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# Fairness and Unfairness in South Australian Elections

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Thesis submitted for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
Politics Department  
University of Adelaide  
July 2005

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## ABSTRACT

### Fairness And Unfairness in South Australian Elections

In 1991, the South Australian Government enacted legislation requiring electoral commissioners to draw boundaries that would give both major party groups (Labor and Liberal) a fair and equal chance of winning government. This reform came as a result of long-standing grievances held by both parties about the unfairness of the existing system. This thesis argues that electoral fairness or the lack of it, has been a major issue in South Australia since the early colonial days and that the 1991 legislation has failed to resolve the problem.

This thesis analyses elections and electoral laws in a historical manner, because it was considered important to show how past events have affected the modern political landscape. It is argued in the thesis that the 1991 changes cannot guarantee fairness, as the 2002 election showed. It saw Labor win government with less than 50% of the two-party preferred vote, a result that is the occasional by-product of any single-member system. Such systems have a natural tendency to over-represent the largest parties, and in a close election, sometimes produce a result where the second largest party wins more seats than the largest party.

It is also argued that while multi-member systems can and usually do produce fairer results than single-member systems, such systems are not likely to be introduced because both major parties have a self-interest in maintaining the single-member system. Occasionally electoral reform can be achieved (as happened in New Zealand and Italy) when the existing system is shown to be producing bad results. However, the apathy of many voters and the partisan interests of the major parties means that such major changes are unlikely to happen in Australia in the foreseeable future.