Minister**
John Watson (ALP, Bland, NSW) became Prime Minister aged 37 and served from 27 April 1904 to 17 August 1904.

**Oldest person to become Prime Minister**
John McEwen (CP, Murray, Vic.) became Prime Minister aged 67 years eight months after Harold Holt’s death. He served from 19 December 1967 to 10 January 1968 when Senator John Gorton (LP, Vic.) was elected as Leader by the Liberal Party.

**Longest serving Prime Minister**
Robert Menzies (LP, Kooyong, Vic.) was Prime Minister for 16 years one month eight days from 19 December 1949 to 26 January 1966. He was also Prime Minister for two years four months four days from 26 April 1939 to 29 August 1941.

**Shortest serving Prime Minister**
Frank Forde (ALP, Capricornia, Qld) was Prime Minister for eight days from 6 July 1945 to 13 July 1945 having been commissioned by the Governor-General upon the death of John Curtin. He then lost the leadership ballot to Ben Chifley.

**Oldest serving Prime Minister**
Robert Menzies (LP, Kooyong, Vic.) was 71 years one month when he resigned on 17 December 1966, having been in Parliament since 15 September 1934.

**Prime Ministers who served separate terms as Prime Minister**
Alfred Deakin (Protectionist, Ballaarat, Vic.) served three separate terms as Prime Minister: 24 September 1903 to 27 April 1904, 5 July 1905 to 13 November 1908 and 2 June 1909 to 29 April 1910.

Andrew Fisher (ALP, Wide Bay, Qld) served three separate terms: 13 November 1908 to 2 June 1909, 29 April 1910 to 24 June 1913 and 17 September 1914 to 27 October 1915.
Robert Menzies (UAP, LP, Kooyong, Vic.) served two separate terms: 26 April 1939 to 29 August 1941 and 19 December 1949 to 26 January 1966.

Kevin Rudd (ALP, Griffith, Qld) served two separate terms: 3 December 2007 to 24 June 2010 and 27 June 2013 to 18 September 2013.

Prime Ministers who lost their seats at a federal election
Stanley Bruce (Nationalist, Flinders, Vic.) lost his seat at the federal election on 12 October 1929.
John Howard (LP, Bennelong, NSW) lost his seat at the federal election on 24 November 2007.

Prime Ministers who died in office
Joseph Lyons (UAP, Wilmot, Tas.) was Prime Minister from 6 January 1932 until he died on 7 April 1939.
John Curtin (ALP, Fremantle, WA) was Prime Minister from 7 October 1941 until he died on 5 July 1945.
Harold Holt (LP, Higgins, Vic.) was Prime Minister from 26 January 1966 to 19 December 1967, the day on which he is presumed to have died while swimming at Portsea, Victoria.

Prime Minister from the Senate
The only senator to become Prime Minister was John Gorton (LP, Vic.). He was appointed Prime Minister while still a senator on 10 January 1968, three weeks after the presumed death of Harold Holt (LP, Higgins, Vic.). Gorton resigned from the Senate on 1 February 1968 in order to contest a by-election for the House of Representatives seat held by Holt. As a result, from 1 to 24 February 1968 (the date of the by-election), the Prime Minister was not a member of the Parliament.

Ministers
Youngest person to become a minister
Katherine (Kate) Ellis (ALP, Adelaide, SA) was 30 years two months when appointed Minister for Youth on 3 December 2007.

Oldest person to become a minister
Senator Joseph Collings (FLP and later ALP, Qld) was 76 years four months when he first became a Minister. He served as Minister for the Interior from 7 October 1941 to 13 July 1945. He subsequently became Vice-President of the Executive Council on 13 July 1945, stepping down on 1 November 1946, at the age of 81 years five months.

Longest serving minister
John McEwen (CP, Echuca, Indi and Murray, Vic.) served as a minister for a total of 25 years, first from 29 November 1937 to 7 October 1941 and then from 19 December 1949 to 5 February 1971.

The longest unbroken period of service as a minister was that of William McMahon (LP, Lowe, NSW), who served as a minister from 17 July 1951 to 5 December 1972, a total of 21 years four months.

Shortest serving minister
Senator Glenister Sheil (CP and later NPA, Qld) is often described as the shortest serving minister. He was sworn in as a member of the Federal Executive Council on 20 December 1977. His appointment was terminated two days later, before his ministerial appointment (Minister for Veterans’ Affairs) was actually gazetted. This was because he had made a statement in support of apartheid in South Africa which was contrary to Government policy.

James Robert Dickson (Qld) was appointed Minister for Defence in the first federal ministry on 1 January 1901, prior to the election of the first Commonwealth Parliament. He died nine days later on 10 January 1901. He was the first federal minister to die in office.

First Minister to resign because of a disagreement with Cabinet
Charles Kingston (Protectionist, Adelaide, SA) resigned as Minister for Trade and Customs from the Barton Ministry on 24 July 1903 over a disagreement in Cabinet about whether the proposed Conciliation and Arbitration Bill 1903 should cover seamen on all ships engaged in Australian coastal trade.
Members of Parliament

Number of people who have been members of the Commonwealth Parliament
As at 28 February 2014, there have been 1,644 members of the Commonwealth Parliament (MPs) since Federation. This includes 49 MPs who served in both the Senate and House of Representatives.

Number of people who have been members of the House of Representatives
As at 28 February 2014, there have been 1,134 members of the House of Representatives since Federation.

Number of people who have been senators
As at 28 February 2014, there have been 559 senators since Federation.

Youngest person elected
Wyatt Roy (LP, Longman, Qld) was elected to the House of Representatives on 21 August 2010 aged 20 years three months. He is the youngest person elected to any Australian parliament.

Previously, the youngest person elected to the House of Representatives was Edwin Corboy (ALP, Swan, WA). He was elected at a by-election on 26 October 1918 aged 22 years two months and served until defeated at the next election on 13 December 1919. Corboy was elected when the qualifying age for candidates was 21, which remained the case until 1973 when the age was lowered to 18.

The youngest woman elected to the House of Representatives is Katherine (Kate) Ellis (ALP, Adelaide, SA) who was elected on 9 October 2004 aged 27 years.

The youngest woman elected to any Australian parliament is Kelly Vincent (Dignity for Disability) who was elected to the South Australian Legislative Council on 20 March 2010 aged 21 years four months.

Youngest person in the Senate
Senator William (Bill) O’Chee (NPA, Qld) was appointed under section 15 of the Constitution to fill a casual vacancy on 8 May 1990. He was aged 24 years 10 months.

The youngest person actually elected was Senator Sarah Hanson-Young (GRN, SA) on 24 November 2007 aged 25 years 11 months. It should be noted, however, that Hanson-Young’s term did not commence until 1 July 2008 when she was 26 years six months.

Senator Natasha Stott Despoja (AD, SA) was appointed on 29 November 1995 aged 26 years two months, and her term commenced immediately from that date.

Oldest person first elected to the House of Representatives
Edward Braddon (Free Trade, Tas. and later Wilmot, Tas.) was elected at the age of 71 years nine months and served from 29 March 1901 until his death on 2 February 1904.

Oldest person appointed or elected to the Senate
Senator John Verran (Nationalist, SA) was appointed under section 15 of the Constitution aged 71 years one month and served from 30 August 1927 to 16 November 1928.

Oldest and longest serving member of the Commonwealth Parliament
William Morris Hughes entered Parliament aged 38 years six months on 29 March 1901 and died aged 90 years one month on 28 October 1952 while still a member. He served for 51 years seven months representing a number of electorates (West Sydney, North Sydney, Bradfield, NSW and Bendigo, Vic.) and various parties (ALP, Nationalist, UAP, LP).

Shortest serving member of the Commonwealth Parliament
Charles Howroyd (Nationalist, Darwin, Tas.) died on 10 May 1917 five days after being elected on 5 May 1917. He never sat in Parliament.
First and only member expelled from the House of Representatives

Hugh Mahon (ALP, Kalgoorlie, WA) was expelled on 12 November 1920 ‘having by seditious and disloyal utterances ... been guilty of conduct unfitting for him to remain a Member ... and inconsistent with the oath of allegiance which he has taken as a Member’.¹ This followed a speech he gave at a public meeting in Melbourne in which he criticised British policy in Ireland. His seat was declared vacant and although he contested the subsequent by-election, he was unsuccessful. Since the passing of the Parliamentary Privileges Act 1987 the House of Representatives no longer has the power to expel a member.

First member suspended from the House of Representatives

James Catts (ALP, Cook, NSW) was suspended for the remainder of the day’s sitting on 18 August 1910 for referring to a statement by Elliott Johnson (LP, Lang, NSW) as ‘a dirty, skunky thing to say’ and for going over to the other side of the Chamber and saying ‘you dirty skunks’.²

On 21 February 1994, a new Standing Order (304A, later 94a) came into effect. This allows the Speaker to order the withdrawal of a member from the Chamber for one hour (‘sin bin’) for disorderly conduct without a question having to be put to the House. Wilson Tuckey (LP, O’Connor, WA) was the first member to be asked to withdraw from the Chamber under this standing order on 24 February 1994, just three days after it came into effect.

First Senator suspended from the Senate

Senator Arthur Rae (ALP, NSW) was suspended on 1 November 1912 for describing a statement attributed to him by Senator Edward Millen (Anti-Socialist, NSW) as ‘a deliberate falsehood’ and then failing to withdraw it.³ He was suspended for the remainder of the day's sitting.

Member suspended or ordered from the House of Representatives most often

Christopher Pyne (LP, Sturt, SA) holds the record for the most number of times a member has been ejected from the Chamber. Overall, he has been ejected 45 times which includes two suspensions for 24 hours and 43 ejections for one hour.

Senator suspended from the Senate most often

Senator James Keeffe (ALP, Qld) was suspended six times during his term from 1 July 1965 to 4 February 1983.

Speaker who has suspended the most Members

During Harry Jenkins’ (ALP, Scullin, Vic.) term as Speaker (12 February 2008 to 24 August 2011) there were 265 occasions when members were suspended or ordered to withdraw from the Chamber.

President who has suspended the most Senators

Alister McMullin (LP, NSW), President from 8 September 1953 to 30 June 1971, and Sir Condor Laucke (LP, SA), President from 17 February 1976 to 30 June 1981, both suspended senators on six occasions.

Member of Parliament who has crossed the floor most frequently

Senator Reginald (Reg) Wright (LP, Tas.) crossed the floor 150 times from 22 February 1950 to 30 June 1978. Senator Ian Wood (LP, Qld) crossed the floor 130 times over the same period. This information covers the period from 1950 onwards.

Women in politics

First woman political candidate

In 1897 Catherine Helen Spence ran for the National Australasian Convention. She came 22nd out of 33 candidates and was not elected.

Women first eligible to vote and sit in the Commonwealth Parliament

Women in South Australia and Western Australia had been granted the right to vote before Federation and so were eligible to vote in the first Commonwealth election on 29–30 March 1901. All women (excluding

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3. Ibid., 1 November 1912, p. 4997.
Indigenous women became eligible to vote through the *Commonwealth Franchise Act 1902* which came into effect on 12 June 1902. Thus, the first election at which they could vote and stand for the Commonwealth Parliament was that of 16 December 1903.

**First woman candidate for the House of Representatives**
Selina Anderson (Protectionist) for Dalley, NSW, contested the 16 December 1903 election. She was also a candidate under her maiden name of Siggins for the Country Party in the seat of Calare at the federal election on 16 December 1922. She was unsuccessful on both occasions.

**First women candidates for the Senate**
Vida Goldstein for Victoria, and Nellie Martel and Mary Ann Moore Bentley for New South Wales contested the 16 December 1903 election. None were successful.

**First women elected to Parliament**
Enid Lyons (UAP and later LP, Darwin, Tas.) was elected to the House of Representatives on 21 August 1943 and retired on 19 March 1951.

Senator Dorothy Tangney (ALP, WA) was elected to the Senate on 21 August 1943 and served to 19 March 1951 and then was re-elected from 28 April 1951 to 30 June 1968.

The first woman elected to any Australian parliament was Edith Cowan (Nationalist, West Perth, WA) who was elected to the WA Legislative Assembly on 12 March 1921 and served until 22 March 1924.

**First woman to become Governor-General**
Quentin Bryce became Australia’s first woman Governor-General on 5 September 2008.

**First woman to become Prime Minister**
Julia Gillard (ALP, Lalor, Vic.) became the first woman Prime Minister on 24 June 2010. She became the first elected woman Prime Minister following the election on 21 August 2010.

**First woman member of the Ministry/Cabinet**
The first woman Cabinet member was Enid Lyons (LP, Darwin, Tas.), Vice-President of the Executive Council from 19 December 1949 to 7 March 1951. In 1956, Prime Minister Robert Menzies instituted a two-tier ministry, with the Cabinet comprising the senior ministers, and the non-Cabinet ministers attending meetings only in cases directly involving their portfolios.

The first woman minister responsible for a government department was Senator Annabelle Rankin (LP, Qld), Minister for Housing from 26 January 1966 to 22 March 1971.

The first woman minister to administer a government department and be a member of the Cabinet was Senator Margaret Guilfoyle (LP, Vic.), who was appointed to Cabinet on 8 July 1976 during her term as Minister for Social Security from 22 December 1975 to 3 November 1980.

**First woman Speaker of the House of Representatives**

**First woman President of the Senate**
Senator Margaret Reid (LP, ACT) served as President of the Senate from 20 August 1996 to 18 August 2002.

**First woman to lead a federal parliamentary party**
Senator Janine Haines (AD, SA) was Leader of the Australian Democrats from 18 August 1986 to 24 March 1990.

**Indigenous members of the Commonwealth Parliament**

**First Indigenous members of the Commonwealth Parliament**
Senator Neville Bonner (LP and later IND, Qld) was the first Indigenous Senator. He was appointed on 11 June 1971 under section 15 of the *Constitution* and returned at the next election on 2 December 1972. He served until 4 February 1983.
Ken Wyatt (LP, Hasluck, WA) is the first Indigenous member of the House of Representatives. He was elected on 21 August 2010.

First Indigenous woman member of the Commonwealth Parliament
Nova Peris (ALP, NT) was elected to the Senate at the 2013 half-Senate election.

Commonwealth Parliament and legislation

The first Commonwealth Parliament
The first Commonwealth Parliament was opened in Melbourne on 9 May 1901. It moved to Canberra to the provisional Parliament House on 9 May 1927 and then to the present Parliament House on 9 May 1988.

Welcome to Country ceremony first conducted prior to the opening of Parliament
The Welcome to Country ceremony was first conducted prior to the opening of the 42nd Parliament in the Members’ Hall of Parliament House on 12 February 2008.

First President of the Senate
Senator Richard Baker (Free Trade, SA) served from 9 May 1901 to 31 December 1906.

First Speaker of the House of Representatives
Frederick Holder (Free Trade, and later Protectionist and Anti-Socialist Party, South Australia and Wakefield, SA) served from 9 May 1901 until his death in the Chamber on 23 July 1909. He is the only Speaker to die in office.

Longest speech in Parliament
Senator Albert Gardiner (ALP, NSW) spoke for 12 hours and 40 minutes on the Commonwealth Electoral Bill 1918 from 10.03 pm on 13 November to 10.43 am on 14 November 1918. The transcript took up 79 pages of Hansard (parliamentary debates).

Longest debate on a Bill in Parliament
The longest debate on a single Bill in the Senate was on the Native Title Amendment Bill 1997, which went for 56 hours 8 minutes. Such records are not kept for the House of Representatives.

Most sitting days in a year
The House of Representatives sat for 122 days in 1904, the most sitting days in a calendar year.

Least sitting days in a year
The House of Representatives sat for 29 days in 1937, the least sitting days in a calendar year.

First joint sitting of the House of Representatives and the Senate following a double dissolution election
The House of Representatives and the Senate held a joint sitting from 6–7 August 1974 to deal with six bills which had been triggers for the double dissolution election on 18 May 1974. Although there have six double dissolution elections (1914, 1951, 1974, 1975, 1983 and 1987), this was the only time a joint sitting was held as a result. A joint sitting is different from a joint meeting of both Houses.

First private member’s Bill passed into law
The Life Assurance Companies Bill 1904 was initiated by Littleton Groom (Protectionist, Darling Downs, Qld) and passed into law as Act No. 12, 1905.

First private senator’s Bill passed into law
The Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Bill 1908 was initiated by Senator Edward Needham (ALP, WA) and passed into law as Act No. 28, 1909.

Largest and smallest number of Bills passed into law in one year
A total of 264 Bills passed into law in 1992, the largest number in one year. The smallest number of Bills passed into law in one year was 12 in 1907.

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4. The state of South Australia was polled as one division at the first general election in 1901.
First broadcast of the proceedings of Parliament
Radio broadcasts began on 10 July 1946. Senate proceedings have been regularly televised from August 1990 and House of Representatives proceedings from February 1991.

Elections and government

Largest Commonwealth electorate by area
Durack in Western Australia covers an area of 1,587,758 sq. kms.

Smallest Commonwealth electorate by area
Wentworth in New South Wales covers an area of 30 sq. kms.

Largest Commonwealth electorate by population
Fraser in the Australian Capital Territory had 139,358 people enrolled as at 31 January 2014.

Smallest Commonwealth electorate by population
Solomon in the Northern Territory had 64,232 people enrolled as at 31 January 2014.

Smallest vote margin to win a seat
John Lynch (ALP) defeated Alfred Conroy (LP) by just seven votes (13,162 to 13,155) to win the seat of Werriwa (NSW) at the 5 September 1914 election. There have been contests where the margin was less but in both cases the result was challenged and the election declared void.

First Commonwealth election at which all Indigenous people could vote
The right to vote had been extended to all Indigenous people in 1962 but it was at the House of Representatives election on 30 November 1963 that they first had the opportunity to exercise that right.

Government with the largest majority
The Fraser LP/NCP Coalition Government had a majority of 55 after the 1975 election having won 91 seats to the ALP’s 36 in the House of Representatives.

Governments with the smallest majority
The Cook Liberal Party Government had a one seat majority (38–37) after the 1913 election.
The Menzies UAP/CP Coalition retained Government after the 1940 election with 36 seats. Labor also won 36 seats (ALP 32 and Non-Communist Labor 4), and independents won two seats.
The Menzies LP/CP Coalition retained Government after the 1961 election. Although it had won the same number of seats (62) as the ALP, the ALP numbers included two territory members (ACT and NT) who did not have full voting rights and therefore could not affect the outcome of divisions. Territory members could only vote on Bills affecting the territories.
The 2010 election produced the first hung parliament since 1940. Although the Coalition gained 73 seats, the Gillard Labor Government retained power with 72 seats and the support of three independent MPs and one Australian Greens MP.

Party which has been in government the most
Non-Labor parties have been in power for 66 per cent of the time since Federation compared to the ALP’s 34 per cent.

Longest continuous period in government
The Liberal/Country Party Coalition was in government for 22 years 11 months and 16 days from 19 December 1949 to 5 December 1972.

Shortest period in government
The ALP was in government for three months and 22 days from 27 April 1904 to 17 August 1904.
Key

Sources


‘Women in the Senate’, Senate Brief No. 3, Department of the Senate, Canberra, March 2013, accessed 27 February 2014.

