

# DOUBLE DISILLUSION

THE 2016 AUSTRALIAN  
FEDERAL ELECTION



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EDITED BY ANIKA GAUJA,  
PETER CHEN, JENNIFER CURTIN  
AND JULIET PIETSCH



Australian  
National  
University

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P R E S S



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ACADEMY OF  
THE SOCIAL SCIENCES  
IN AUSTRALIA

*This book is dedicated to the memory of Margareta Gauja  
(1950–2016)*



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# List of Abbreviations

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABCC	Australian Building and Construction Commission
ABF	Australian Border Force
ACCC	Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
ACCU	Australian Carbon Credit Units
ACNC	Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
AEC	Australian Electoral Commission
AES	Australian Election Study
AFP	Australian Federal Police
AHA	Australian Hotels Association
AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
ALP	Australian Labor Party
AMA	Australian Medical Association
AMWU	Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union
ASIC	Australian Securities and Investments Commission
AWU	Australian Workers' Union
BCA	Business Council of Australia
CATI	computer-assisted telephone interviewing
CDP	Christian Democratic Party
CEFC	Clean Energy Finance Corporation
CFA	Country Fire Authority
CLP	Country Liberal Party

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COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CSG	coal seam gas
DAP	Direct Action Plan
DIBP	Department of Immigration and Border Protection
DLP	Democratic Labour Party
DPMC	Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
EAC	External Advisory Committee
EBA	Enterprise Bargaining Agreement
EPBC Act	<i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i>
ETS	Emissions Trading Scheme
EU	European Union
FECCA	Federation of Ethnic Community Councils of Australia
FF	Family First
FIRB	Foreign Investment Review Board
FWC	Fair Work Commission
FWO	Fair Work Ombudsman
GDP	gross domestic product
GFC	global financial crisis
GP	general practitioner
GST	Goods and Services Tax
IAS	Indigenous Advancement Strategy
ICAC	Independent Commission Against Corruption
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IR	industrial relations
ISDS	Investor–State Dispute Settlement
IVR	interactive voice recognition
JLN	Jacqui Lambie Network
JSCEM	Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
KAP	Katter’s Australian Party
LGBTI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex
LNP	Liberal–National Party (Queensland)

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

LPA	Liberal Party of Australia
MAE	median absolute errors
MP	Member of Parliament
NBN	National Broadband Network
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NESB	non-English speaking background
NFAW	National Foundation for Australian Women
NFF	National Farmers' Federation
NGO	non-government organisation
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
NXT	Nick Xenophon Team
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OH&S	occupational health and safety
OSB	Operation Sovereign Borders
PBS	Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme
PEFO	Pre-Election Fiscal Outlook
PHON	Pauline Hanson's One Nation
PM	Prime Minister
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PR	proportional representation
PUP	Palmer United Party
QLD	Queensland
RBA	Reserve Bank of Australia
RCA	Refugee Council of Australia
RCGP	Royal College of General Practitioners
RET	Renewable Energy Target
RMSE	root mean square error
RPC	Regional Processing Centre
RSAS	Remote Schools Attendance Strategy
RSRT	Road Safety Remuneration Tribunal

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SA	South Australia
SHEV	Safe Haven Enterprise Visa
STEM	science, technology, mathematics and engineering
STV	single transferrable vote
TAS	Tasmania
tCO <sub>2</sub> -e	tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
TPV	Temporary Protection Visa
UK	United Kingdom
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
US	United States
VIC	Victoria
WA	Western Australia
WEL	Women's Electoral Lobby
YRAW	Your Rights at Work

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May 2017

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# 1

## ‘Double Disillusion’: Analysing the 2016 Australian Federal Election

Anika Gauja, Peter Chen, Jennifer Curtin and Juliet Pietsch

After six weeks of a faux campaign followed by eight weeks of official and vigorous campaigning, the night of Saturday 2 July 2016 proved an anticlimax for election observers, particularly those expecting a clear result. Australia’s seventh double-dissolution election did not deliver the political ‘cut-through’ intended by the Constitutional framers—inspiring the title of this volume: *Double Disillusion*.

Making his election-night speech to the party faithful assembled at the Wentworth Hotel in Sydney, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull did not declare victory. Rather, he cautiously relayed the news that:

based on the advice I have from the party officials, we can have every confidence that we will form a Coalition majority government in the next parliament. It is a very, very close count ... so we will have to wait a few days (*Herald Sun* 2016).

Although more upbeat in his election night speech to Labor Party supporters at the Moonee Valley Racecourse in Melbourne, Opposition Leader Bill Shorten began in a similar tone:

Friends ... We will not know the outcome of this election tonight. Indeed, we may not know it for some days to come. But there is one thing for sure—the Labor Party is back (*Herald Sun* 2016).

In what was reminiscent of the 2010 Australian federal election count, which produced a hung parliament and a minority Labor government (see Simms and Wanna 2012), the result of the 2016 contest took several days to finalise. With counting still to be officially completed, Bill Shorten conceded defeat a week later on 10 July 2016, and Malcolm Turnbull claimed victory with what would turn out to be the slimmest of majorities in the lower house: winning 76 seats for the Liberal–National Coalition in the 150-seat House of Representatives.

Similarly, the outcome in the Senate did not provide additional certainty for the government: 20 crossbench Senators were elected in the highest primary vote for minor parties since the postwar consolidation of the Australian party system (see Glenn Kefford, Chapter 15). In some ways, this representative outcome was not surprising given the low quota of a double-dissolution election, but it also typified the type of result predicted by the ongoing trend towards minor-party voting in the upper house over the past half century. While this result will begin to be reversed at the next half-Senate election as the new Senate voting system starts to deliver its intended effect (see Antony Green, Chapter 8), the representative balance created by the 2016 federal election has once again brought to the fore the necessities of Senate negotiation—a process that plagued the Abbott administration, albeit recreated this time with different political actors.

The title *Double Disillusion* also reflects the fact that, for many political commentators, the uncertainty of election night and Turnbull's lacklustre and somewhat sullen speech compounded what was regarded as a 'surprisingly formulaic' (Kenny 2016) and dull campaign—'one defined by extreme boredom and a lack of mistakes' (*Australian* 2016). While the campaign itself did not provide the theatre many had hoped for, it did produce a dramatic result with seemingly little capacity to resolve the political deadlock that had arisen in the previous parliament. Not only had a first-term government lost a net 14 seats and was reduced to a majority of one in the House of Representatives, the strength of the minor party vote in the Senate ensured that seven different parties would be represented on the new crossbench.

As far as elections go, the 2016 result was a 'wake-up call' to the government; however, perhaps more significantly, the election provided important insights into some of the contemporary challenges (both domestic and international) facing Australian society and representative democracy. Globally, 2016 was a year of political upheaval



and enduring uncertainty, manifested by the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom in June, the election of Donald Trump in the United States in November and the increasing prominence of populist politics across Europe and Latin America.

Amidst these political convulsions, the 2016 Australian federal election campaign had seemed isolated and largely immune. For all the political salience of Australia's hard-line border control policy, the country remained unaffected by the record mass displacement of migrants and refugees and the associated resentment of immigration, open borders and globalisation seen in parts of Europe (see James Jupp and Juliet Pietsch, Chapter 29). As with the failure of the global financial crisis to significantly impact on the 2010 federal election (see Simms 2010), Donald Horne's 'lucky country' appeared again insulated from global trends and global problems. References to global affairs were largely subsumed within the call by Turnbull and the Liberals to vote for 'stability' and avoid chaos by re-electing the incumbent government (detailed by Marija Taflaga and John Wanna, Chapter 2), though the specific emphasis of the risk—global uncertainty or Labor's history of internal disunity—remained ambiguous.

As an agenda-setting event signalling future policy and policy contestation, the 2016 election was extremely underwhelming. The array of issues considered in the campaign remained largely constrained to narrow debates about limited economic growth and austerity, with both major parties wedded to extremely conventional economic management theories (Damien Cahill and Matthew Ryan, Chapter 22). Both parties played to their policy strengths: the Coalition emphasised stability and measures for budgetary restraint, which Labor was quick to mirror. Labor focused on the protection of Medicare with its controversial 'Mediscare' strategy (Amanda Elliot and Rob Manwaring, Chapter 24). In many areas, policy domains were reduced to synecdoche issues for wider concerns; for example, threats to the Great Barrier Reef instead of a wider debate about environmental management (Rebecca Pearse, Chapter 25), same-sex marriage over social inclusion (Blair Williams and Marian Sawyer, Chapter 28) and penalty rates over wider industrial relations terrain (David Peetz, Chapter 23).

## A politics of disillusionment

A comprehensive chronology and analysis of the main events of the 2016 campaign is provided by Marija Taflaga and John Wanna (Chapter 2); rather than covering this same terrain, our main aim in this introduction is to highlight some of the key themes that unite the diverse chapters in this book. Drawing on the expert opinion of the collective authors of this volume, we contend that the 2016 federal election, often characterised as lacking spark, dynamism and interest from the public (Clive Bean, Chapter 10), can be better viewed as a ‘magnifying event’ reflecting the politics of the nation—a popular disillusionment with Australian political institutions and actors. We suggest that this can be seen in both structural and behavioural terms.

- From a structural perspective, the 2016 election brought into question the capacity of the Australian political system to deliver political and policy outcomes to the electorate. This has a number of sources, including the pluralisation of a society that employs a majoritarian institutional arrangement; as well as the significant challenges to the capacity of political parties and governments in middle powers like Australia to respond to the policy problems facing a diverse and global society.
- From a behavioural perspective, within a general scepticism about institutions (Edelman 2016), there is a popular sense that established parties are too focused on strategy, too factionalised, and lacking in capacity, to address the complex policy issues of the day. There is increasingly a disconnect between the ‘promise’ of elections as a mechanism of democratic accountability and the ‘reality’ of their use as a tool of political strategy.

Taken together, these themes further illustrate why this book is titled *Double Disillusion*, a play on the descriptor ‘double dissolution’. First and foremost, the 2016 federal election highlighted the fact that although elections formally function as the opportunity to provide a ‘voice’ to the people to hold politicians to account, several aspects of the electoral process can be managed by political parties as a tactical mechanism to prolong periods in government and achieve their legislative programs. Operating with a three-year window that has some flexibility, federal governments will routinely time the announcement of an election in line with their calculations of electoral success, even if, as in the case of 2016,

these calculations may not bear out. Although useful from the federal government's perspective, voters do not always view early elections in a positive light. The manipulation of electoral timing can be perceived as a self-serving strategy.<sup>1</sup>

In 2016, the issue of strategy was heightened by the government's decision to invoke provisions in the Australian Constitution to dissolve both Houses of Parliament, and thereby achieve an early election not only for the House of Representatives, but the full Senate.<sup>2</sup> As Antony Green discusses in Chapter 8 of this volume, as a measure to break political deadlock, section 57 of the Constitution provides that if both Houses of Parliament fail to agree on the passage of a bill, in certain circumstances the Governor-General may dissolve both Houses of Parliament simultaneously—what is commonly referred to as a 'double-dissolution election'.

The 'trigger' for this mechanism in 2016 was the Senate's inability to pass bills on union governance and the re-establishment of the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC). However, as Taflaga and Wanna argue in Chapter 2, the alternative strategic motivation behind the double-dissolution election was to 'clear out' the Senate crossbenchers, who had provided a source of frustration for the government in attempting to legislate its policy program in the previous parliament. This misfit between public interest in trigger bills (Irving 2015: 40) and the underlying strategic import of the prime minister's actions serves to further underline a disconnection between popular concerns and political practice.

The timing of the 2016 election and the use of the double-dissolution trigger also needs to be understood in the context of reforms to the Senate voting system, which were passed by the parliament in March 2016. Designed to address the growing electoral importance of 'micro-

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1 Given this scepticism, it could be argued that moving to fixed-term elections may be one way to reduce disillusionment and to 'modernise' the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy, following in the footsteps of the United Kingdom (2011) and Canada (2007). The majority of Australian States and Territories also follow this model: New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria, Western Australian, and the Northern and Australian Capital Territories.

2 On 21 March 2016, Malcolm Turnbull formally requested the Governor-General to prorogue parliament with effect from 15 April as per section 5 of the Constitution, thereby allowing for a reintroduction of the trigger bills and the Budget to be read before the cut-off date of 5 May. A double dissolution cannot occur within six months of the end of a three-year term of the House of Representatives, so the PM's initial request essentially set the election date for 2 July.

parties' and preference-harvesting arrangements leading to democratically questionable outcomes, the changes instituted a system of optional preferential voting and removed 'group-voting' tickets.

The voting system reforms were lauded on the grounds that they increased transparency and restored true choice to voters, rather than results being driven by preference deals engineered by parties and so-called 'preference whisperers' (Kelly 2016: 98). By the same token, the reforms were also criticised as creating a significant disadvantage to new entrants, making it more difficult for minor parties to be elected and consolidating the power of the incumbent political parties (Lee 2016).

As several of the chapters in this book suggest, while the government's strategy of clearing out a previously difficult Senate may have backfired, with a plethora of new parties now present, the politics behind the electoral law reforms, the timing of the election and the use of the double-dissolution trigger were clearly in the interests of the established parties of government and, as we argue, contributed to the climate of disillusionment surrounding the 2016 federal campaign.<sup>3</sup> This notion of an 'insider class' of self-dealing and privilege was again in the media at the end of 2016—the expenses scandals (Riordan 2017) and political donation debates highlighting the opaque nature of politicians' use of public resources and party financing (Baxendale 2017; see also Gauja and Sawyer 2016).

Second, and a prominent theme in the chapters throughout this volume, is the necessity to understand and engage with the growing complexity of electoral politics in Australia. In particular, attention must be paid to shifting attitudes and forms of engaging with politics, and the constantly evolving landscape of actors involved in election campaigns, as well as the arenas in which political talk occurs. We suggest that the increasing myriad of political actors involved in the electoral process highlights the importance of looking beyond traditional arenas to assess the extent and impact of political debate.

Previous editions of the Australian federal election book have noted the decline of partisan attachments and the increasing professionalisation and personalisation of election campaigns (see, for example, Johnson, Wanna

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3 It is worth noting that only half of the new Senate will have six-year terms; the other half will be up for re-election under the full quota in three years. This means it is likely that the number of micro-party representatives will decrease.

and Lee 2015), trends that could be associated with electoral discontent, instability and declining party membership. In this volume, we try to draw attention to the changing nature and heightened complexity of the electoral landscape—in particular, constraints on individual political actors, as well as the blurring of formal and informal arenas of political activity by parties, politicians and citizens.

The contributors to this book emphasise, perhaps in a more optimistic way, that although political parties and their leaders remain central to Australian election campaigns, the universe of participants is far more diverse than this. Contrary to their representation in elite and emerging media (see Andrea Carson and Brian McNair, Chapter 19; Peter Chen, Chapter 20), we argue that elections are not monopolised by leaders, parties and media elites (the ‘whales’ of political journalism). The 2016 contest saw ongoing participation by a wide array of interest groups (see Darren Halpin and Bert Fraussen, Chapter 17), marginalised communities (see Diana Perche, Chapter 27; Williams and Sawyer, Chapter 28), independent candidates (see Jennifer Curtin, Chapter 16) and online campaigning organisations—most notably GetUp!—(see Ariadne Vromen, Chapter 18).

Some of these activities, like the intervention of GetUp! in asylum-seeker policies (constructed by political parties over time to ‘wedge’ political opponents—see Sara Dehm and Max Walden, Chapter 26), demonstrate new modes of participation and illuminate political actors that can be important in shaping campaigns and campaign narratives. Others, like the coalition of individuals and groups who developed and promoted the Redfern Statement on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, remain in a state of potentiality. Without these alternative voices, the 2016 election would have been far less dynamic than even its current low reputation attests. Thus, while the discussion of Senate reforms point to a closure of the competitive space of campaigns, the ideational nature of elections may remain even in a political system dominated by parties following the cartel trajectory.

Finally, we suggest that much of the disillusionment with the 2016 Australian federal election is linked to critiques of the major parties’ capacities (particularly that of the government) to deal with the significant policy challenges facing Australian society and to represent the interests of an increasingly diverse community (see Jupp and Pietsch, Chapter 29). Specifically, this volume reveals how these policy areas were approached

and emphasised (or de-emphasised) by the various actors (parties, interest groups, social movement organisations, and others) involved in the campaign and the political strategies involved in the process. As many of the authors contend in this volume, much of the 2016 election was fought over traditional ideological divisions: economic management versus social provision (see Carol Johnson, Chapter 3). In a complex political environment, this demonstrates enduring class divisions and the importance of inequality and material concerns in the lives of everyday Australians. Several chapters in this book are critical of the ability of the political community to generate significantly new policy ideas. In some areas, it appears they are ‘searching’ for new solutions during a period in which conventional policy models in a number of key economic, social and environmental domains appear no longer to have efficacy, while in other areas authors identify agenda closure by parties and other elites.

In providing an expert analysis of the actors, policies and, importantly, the political strategies involved in the campaign, this collection gives readers a much more nuanced understanding of why the 2016 Australian federal election was one that represented a ‘double disillusion’. It is evident that voters were disillusioned, but, looking beyond the negative tone associated with the title, we suggest that many of the characteristics of the 2016 Australian federal election may also represent a longer-term shift in Australian electoral politics. This shift is signified by a period of party and electoral fragmentation leading to a richer universe of political and campaign participants, increased policy complexity in a climate of growing economic uncertainty and inequality, and an ever-present public cynicism with leadership churn and the political manipulation of electoral rules.

## Continuing the tradition: The 2016 federal election volume

The post-election analysis of Australian federal campaigns is well established in the discipline of Australian political science. These volumes date back to 1958 (Johnson and Wanna 2015: ix). In this, the 16th edited collection of post-election analyses, a larger editorial team has worked to bring together 41 contributors. This expanded scope, we hope, provides an unprecedented depth of expertise to this key political event by bringing together an interdisciplinary group of established and emerging scholars.

Each of the chapters goes beyond political commentary, being written on the basis of in-depth and original research and analysis providing new and important insights.

The analysis in this volume is divided into four sections.

The first provides the context and outlines key contests in the 2016 Australian federal election. Observing the importance of this volume for the historical record, it begins with a chapter that maps the chronology and provides a detailed overview of the campaign (Taflaga and Wanna, Chapter 2). In this chapter, the authors demonstrate the connection between the disruptive leadership change before the election and the temporal and policy constraints faced by the prime minister in 'setting up' the double-dissolution election. This context is followed by a discussion of the ideological (Johnson, Chapter 3) and leadership contests (Paul Strangio and James Walter, Chapter 4). Both chapters demonstrate a 'narrowing' in Australian political practice: the first highlighting this narrowing at the ideological and ideational level; the second underlining the way political practice has become personalised in the figure of the party leader. With the unpleasant return of the leadership principle and its populist turn in politics at the global level, it is valuable to be able to observe how Australian political leadership is constructed and made manifest today. Finally, in the context of the surprising results in the United Kingdom's 'Brexit' vote and the United States' presidential race, the final chapters in this section examine the impact and accuracy of Australian election polls in detail (Murray Goot, Chapter 5; Simon Jackman and Luke Mansillo, Chapter 6). Given that professional polling is one of the most prominent features of modern political campaigns and the source of considerable 'meta-commentary' on politics by the media, it is important to assess how effective contemporary polling is and look behind the figures to understand how these numbers are constructed.

The second section of the book reports and analyses the results of the election. This takes a number of forms. The first two chapters look at the results in aggregate: first for the House of Representatives (Ben Raue, Chapter 7) and second for the Senate (Green, Chapter 8). Reminding us of the important lesson that there is no 'uniform swing' in Australian elections, these chapters look at those seats that changed hands and those that did not. Given the importance of the Senate in this race and the institutional changes that preceded it, Green's chapter provides

commentary on the outcomes, but also looks in detail at the way elements of the new Senate voting system influenced the result, and how they were also interpreted strategically by the competitors.

Narrowing the focus from these aggregate results, the following chapters in this section provide additional thematic analysis and explanation by examining the way different constituencies were considered (or not) in the campaign, and the impact of different types of electoral grouping on the outcome of the campaign. Two very different chapters examine these topics. The first looks at federalism and regional variations in campaigning and results (Martinez i Coma and Smith, Chapter 9). The second reports on data from the 2016 Australian Election Study (Bean, Chapter 10)—that long-running survey of voter behaviour and opinion that allows both demographic factors and issue salience to be examined in more detail.

The third section of the book explores the campaigns and the impact of a variety of different political actors. Keeping with tradition, we include chapters that focus on each of the main parties: the Australian Labor Party (Rob Manwaring, Chapter 11), the Liberal Party of Australia (Nicholas Barry, Chapter 12), the National Party of Australia (Geoff Cockfield and Jennifer Curtin, Chapter 14) and the Australian Greens (Stewart Jackson, Chapter 13). Recognising their growing role, this volume also includes an in-depth analysis of the key minor parties that were significant in the 2016 election campaign (Kefford, Chapter 15) as well as the independent candidates for office (Curtin, Chapter 16). Breaking with the tradition of previous editions of the post-election book, each of these chapters is written by academic experts rather than party practitioners. Parties' and candidates' campaigning techniques and practices are covered along with the main policy issues they campaigned on, an analysis of their strategies and their respective electoral strengths before and after the election.

Further expanding our appreciation of the electoral arena in Australia and the variety of actors involved, this section also includes chapters on the conduct of interest groups and their motivations for participation in elections (Halpin and Fraussen, Chapter 17), a specific chapter on GetUp! as an electoral actor worthy of analysis on par with many of the parties contesting the election (Vromen, Chapter 18), the established media's coverage of the campaign (Carson and McNair, Chapter 19) and new entrants into the Australian media market (Chen, Chapter 20). Recognising the interactive nature of new media in facilitating and magnifying 'folk'



political speech, this volume includes a chapter that explores the incidence of election 'talk' in everyday online spaces (Scott Wright, Verity Trott and William Lukamto, Chapter 21).

The final section of the book shifts the focus from actors in the campaign to policy issues. Included here are chapters providing analysis from experts in their respective policy fields: the economy (Cahill and Ryan, Chapter 22), industrial relations (Peetz, Chapter 23), social policy (Elliot and Manwaring, Chapter 24), the environment (Pearse, Chapter 25), refugees (Dehm and Walden, Chapter 26), Indigenous policy (Perche, Chapter 27) and gender and sexuality (Williams and Sawer, Chapter 28). The final chapter in the volume, by James Jupp and Juliet Pietsch (Chapter 29), analyses not only policy issues that surround a multicultural Australia, but also the importance and treatment of ethnic constituencies and issues. Many of these contributors come from fields outside of political science and their contributions cement the richness of the collection with additional expertise and insights.

Overall, this volume provides the 'continuity with change' promised by the prime minister in outlining his intentions upon coming into government in 2015 (Henderson 2016). This has been a deliberate strategy to ensure that this volume provide useful continuity back to its forbears in the late 1950s, while focusing on the phenomena, issues and actors relevant to explaining both the election itself and the political milieu in which it sat.

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# Part One. Campaign Themes and Context



# 2

## ‘I’m Not Expecting to Lose ...’: The Election Overview and Campaign Narrative

Marija Taflaga and John Wanna

### The countdown to a combative election

The quotation from Malcolm Turnbull in the chapter title reflected the restrained optimism of the newly installed prime minister facing his first election as leader in the dying days of the 2016 federal election campaign. He spoke these prophetic words reluctantly when asked persistently by TV personality Annabel Crabb on her show *Kitchen Cabinet* about his expectations of the outcome. While Turnbull’s prediction would ultimately prove accurate (only just!), Turnbull and his Coalition colleagues would get the fright of their lives when the counting began.

This chapter provides a chronology of the federal election campaign of 2016. It explores the antecedents of the main events and outcomes, and looks to provide reasons for the largely unexpected closeness of the eventual result. The chapter is broadly divided into five parts: (1) the background context and government’s leadership transition along with the delicate timing and deliberate preparations for a double-dissolution election; (2) the flurry of last-minute policy announcements and budgetary measures; (3) the meandering nature of the lengthy campaign from the standpoint of the main protagonists followed by the resort to

banal sloganeering; (4) the volatile election outcome and the descent into uncertainty; and, finally, (5) the immediate aftermath of the election and an assessment on the wisdom of calling a double dissolution.

The most noteworthy aspect of the 2016 federal election was that the election campaign really mattered. Both major contending parties went into the lengthy eight-week campaign with considerable negatives and political drawbacks (so-called 'lead in the saddlebags')—both were headed by relatively inexperienced leaders who were untested and had not previously led a national campaign; both faced mounting disaffection from their constituencies and swinging voters; and both major parties were frustrated by the dire fiscal situation with no additional money to spend unless they were prepared to allow the deficit to increase. Polling indicated that both sides would struggle to lift their primary vote back to their historical average, well into the 40 percentages. But the main battlelines of the campaign returned the contest to old-fashioned terrain—one fought over the traditional ideological contours of economic management (Liberals and Nationals) versus social provision (Labor and the Greens). Perhaps the major difference between the two sides was that the Coalition attempted to mount a bland but positive campaign focused on 'jobs and growth', whereas Labor opted for a scare campaign in the final weeks, pretending that the government had a secret plan to privatise and dismantle Medicare. At the same time, Labor emphasised health, education and jobs.

The previous federal election in September 2013 had turned out largely to be a foregone conclusion; Labor was not competitive and suffered a 'thumping defeat' while the Coalition, led by Tony Abbott, scored the second-largest majority in the parliament since 1945 (Rayner and Wanna 2015). Tactically, 'Abbott's gambit' in plumping for a strategy of outright opposition across a small number of wedge issues paid off and made the result somewhat inevitable (see Bean and McAllister 2015; Johnson and Wanna 2015). By contrast, the 2016 election was a real competitive contest and, although many commentators correctly predicted the Coalition would be returned with a reduced majority, the eventual outcome surprised many by the closeness of the result and the many closely contested seats finishing on tight margins.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Arguably, the 2016 election resembled the 2010 federal election, where a first-term prime minister had just been ousted and was taunted for not being the 'real' character. The contest was close, neither major party could assemble much enthusiasm for its re-election, and the campaign largely consisted of the protagonists going through the motions.



The Coalition was elected in 2013 on the back of a cynical campaign that whipped up a significant protest vote. Having achieved victory (becoming only the seventh opposition to win office since World War II), the new Abbott administration settled into office without a clear agenda beyond a few three-word slogans about 'stopping the boats', 'axing the (carbon) tax' and 'fixing the budget', and a vague promise to create 2 million jobs. It meant that the government found it hard to craft a positive narrative or prioritise its agenda beyond disassembling Labor's failings. Peddling the mantra that Australia was saddled with a 'budgetary crisis' of Labor's making (due to compounding annual deficits from 2008 and mounting debt levels expected to reach \$470 billion by 2018), the government attempted to take tough action in the 2014 Budget. It announced a long list of austerity measures (a scatter gun of irritants and other budgetary tightenings, rather than radical downsizing) designed to end the 'age of entitlement'. Future funding to States was reduced (by claims of up to \$80 billion from notional funding for health and education), a 2 per cent additional levy on higher income earners was imposed for three years, indexation rates for welfare payments were reduced, tougher means tests for family benefits were announced, the age at which people were entitled to the aged pension was increased to 70, cuts to government departments were imposed and a \$7 GP copayment was proposed to help ration medical spending. The 2014 Budget was widely considered as unfair and not well received in the community. Together with other policy 'failures' such as university deregulation, the withdrawal of 'business welfare' leading to plant closures and a contentious bid to amend the *Racial Discrimination Act*, these incidents damaged the government's standing in the electorate. Following much protraction and bungled negotiations, many of the proposed measures were not acceptable to the Senate, leaving them as so-called 'zombie measures' haunting the government's budget bottom line.

Although the Coalition had won a comfortable victory, in government it remained deeply divided. Criticisms of Abbott's leadership grew, especially concerning his abrasive personality. A series of gaffes highlighted his errors of judgement, his polarised personal standing with the electorate and the party's consistently low polling, along with his refusal to compromise on controversial issues, and his penchant for consulting only a few hand-picked advisers, such as his chief of staff Peta Credlin, exacerbated the situation (Errington and van Onselen 2015; Savva 2016). Abbott was put on notice by his party in February 2015. He survived a leadership spill

motion 39–61, even though no challenger was prepared to contest the ballot. In a sudden opportunistic coup, the Liberals voted, in September 2015, to replace Abbott with Malcolm Turnbull, a mere 12 months before the next election was due. Abbott's party colleagues had more confidence that Turnbull could communicate effectively on economic policy and win the next election.

## Closer and closer to the pending abyss: Gambling on a double dissolution

When Turnbull became PM there was a collective sigh of relief, mixed with widespread bewilderment. The Liberals, who had promised 'grown-up government' and attacked Labor's disarray, infighting and leadership instability, had, by their own hands, suffered through similar leadership turmoil. But the aura surrounding the seemingly affable Turnbull's ascendancy soon diminished as his vacillating and indecisive style of leadership transcended into a sense of national disappointment. With its own conservative wing hostile to major changes, the Turnbull government, challenged by State government leaders, influential pressure groups and think tanks, soon found itself struggling to manage the policy debate in the media.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, the Opposition Leader Bill Shorten, who many had underestimated or written-off as a one-note union official, suddenly rose to the occasion and began to make the dishevelled Labor caucus look electable.

Once Turnbull assumed the prime ministership, speculation about the likelihood of an early election dominated Australian politics during the initial months of 2016, especially as the government appeared to be comfortably on top in the polls and Turnbull's personal standing was high. The year 2015 ended with the Coalition 4 percentage points in front of Labor (or 52 per cent to 48 per cent in two-party preferred terms).<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, while Turnbull's honeymoon appeared to be holding up

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2 The Turnbull government's policy difficulties arose from two sets of factors. The first set was the result of previous policy decisions undertaken by the Abbott government, as that government vacillated between arrogance and its 'born to rule mentality' and indecisiveness. The second was the product of Abbott's decision to stay on in politics, which emboldened the right faction within the Liberal Party and resulted in increased timidity and indecisiveness by the Turnbull government.

3 Used throughout this book, the term 'two-party preferred' refers to the vote for Labor and the Coalition when other parties have been excluded and have had their preferences distributed.

into the early months of 2016, a series of political events began to fan dissatisfaction. As early as February 2016, media commentary reported that there was a 'faint air of chaos' among the executive, with Turnbull 'less in control than he might pretend'. Two stalwarts of the previous government, Warren Truss and Andrew Robb, both resigned their portfolios and indicated they would step down at the next election (Kenny 2016a). This caused a minor ministerial reshuffle, with Barnaby Joyce becoming the new Nationals leader and deputy prime minister (retaining his agricultural portfolio) and Senator Fiona Nash emerging as his deputy.

Turnbull was also unsettled by a 'forced' ministerial resignation, when it was revealed that Human Services minister Stuart Robert had gone to China to secure a trade deal between two mining companies, China Minmetals and Nimrod Resources. The latter company was headed by Paul Marks, a major Liberal party donor (Henderson 2016). After trying to rebuff Shadow Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus' attack over many days in Question Time (often with monosyllabic answers), Turnbull stood Robert down. Turnbull then asked his head of department, Martin Parkinson, to undertake an investigation into whether Robert had broken the ministerial code of conduct. Parkinson responded that Robert had not benefited financially from the activity, which was not within his portfolio responsibilities, but that he had nevertheless acted 'inconsistently' with the expected ministerial standards. Robert resigned on 12 February 2016 and was replaced by Alan Tudge (Human Services) and Dan Tehan (Defence Materiel and Veterans' Affairs). Steve Ciobo (Trade) and the Nationals' Darren Chester (Infrastructure and Transport) both joined Cabinet (Hudson 2016a).

During March, the government began to prepare the groundwork to engineer a double dissolution (the first to have occurred since 1987) over the issue of the Senate having rejected its two bills on union governance and the re-establishment of the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC). The government believed that these were politically salient issues on which to fight a double-dissolution election, even though, since December 2013, it already had an earlier 'trigger' with the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (Abolition) Bill. In late March, Turnbull gave parliament an ultimatum by reintroducing the industrial relations bills for a second time. He demanded that the bills be allowed to pass or the Senate would face a double dissolution (Grattan 2016). Senators voted down the bills for a second time on 18 April—in effect sealing their fate.

But the preparations for a double dissolution also included the government announcing its intention to reform the Senate voting system, in an attempt to reduce the influence of party preference flows that had allowed ‘preference harvesting’ by minor parties. Instead, the government opted to empower the voters by allowing them to allocate their own preferences, and to allow optional preferential voting so that many votes for micro-parties would quickly ‘exhaust’ and be eliminated from the voting (Borrello 2016). Following a marathon overnight sitting in the Senate with Labor and crossbench Senators filibustering against these proposed changes to the Senate voting methods (where debate largely focused on the presumed power grab by the major parties rather than on greater transparency and individual preference choices), speculation intensified that the Prime Minister would ask the Governor-General in early May to call a double-dissolution election for 2 July (the earliest possible date to avoid a subsequent half-Senate election). But he needed to prorogue the current session of parliament and immediately recall it to reconvene at an earlier date.

Accordingly, on 21 March 2016, Turnbull announced that Parliament would be brought back early (on 18 April) to give it time to consider the ABCC Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Bills a second time and also pass the necessary supply bills. He also indicated that the Budget would be brought forward by one week to Tuesday 3 May to enable it to be tabled before an election was called and to enable the Opposition Leader to deliver his Budget Reply speech (Grattan 2016). The timelines for such an electoral strategy were extraordinarily tight, with any double dissolution constitutionally needing to be called by 11 May, but with the first practical date for the election being 2 July. This strategy implied an election campaign of at least 54 days. But many seasoned observers thought that once the Senate voting reforms were passed on 21 March, the parties were already in election mode. Indeed, Labor’s campaign director, George Wright, announced on the same day that: ‘[t]he campaign starts now. We are ready’. He also predicted that the Coalition would outspend Labor by a margin of 3:1 in electioneering (Peatling 2016a).

The main motivation in contemplating a double dissolution (other than to pass the initiating legislation) was to ‘clean out’ the ‘feral’ Senate so that the government could govern and reduce the huge crossbench of 18 Senators. Many of these Senators had minuscule primary votes, but had captured positions through ‘preference harvesting’ and from sweetheart deals with other parties. In a double-dissolution election with

all Senators coming up for election, many of the non-major party Senators risked losing their seats, not only the micro single-issue representatives such as Ricky Muir, Bob Day, John Madigan and David Leyonhjelm, but also the former Palmer United band of Glenn Lazarus, Jacqui Lambie and Dio Wang. Moreover, the Greens, who had supported the passage of the new Senate voting system, were vulnerable to losing a few of their 10 Senators (especially in South Australia (SA), and perhaps in Victoria and Western Australia (WA)) without the flow-on of Labor Party preferences (see further, Chapter 8). The Greens were encouraged to make their support for the electoral reforms conditional on receiving Coalition preferences in marginal inner-city seats, but seemingly did not attempt this or manage to reach agreement (Iggulden 2016a). The Coalition too faced the challenge of returning all 33 of their sitting Senators. Only Nick Xenophon really seemed to welcome a double dissolution, seeing it as a feasible way to increase his representation in the upper chamber (winning perhaps three or more full quotas outright, and possibly snaring a lower house seat) (Shepherd 2016).

Interestingly, a large proportion of members who began the 44th Parliament in September 2013 would not contest the following election for various reasons: during the term, eight parliamentarians had resigned (Kevin Rudd, Bob Carr, Kate Lundy, Brett Mason, Christine Milne, Mike Ronaldson, Penny Wright and Joe Hockey) and one had died (Don Randall). These departures were followed by an avalanche of retirements announced by serving parliamentarians indicating they would quit politics at the next election. Among government members, the Liberals' Bob Baldwin, Bruce Billson, Mal Brough, Bill Heffernan, Ian Macfarlane, Andrew Robb, Philip Ruddock, Andrew Southcott, Sharman Stone, Teresa Gambaro and eventually Bronwyn Bishop and Dennis Jensen (who both lost preselection battles) would depart parliament (although Jensen did stand as an independent candidate, and lost). The Nationals had fewer departures, although their leader Warren Truss, as well as Bruce Scott and John Cobb, chose to retire. On Labor's side, many MPs who had served in the tumultuous years under the Rudd-Gillard government, and now faced the prospect of more years in opposition, announced their retirement. Joining the three ministers (Rudd, Carr and Lundy) who had already gone were Joe Bullock, Anna Burke, John Faulkner, Laurie Ferguson, Gary Gray, Alan Griffin, Jill Hall, Joe Ludwig, Jan McLucas, Melissa Parke, Nova Peris, Bernie Ripoll, Kelvin Thomson and, surprisingly, WA's Alannah MacTiernan, who, after

a career in State politics and just one term in Canberra, appeared reluctant to wait in the queue for a senior position in government. Then Clive Palmer announced he would not recontest once the election was called. In total, their resignations brought the departures from both chambers to some 38 members, implying a turnover of almost 17 per cent of sitting members. With Bullock retiring early, Bill Shorten was quick to nominate Aboriginal activist Pat Dodson to replace him as WA's new Labor Senator (reminiscent of Julia Gillard's 'captain's pick' of Nova Peris).

## Clearing the decks: A flurry of last-minute policy announcements

On the eve of the election, the government cobbled together a number of high-visibility policy announcements to shore up its image and placate key constituencies. First, a new (but delayed) Defence *White Paper* (Commonwealth of Australia 2016) was released arguing for a 'rules-based global order' and reconfirming defence spending would rise to 2 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) by 2020–21. It also committed the government to the long-term support of the 'innovative' capabilities of the Australian defence industries (Jennings 2016). Second, Malcolm Turnbull and Industry minister Christopher Pyne announced a \$1 billion Innovation and Science package just before Christmas, much of which was reannouncing previously allocated money (Hurst 2015). Then the government announced new contracts for naval ships to be built in WA, plus 12 (French-designed) submarines to be built in SA, new policies covering cyber security, funding for city planning and a funding boost for the financial regulator Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC) to better police the banks (Hasham 2016; Massola 2016a; Starick 2016; Turnbull 2016). The intention to build submarines in SA was a panicky move to avoid losing marginal seats in that State. The Treasurer also announced that the sale of the vast cattle stations in the Kidman Empire to Chinese buyers would not be approved by the Foreign Investment Review Board (FIRB) on national interest grounds, appeasing considerable rural angst over the issue (Barbour, Vidot and Gunders 2016).

The government had made less progress with a number of other controversial issues. It had announced that it would implement amendments to the *Competition and Consumer Act* to introduce an 'effects

test' to toughen the law so businesses could be prevented from reducing competition as a result of their actions (Barbour, Henderson and Iggulden 2016). Trade minister Steve Ciobo intended to have the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) treaty ratified before parliament rose, but the legislation was left pending when parliament was suddenly prorogued (Kelly 2016). The government had also toyed with new media laws that responded to the arrival of new technologies, significant digital disruption and new players entering the field, while also allowing traditional players further aggregation. It then decided not to proceed with the legislation (Knott and White 2016). In contrast, the government did manage to repeal the act establishing the Road Safety Remuneration Tribunal (RSRT). This legislation was supposedly to promote safe driving practices, but it had in reality extended union coverage in the sector, significantly increased haulage rates for truck drivers and resulted in projections that transport costs would rise by up to 15 per cent for owner-drivers. The sudden abolition of the tribunal voided any orders it had made, a move that greatly appeased the self-employed truckies, hirers and supply-chain distributors (Hannan 2016). Meanwhile, also in April, both the Commonwealth and Queensland governments refused to intervene or offer bail-out funding to Clive Palmer's failed Queensland Nickel operations. This meant that the company was liquidated with debts of \$300 million and 550 workers were left without jobs (Elks 2015).

## Introducing the Budget early—framing the election with an insipid 'economic plan'

Bringing parliament back early also meant that the 2016–17 Budget could be brought forward by one week to 3 May to allow for three days of debate before an election was called and to give Shorten the opportunity to present his speech in reply. Intending to use the Budget as a launching pad for the election, its timing was a major part of the government's strategy. Indeed, one economic commentator argued that 'for the first time ever ... we have had a budget essentially kick-off the election campaign'. He added that the election 'hasn't just become a referendum on the budget; it was deliberately chosen to be such a referendum' (McCran 2016). Yet there was little political room to manoeuvre in a budget that was already heavily in deficit to the tune of \$39.9 billion in the current year and with a projected deficit of \$37.1 billion for the budgeted year ahead. Instead, the government was reduced to announcing a lacklustre economic 'growth

plan'. With the prospect of an election fast approaching, both Turnbull and his Treasurer Scott Morrison struggled under the fiscal squeeze of consecutive structural deficits (now amounting to eight huge annual deficits in a row, and with no prospect of a surplus on the horizon until after 2021). They repeatedly proclaimed that 'everything was on the table' in terms of adjustments to the spending and taxing mix, and targeted health, welfare and education spending as areas for restraint. However, in relation to taxation measures, they proceeded to rule out virtually every contentious issue that came in for intense criticism. Initially, increases to the Goods and Services Tax (GST) were ruled out, mainly on political grounds (as Labor had quickly ruled out support), but also due to the likely compensation costs and because Treasury claimed an increase in GST would not augment economic growth (Anderson and Borrello 2016). Following that, changes to negative gearing were shelved, along with major cuts to income tax. The government then lowered expectations about company tax cuts (Kenny 2016b; Peatling 2016b; Tingle 2016a). The only issue that seemed to survive the melee was to put some ceiling on the tax-free superannuation balances of wealthy retirees and lower the tax concessions they received. Morrison was reduced to announcing, plaintively, that taxation as a percentage of GDP would decline from 25.9 per cent to 25.3 per cent by 2018–19 (Morrison 2016).

## Towards the campaign proper: Posturing politics permeates the marathon crusade

The campaign proper got off to a lethargic start on 8 May 2016, when the Governor-General granted Turnbull's wish to hold a double dissolution and dissolved parliament. At the commencement of the eight-week campaign, the two main parties began at a measured pace rather than a canter; the Greens spent time highlighting their high-profile celebrities in key seats, while local candidates returned to their constituencies and scrambled to reactivate or build individual campaign architecture and remind voters of their beneficence. Although the main four federal parties had been engaged in 'faux campaigning' for several weeks, significant coverage in the media suggested that much of the electorate remained decidedly uninterested and were not listening (Burgess 2016; Coorey 2016b; Robertson 2016c; Young 2016). With no money to spend, the promises from the major parties ranged from the micro to the banal: funding toilet blocks and sports facilities for local communities,



announcing minor road upgrades, offering funds for sewerage sampling to allow federal police to find 'ice labs' and commitments to improve local surveillance with the provision of additional CCTV cameras (Lee 2016). Only the Greens embarked on anything approaching a spending spree, together with proposed tax increases.

In many respects, the 2016 election campaign was a return to an older feel of Australian politics. The two major parties presented modestly contrasting economic visions, which reflected their core values, self-image and key support bases of their respective parties (also see Chapter 3). The Coalition pushed its pro-business economic credentials, promising that increased investment would promote economic growth. Labor opted to push its social agenda, advocating fairness, redistribution, along with health and education. For some, the election was uninspiring and predictable, but for those commentators with longer memories, it represented a return to traditional contours and some significant differences of priorities between the major players.

Wary of making big spending announcements, both major party leaders were regularly accused of having no new policy ideas (although various thought-bubble gimmicks were trotted out such as allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to vote) (Butler 2016). Moreover, many controversial issues such as the continuing offshore detention of 'boat people' on Manus Island and Nauru, Australian military involvement in Syria and Afghanistan or the breakdown of law and order in Aboriginal communities, such as Arukun, were off limits largely because they enjoyed bipartisan support from the major parties<sup>4</sup>—although the Greens occasionally tried to draw attention to them (Karp 2016).

It first appeared as though Labor had opted to run a decidedly positive campaign, but the party soon departed from this script and turned heavily negative. Labor announced its '100 positive policies', most of which were dot-point ideas and statements of principle (Australian Labor Party (ALP) 2016a). As the party tried to defend its left flank from the Greens, it spent much of the first few weeks of the campaign denying it would enter into a coalition agreement with them after the election. Instead, it emphasised that only a majority Labor government would govern

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<sup>4</sup> Labor was initially stung by some very public internal disaffection over its acceptance of the Coalition's tough policy on unauthorised boat arrivals from candidates protesting about their party's agreement to turning boats back and continued offshore detention (Viellaris 2016).

responsibly (Woodley 2016a). Labor's frontbench had announced plans to increase taxes on tax-evading multinationals and cut back on negative gearing so that it would apply only to new housing investments. It would increase tax on wealthy superannuants who would be expected to pay tax on pension earnings over \$75,000, and increase the renewable energy target to 50 per cent by 2030 (ALP 2016b). Significantly, the Shadow Treasurer, Chris Bowen, when launching Labor's 10-year economic plan, also admitted that the budget deficit would be greater under Labor's proposed measures than under the Coalition's plan (Tingle 2016b). This eventual admission saw Labor's campaign shift gear from being predictable and upbeat to a distinctly more negative orientation. Labor began to highlight community fears over changes to industrial relations and penalty rates. It opposed supposed cuts to school education, health and social welfare, argued against the reintroduction of the ABCC and fumed over the Coalition's plan to cut company tax over 10 years, costing some \$50 billion (see also Chapter 11).

To the disdain of many commentators (and later the Prime Minister on election night), Labor engaged in a duplicitous scare campaign over what it claimed was the Coalition's plans to sell or privatise Medicare, the so-called 'Mediscare' campaign. The 'Mediscare' blitz took off in the last three weeks of the campaign, on both social media and free-to-air advertising, playing on fears that the Coalition would wind back Medicare or shift costs on to health users. The scare campaign was contrived by disingenuous social media campaigners in Queensland's Labor headquarters, and involved former prime minister Bob Hawke fronting a television advertisement supplemented by massive cold-calling to households. Approximately 75 per cent of Labor's advertising budget was spent on negative advertising (Reece 2016).

Labor also centred its campaign around its leader and, to the surprise of many observers, Bill Shorten fought an adroit campaign sticking to his well-rehearsed scripts during daily appearances. He appeared to enjoy campaigning, and gained an energy as the weeks unfolded that allowed him to repair his abysmal approval rating, which had tanked to just 17 per cent in late 2015 (Morris 2015). As he sought to 'connect' with voters and rebuild his leadership credentials, he had to face the ignominy of speculation sourced from among his own colleagues that he would be immediately replaced after a widely expected humiliating defeat (Farr 2015).

The Coalition, somewhat leadenly, reminded voters that its platform was essentially contained in the tabled, but yet-to-be-passed, Budget delivered to parliament in early May, seemingly under the belief that this was sufficient to deliver office in July. In a major thematic shift from the leadership of Tony Abbott, the Coalition attempted to avoid too much discussion of national security and the 'turn-back' policy on unauthorised boats, and instead focused squarely on their plans for the economy.<sup>5</sup> With Nationals leader and Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce preoccupied in fighting off a challenge in the seat of New England against former Independent MP Tony Windsor, Turnbull's campaign team was left to focus the national campaign on the PM's ostensible affability. But, in his public performances as the spearhead campaigner, and in marked contrast to Tony Abbott in 2013, Turnbull looked flat and preoccupied throughout the campaign and never really responded to Labor's hyperbolic 'Mediscare' campaign. Suffering from influenza, Turnbull was often a little too verbose. He looked decidedly awkward in staged daily meet-and-greet events, struggled over small talk with constituents and was usually short of content and lacking any 'mongrel' in criticism of his opponents.<sup>6</sup> In the middle of the campaign, Treasurer Scott Morrison and Finance Minister Mathias Cormann accused Labor of having a \$67 billion black hole (Iggulden 2016b). However, that same day the Treasurer was forced to retreat from his claims after sustained questioning (see further, Chapters 4 and 12).

## A myriad of minor campaigns and vilifying the non-establishment parties

Significantly, the 2016 election did not simply turn into the traditional two-way fight between the main protagonists over marginal seats. Minority party support was at an all-time high, and even safe seats were vulnerable to capture from attractive opponents. Accordingly, the campaign fractured into a four-way battle for disputed territory.

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5 A gaffe by Peter Dutton early in the campaign, when he said that refugees were both illiterate and likely to steal jobs, produced much acrimony among migrant communities and those with parents born overseas. Dutton's comments, however, elicited a strong defence from Julie Bishop. Both Tanya Plibersek and Sam Dastiyari used their own personal migration stories to condemn Dutton's remarks.

6 Abbott's former chief of staff (and later media commentator during the campaign) Peta Credlin described Turnbull's performance in the campaign as 'unsure and wounded', claiming he 'didn't find the "meet and greet" easy in the campaign and it showed' (Credlin 2016).

The predominant contest remained between the main protagonists, Coalition versus Labor, but it also included other fierce battles between ‘industrial’ Labor versus the ‘hipster’ Greens in inner-city precincts and sea-change lifestyle seats. Considerable speculation was generated over how many seats (like Melbourne, Melbourne Ports, Batman, Willis, Grayndler and Sydney) Labor would lose to Green challengers (Aston 2016b; Chang 2016a). In South Australia, the Labor–Liberal duopoly was fighting off a serious challenge from the Nick Xenophon Team, using some dirty tactics along the way, such as claiming Xenophon was a slum landlord and arranging cosy preference swaps in affected seats (Faulkner 2016). Finally, a further electoral battle was fought over Senate seats between the Coalition and various right-of-centre parties, such as Pauline Hanson’s One Nation (PHON), the Liberal Democrats, Family First and other fringe parties like Derryn Hinch’s Justice Party and Jacqui Lambie’s Network (see Chapter 15).

Both parties amplified the creeping cartelisation in Australia’s party system. They immediately urged voters to return a majority government, indicating that the spectre of another minority government or one dependent on Green support was still considered toxic among the political establishment. The third party was regularly described as ‘dangerous’ and ‘irresponsible’. Indeed, both party leaders returned frequently to the well of minor party bashing. For instance, Turnbull declared mid-campaign that ‘a vote for anyone other than my Coalition team is a vote for chaos’ (Davey 2016). The Liberals frequently attacked the Greens and Labor throughout the campaign, seeking to besmirch Labor by attempting to demonstrate that they had an association with the Greens and to evoke memories of the ‘Labor–Greens’ alliance during the Gillard government. The Coalition hoped to tap into the fears of non-progressive voters who might regard the Greens as a radical fifth column. The Liberal Party went so far as to release a political advertisement, ‘The Greening of Labor’ (Liberal Party of Australia 2016). Set to abrasive rock music and using jarring editing, the advertisement attempted to portray the Greens as a sinister force dragging an already suspect Labor Party further away from the mainstream. In style, it was reminiscent of the much-mocked and ineffective ‘Piracy it’s a Crime’ advertisements from the mid-2000s, which sought to counter the illegal copying of films and music.

Labor made similar noises, but was subtler in their critique. Shorten attacked the Greens for their opportunistic deal-making with the government to pass key legislation (on the financial disclosures of

multinational corporations and Senate electoral reform), but maintained that Labor would nevertheless respect the crossbench and seek to work with it. Labor also ran ads attacking the Liberals for proposing to preference the Greens ahead of Labor in inner-city Melbourne seats (Hudson 2016b; Massola 2016b). In a sign of the changed times and recognition of the pressure facing the two established parties, the right-wing *Daily Telegraph* ran a front page declaring 'Save our Albo', and attacked the Greens candidate as an anticapitalist 'radical' (Clennell 2016). This turnaround was in stark contrast to the 2013 election, when the *Daily Telegraph* had depicted Albanese as the 'Nazi buffoon Sergeant Schultz' to Kevin Rudd's 'Colonel Klink' from the 1960s comedy show *Hogan's Heroes*—a choice that spoke volumes of the demographic profile of the newspaper's readers.

Meanwhile, the new Greens leader, Richard Di Natale, visiting numerous inner-city cafés and cheese shops, declared the Greens intent to become a party of government (also see Chapter 13). However, the party struggled to satisfy the strident demands of their own constituencies and failed to present themselves as a responsible party of government. By campaign end, the Greens were attacked for their spending promises by both major parties. Slightly off the mainstream radar, a reformulated PHON now targeting Islamisation managed to stand 15 candidates in selected lower house seats (12 in regional Queensland and three in NSW) and 16 candidates for the Senate in every State (four candidates in Queensland, three in NSW and WA and two each in the other States). While Pauline Hanson was a regular guest on commercial TV lifestyle shows, One Nation received limited coverage in the mainstream media, despite predictions from Antony Green that Hanson stood a 'realistic' chance (Iggulden 2016c). PHON's quest for the far right competed with Katter's Australian Party, the Christian Democrats, Rise Up Australia and the Citizens' Electoral League.

As the campaign progressed, Labor frequently took a narrow early lead in the polls with 51–52 per cent to 49–48 per cent in two-party preferred terms. The closeness of the polls excited predictions that Labor could win up to 12 seats from the government (six in NSW, two each in Victoria and Queensland, and one each in Tasmania and the Northern Territory), with strategists claiming a further eight seats were in doubt. There were many signs the Coalition agreed with such projections and were 'sandbagging' key marginal seats to contain their losses.

## Surprises, scandals and refining campaign messages into three-word slogans

By the middle weeks of the election, campaigning suddenly degenerated into three-word sloganeering, despite both sides promising not to stoop to such levels. For Labor, the campaign leitmotif was initially ‘Putting People First’, then ‘Jobs, Education, Medicare’, and finally honing down to the two-word slogan ‘save Medicare’ (despite Labor’s spokeswoman for health Catherine King admitting Labor had plans to improve the Medicare transaction payment system, ‘making it clear to voters that Labor would also change the information technology if it won power’) (Crowe 2016). For the Coalition, their three-word response was taken from their economic plan framed in the Budget—‘Jobs and Growth’—an insipid slogan repeated ad nauseam much to the annoyance of many on the Coalition backbench, who later complained to the media (Jennett 2016).

Neither Turnbull nor Shorten looked truly comfortable in drawing too heavily from the negative side of the political tactical handbook. Both leaders were happier in the realm of serious policy discussion and debate rather than the ruthless cut and thrust of political warfare. Unlike Abbott and Gillard, the style of the new leaders was not that of the battle-hardened warrior relentlessly pushing a simple message. Arguably, the removal of these former prime ministerial adversaries had the effect of lowering the intensity of political banter and hyperbole in the 2016 campaign. While Morrison tried to be more confrontational on economic management, his efforts largely backfired and he was withdrawn from the front-line campaign for many weeks. By contrast, Julie Bishop was presented as the Coalition’s voice of reason. Mathias Cormann caused some mirth by mistakenly mentioning that Bill Shorten was ‘very caring and very much in touch’ and ‘every single day promoting our national economic plan for jobs and growth’ when he had intended to bolster Turnbull’s credentials (Chang 2016b).

There was also plenty of typical campaign fodder besides the recourse to three-word slogans. In a sign of growing segmentation of messaging and political audiences, the Coalition’s ‘fake tradie’ advertisement that featured a tradesman wearing a gold watch was quickly mocked across mainstream media, with Twitter generating several ‘fake tradie’ accounts (Koziol 2016a). Likewise, an awkward Labor advertisement in which Bill

Shorten's wife Chloe interviewed him was dubbed bizarre by the more right-leaning media outlets, but did not garner the same level of derision online (Vickery and Burke 2016).

Even campaign tactics that seemed original were in fact reinventions of old methods. Campaign manoeuvres tended to employ new technologies to coordinate large groups of people to engage in old-style politics. Labor recruited a union-staffer army of door knockers and cold-callers who engaged in tried-and-true campaigning techniques (Park 2016). They also relied on gimmicks that aimed to elicit free media and shares on Facebook and Twitter. They also used more positive photo opportunities from Sam Dastyari's videos on multinational tax avoidance through to the 'Bill Bus' that had an entourage of frontbenchers aboard but which also kept getting stuck in driveways and easements (Dastyari 2016). Green- or Labor-aligned partisan organisations (non-party conduits such as GetUp!, affiliated Labor unions and partisan interest groups) were recruited to coordinate donations and operate phone banks and later staff the polling stations. Social media and the internet now provides activist parties with an extensive capacity to mobilise people and tap into a younger generation of 'joiners' who previously would have emerged in far smaller numbers from civil society. Only the Liberals seemed truly behind on this front, perhaps realising it was not worth the effort given their poor resource budgets and limited capacities for organisation.

The Coalition's factional difficulties emerged as a running theme from the very beginning of the campaign. Rancorous factionalism in NSW over Abbott's swift demise, and the general disorganisation of the NSW Division, saw many rank-and-file members refuse to support marginal seat holders who had been 'disloyal' to Abbott, such as Peter Henty (Eden-Monaro) and Fiona Scott (Lindsay) (Aston 2016a; Bourke 2016; Duffy 2016; Robertson 2016a). Some former Liberals contested moderate Liberal-held seats to express their displeasure over 'traitorous behaviour'. The NSW Branch donations were also the subject of a *Four Corners* investigation during the campaign (McDermott, Cronau and Hoyt 2016). Peta Credlin's regular spot on Sky News gave Abbott's former chief of staff a platform from which to attack the Prime Minister. Credlin dubbed him 'Mr Harbourside Mansion' (Kenny 2016c). The situation was not helped by the media's regular focus on Abbott, though this was not always to his benefit. Footage of a lonely Abbott handing out unwanted election material at a Warringah ferry station was repeatedly recycled throughout the campaign.

In the second half of the campaign, the Liberal Party was dogged by a political funding scandal in relation to an election software company Parakeelia, owned by the Liberal Party. Liberal parliamentarians would buy the software from the Liberal-owned company using their parliamentary allowances (Robertson 2016b; Robertson and Massola 2016). Finally, in the last weeks of the campaign, the Liberal Party was once again dogged by tensions over how the same-sex marriage plebiscite would be conducted and, should the plebiscite be successful, whether Coalition members would reserve the right to vote according to their conscience. In the days following the campaign, stories emerged that Turnbull himself had donated \$1 million to the party's financially strapped campaign (Markson 2016). He did so because of the combined problems of the NSW Electoral Commission's refusal to release public funding after the party withheld information about donation sources (Nicholls and Robertson 2016) and the revolt of its traditional base of financial supporters who closed their wallets in anger at the government's proposed superannuation changes.

Labor had its own headaches. First, there was a raid by the Australian Federal Police (AFP) on the party's Melbourne offices over leaks relating to the slow progress of the National Broadband Network (NBN). The raid sparked both controversy and embarrassment as debate raged about whether senior government figures knew about the AFP's intentions, and the fact that the police were ordered to destroy all photos as the Labor Party had claimed parliamentary privilege (Riordan and Mather 2016; Woodley 2016b). Second, the Country Fire Authority (CFA) industrial dispute in Victoria festered throughout the campaign, due to Premier Andrews insisting that union firefighters accompany volunteers at call-outs and assume charge of the emergency. While many observers saw this as Victoria's new Labor government rewarding 'Labor thugs' for factional reasons, the highly public dispute sucked oxygen from federal Labor's campaign in that State. In all likelihood, the dispute cost Labor the chance to pick up Corangamite due to the low swing it received across Victoria (Morris 2016) (see Chapter 23).

## Leadership 'debates' and campaign launches

A series of tepid 'leaders' debates' that occurred in the middle weeks of the campaign received only slender audience interest. Turnbull and Shorten had two highly rehearsed leaders' debates (the first held at Windsor RSL on Sky News with a minuscule pay TV audience; the second broadcast



on free-to-air channels from the National Press Club), followed by a third held on Facebook (an Australian first) (Crowe 2016) (see also Strangio and Walter, Chapter 4, this volume). Senators Marise Payne and Stephen Conroy had a 'defence debate' that stressed the need for bipartisanship even though there were minor differences about how to deal with Chinese regional expansionism. A regional leaders' stand-off was held in late May, featuring Barnaby Joyce debating Joel Fitzgibbon and Richard Di Natale. The Deputy PM somewhat fancifully claimed that closing down the live cattle export industry to Indonesia in 2011 had resulted in a 'lot of [boat] people arriving in boats in Australia' (Iggulden 2016d).

In the Treasurers' debate, Morrison and Bowen debated the country's fiscal position and other economic imperatives. The event served to reinforce the return of the major parties to a traditional left–right split over major commitments between Labor and the Coalition. The Coalition promised spending and tax cuts, such as its \$50 billion corporate tax cuts over 10 years, in an attempt to promote investment-led jobs growth. Labor countered by arguing more attention needed to be paid to investments in the drivers of growth such as needs-based education and training schemes. Continuing a tradition from the last few elections, the opposition poured doubt on the government's budget costings in what proved to be a hotly contested debate that lacked a knockout blow. Throughout the campaign, Labor quietly announced its support for many of the government's budget cuts that it had previously denounced, such as on pensions and the school kids' bonus (Coorey 2016a).

Labor was the first to hold its formal campaign launch in western Sydney less than two weeks before election day (20 June), with a potpourri of Labor notables in attendance to champion Bill Shorten's return to 'Labor values'. The launch was pitched directly at the Labor base, with the campaign tacticians anxious to win back wavering Labor supporters. Drawing on Labor's legacy in providing universal health cover and celebrating Labor's past heroes Bob Hawke, Paul Keating and Julia Gillard (but not Kevin Rudd), the protection of Medicare against the Coalition's supposed plan to privatise healthcare was Shorten's centrepiece. Shorten advocated for increased spending on schools, women's equality, including more funding for domestic violence services, and he attacked the government's gay marriage plebiscite. The message was summed up by the huge banner hanging overhead 'We'll put people first', which also doubled as justification for their increased spending. What was missing was discussion of more controversial issues such as asylum seekers,

industrial relations, the argument over the need for a federal Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC), foreign affairs and national security. The Coalition's official election spokesperson, Mathias Cormann, live tweeted the event and accused Shorten of merely racking up another \$3 billion on the 'spend-o-meter' (Koziol 2016b).

A week later, on 26 June, Turnbull used his campaign launch speech to the party faithful to urge Australians to 'leave nothing in doubt', and attacked the chaos of recent political instability and hung parliaments (Baxendale, Lewis and Kelly 2016). The word 'stability' was added to the Liberal's campaign slogans, and accompanying TV ads attempted to scare undecided voters about a portended Labor–Greens alliance. This message was underscored by the global reaction to the surprise 'Brexit' vote in the UK, which occurred on 23 June 2016, approximately one week out from election date. Turnbull's main message to voters was an explanation of why they should not vote against the government (rather than why they should), warning that a protest vote against the Liberals would leave the country with an uncertain future. Labor attempted to draw attention away from the Coalition's campaign launch by using spoiling tactics and releasing their own policy costings while Turnbull was speaking. However, the venture backfired when Chris Bowen had to admit that despite the savings measures that Labor had announced, Labor would have a deeper budget deficit for the next four years than would the government (Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) 2016). The Greens also held their lower-key launch in Melbourne on the same afternoon.

## Nailbiting anxiety on election night

Before the magnitude of Labor's scare campaign became apparent, the government and many opinion pollsters had believed a comfortable Coalition win was the most likely result. Towards the last week of the campaign, Turnbull's optimistic judgement was buttressed by a peripheral debate in the media about the significance of the unexpected Brexit vote for the incumbent government—global uncertainty was seen to underscore the theme of not swapping horses midstream. Yet other commentators cast doubt over the notion that Brexit would have a major impact. On the morning of polling day, Saturday 2 July, polling from Fairfax Media showed that the result was on a knife edge at 50–50 two-party preferred (Hartcher 2016a).

An election that most had assumed would unfurl in a predictable manner became a nailbiter as many seats that had been considered safe for the Coalition were in doubt as counting progressed. Without the theatre of a tallyroom to observe, TV cameras had to race to individual seats (where the swings were most brutal to sitting members) or to the intended party receptions. The mood of government members appearing on TV quickly became tense as the early evening results showed a strong swing to Labor. Adding a surreal element to the evening was the gimmicky special effects graphics being shown on commercial channels. Channel Seven used its 'tower of power', with defeated MPs seated in the Speaker's chair waiting to be brutally ejected—with the tagline 'as you reject them, we'll eject them'—by being rocketed into space. Channel Nine's coverage was particularly tasteless as losing MPs were farewelled via the 'crusher', in which the smiling faces of losers were mechanically compacted into cubes for disposal and then junked.

By midnight, several Coalition MPs had conceded defeat, while other known casualties such as Wyatt Roy steadfastly refused to concede. Nick Xenophon Team's Rebekha Sharkie unseated her former boss, Jamie Briggs, by claiming victory in the former Liberal seat of Mayo (Brooks 2016). The Greens put a brave face on their disappointing evening. They had nothing much more to emphasise than the return of Melbourne MP Adam Bandt, while they held out hope of claiming Batman from Labor's inept 'faceless man' David Feeney. In both Sydney and Grayndler, where the Greens had been hoping to unseat Labor, the incumbents Tanya Plibersek and Anthony Albanese were easily returned. The Greens were further disappointed by results in Higgins, which saw the Coalition's feisty Kelly O'Dwyer returned safely; an outcome that led some tacticians to question the strategy of pulling resources out of Batman to target a safe Liberal seat. Independent sitting members Andrew Wilkie, Bob Katter and Cathy McGowan were all comfortably returned.

After six hours of counting, Bill Shorten appeared triumphant in front of a jubilant Labor crowd declaring boastfully, 'Labor is back'. Shorten gave a rousing speech, which echoed Bob Hawke and Paul Keating in emphasising Labor's strengths in managing economic reform without leaving the vulnerable exposed. Although behind in the count, Shorten looked and sounded like a winner and his speech signalled that the campaign had effectively moved into a new phase as it became clear that no result would emerge that evening. Despite his stunning result, speculation abounded about Shorten's leadership. Deputy Leader

Tanya Plibersek kept her options open by sidestepping questions on the leadership, and rumours were reported that Anthony Albanese would mount a challenge in accordance with the ALP's new leadership ballot rules, which stipulated that the leadership be thrown open in the event of an election loss (Bramston 2016).

As the wait for Turnbull to appear intensified, speculation mounted and recriminations broke out among media personalities and Liberal politicians. Andrew Bolt denounced Turnbull for abandoning Liberal values and called for him to resign immediately. Alan Jones lashed out at fellow program guest and key Turnbull backer Senator James McGrath, calling him the 'chief bed wetter' who had panicked because of poor polls and had conspired to replace Tony Abbott as prime minister. The scene descended into acrimony, with McGrath angrily declaring Jones 'no friend of the Liberal–National party', and that Jones was 'a grub' (Koziol 2016c). Both Bolt and Jones believed that Tony Abbott would have won more seats for the Coalition, and this became the basis for several days of ugly backbiting and finger pointing within the Coalition.

When Turnbull finally appeared after 1 am on Sunday 3 July, he delivered an angry stump speech, decrying the subversion of the rule of law by militant unions and invoking the ABCC legislation that had been the trigger for Turnbull's entire strategy. Angry Liberals asked why this speech had not been given two months previously, and senior commentators panned the performance as a belated 'joke' and criticised his failure to take responsibility for the campaign outcome. Turnbull's attempts to reassure his fellow party worthies (saying the party had faced a similar situation in 1998) achieved mixed results amongst the bewildered crowd whose expectations had been shattered by the results. Compounding the uncertainty of the result on election night was the realisation that counting would not resume until Tuesday due to reforms in the wake of the bungled 2013 WA Senate election, leaving those in tight contests with anxious waits.

## Descent into confused uncertainty: The prospect of a return to minority government

The Coalition's position had worsened by Sunday morning, as seats that had been declared for the Coalition the night previously were declared undecided and classified as too close to call. In all, eight seats remained in doubt, six held by the Coalition and two by Labor. The nation had to wait for days for the count to continue as the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) recounted existing votes and transferred uncounted ballots and postal votes around the country. The snail's pace of the count heightened the sense of uncertainty and sparked calls for electronic voting in the future.

The realisation that Australia faced the real possibility of another hung parliament inflamed tensions within the Coalition in the immediate aftermath of the electoral debacle. Conservatives attempted to link the poor result to Abbott's spectacular assassination, and Turnbull's personal authority and future as leader were openly discussed (Hartcher 2016b). Coalition MPs were universally furious at Labor's tactic of sending text messages to voters, on election day, about the Coalition's 'plan' to privatise Medicare (though Labor was later cleared by the AFP) (Lewis 2016; Moore 2016). Others, including Eric Abetz, decried the so-called underhanded tactics of GetUp! (Baines 2016), which had targeted several 'hard-right' candidates including Immigration Minister Peter Dutton, Jamie Briggs, key Abbott backer Andrew Nikolic and the controversial George Christiansen. GetUp! later claimed credit for the removal of up to eight 'hard-right' candidates, including Briggs and Nikolic (Blucher 2016; GetUp! 2016). It also claimed that others would 'never feel safe again' after the organisation amassed a large volunteer army to staff phone banks, engage in door knocking and raise funds for advertising in key seats (see Chapter 18). Cory Bernardi, also highly critical of the party's moderate leadership, announced that he would launch his own Conservative version of GetUp!. In early August 2016, he would announce that his Conservative GetUp! had collected 50,000 registrations (McIlroy 2016) and, at the beginning of 2017, Bernardi defected from the Liberal Party to go it alone in his new party, Australian Conservatives.

Labor faced its own difficulties in the immediate post-election period. After a brief window of uncertainty over the status of Shorten's leadership, the Labor Party rallied around him, forgoing the opportunity for an anticipated spill. Labor made much of its own unity and used the public divisions within the Coalition to reinforce its campaign theme that Turnbull was ineffective because he was hostage to his right-wing factional colleagues. In the days following the poll, Shorten argued that while there was no clear winner, Turnbull was the clear loser. According to Shorten, the PM had no mandate to introduce his agenda and his 'cuts to Medicare'. Shorten continued to campaign across the country in a lap of honour and refused to concede defeat until the Coalition secured 76 seats, making the most of his opportunities to attack the government and congratulate the Labor Party on its electoral result despite a low primary vote of just 34.7 per cent.

As the Liberal Party raked through the ashes, criticisms were directed toward the party's polling capacity. In particular, they analysed the accuracy of the party's overnight tracking during the campaign, which had resulted in campaign resources being diverted from seemingly safe seats, such as Lindsay, which the party would go on to lose. Further hand-wringing occurred as party officials, including campaign Director Tony Nutt, acknowledged that they had no hope of matching Labor's capacity to organise volunteers on the ground, so much so that they had not even bothered to try (Secombe 2016). In his post-election analysis, Tony Nutt emphasised the importance of Labor's 'Mediscare' campaign, calling it a 'cold-blooded lie' and demanding that Labor pledge to 'never again behave in that way' (Anderson 2016). Meanwhile, Labor heartily congratulated itself on turning its dire position in 2013 around within a single term.

## An unsure future for the government: The final result in the House

Despite the rebuff, Turnbull quickly regrouped. When he composed himself, he claimed responsibility for the failures of the campaign, which was conducted in far too abstract terms. He also acknowledged the government's own record in the health portfolio provided 'fertile ground' for Labor's 'dishonest and misleading' campaign. He asserted that the Coalition was on track to win a slim majority in its own right and

members of his own support base were actively talking up the government in the media. Christopher Pyne described the Liberals in sporting terms as an 'election-winning machine', with six victories from eight contests in the last 20 years (Keany 2016).

Five days after the poll, with the count continuing, Turnbull further seized the initiative by securing deals for confidence and supply with key Independents. Bob Katter declared that he supported the government with 'no enthusiasm' and stated that if Turnbull wanted to bash up unions then he would 'bash him up' and further reserved his 'right to move at any time in any other direction' (Lane 2016). A day later, on 8 July, Turnbull secured agreement from Cathy McGowan, who said, 'I asked for goodwill, I asked for regularly being in touch with each other, I asked for good governance and stability'. Andrew Wilkie also indicated that he would not vote against budget bills (Chang, Brook and Farr 2016).

Turnbull's expeditious agreements with the Independents were insurance measures. By 8 July, the election count showed the government would likely be returned with 76 or 77 seats. With the three agreements with the Independents in place, commentators declared that it was safe to say we 'have a government', even if it was not a majority government. After eight days of uncertainty, Turnbull finally declared victory on 9 July. In conceding, Shorten pledged to 'be constructive', in order to implement its program by working with the parliament, stating that Labor understood that they needed to 'to make this parliament function' (Ross and Dziedzic 2016).

In the House of Representatives, the Greens were disappointed not to win additional seats. However, they retained the seat of Melbourne and continued to build sizeable support in the safe Labor Victorian seats of Bateman and Wills. In NSW, the Greens were troubled by internal problems within that State's branch, which depressed their vote in the seats of Grayndler and Sydney, and they did not poll well in SA.

Eventually, it transpired that the Coalition lost 16 seats, but they won Chisholm from Labor and retook Fairfax after Palmer's departure, to end up with a net result of 14. The big swings against the government were in Tasmania, NSW, SA and the Northern Territory. Labor picked up 15 seats, but lost one, with a net result of 14 seats and the biggest swings in their favour in Tasmania and WA. The Nationals ran a creditable campaign, gaining one additional seat (the Victorian Riverland seat of Murray from the Liberals), which it used to demand additional positions in cabinet.

This request revealed the weakness of Turnbull's leadership position and forced him to expand the size of his Cabinet to 23 (the largest since the Whitlam years) in order to accommodate the Coalition partners without dropping any of his own Liberal Party colleagues.

Turnbull's hopes of winning a four-seat majority were dashed after an extended count in the knife-edge Queensland seat of Herbert, which was eventually won by Labor by a mere 37 votes. The narrowness of this victory did not elicit a Liberal–National challenge over the result in the Court of Disputed Returns. The Coalition government, thus, survived with a wafer-thin majority in the House of Representatives of two seats (76–74), which was then halved after the appointment of the Speaker, the Liberal Tony Smith. However, in reality, the government's margin was more comfortable with the support of the three conservative Independents, plus Xenophon's sitting member Rebekha Sharkie—a former Liberal staffer.

## After the double dissolution the real joke was on Turnbull

The Coalition's representation in the Senate declined. It lost three Senators and managed in the double dissolution to return only 30 to the new parliament. Labor had modest success, gaining one Senator to take their numbers to 26. The Greens also went backwards, losing Robert Simms in SA for a total of nine (three of who only just scraped back in by the slimmest of margins). Rather than clearing out the Senate, Turnbull's strategy only entrenched the 'feral' crossbench further. The double-dissolution strategy was successful in ousting the former Democratic Labor Party (DLP) candidate John Madigan, Ricky Muir (Motoring Enthusiasts), Glenn Lazarus (former Palmer United Party (PUP) and Independent) and Dio Wang (PUP). However, four sitting crossbench Senators were returned: Nick Xenophon, Jacqui Lambie, Bob Day (Family First) and David Leyonhjelm (Liberal Democrats). This motley crossbench was joined by independent candidate and radio 'shock jock' Derryn Hinch from Victoria.

The main winners in the Senate were the Nick Xenophon Team, which now claimed three seats in addition to one in the lower house, and Hanson's revitalised One Nation, which claimed a total of four seats across Queensland, NSW and WA. Hence, the crossbench (comprising



the minor parties and Independents) increased from eight to an even more unwieldy 11 (or from 18 to 20 if the Greens were included). The result left the balance of power with the Greens (should they seek to use it), with Xenophon and Hanson both empowered on the crossbench, but without sufficient numbers to hold the balance of power.

Finally, the 2016 election was also notable for several significant firsts. It was a baptism of fire for four first-time party leaders who took their parties to the poll (Malcolm Turnbull, Barnaby Joyce, Bill Shorten and Richard Di Natale). Linda Burney was the first Indigenous woman and Anne Aly the first Muslim woman to be elected to the lower house. The contest in the seat of Brisbane saw Australia's first contest between two openly gay candidates.

## Conclusion—orchestrated tactics that backfired

The newly installed Turnbull government was returned, but at significant cost. The Liberal Party squandered the second-largest winning majority in the postwar era. The enormous gains made at the 2013 election were surrendered largely by the government's own making. What caused this spectacular turnaround? The Liberals opportunistically changed prime ministers in their first term back in government, replicating Labor's record of instability in government and releasing similar visceral political infighting. Abbott was never very popular as the leader of the government and, even after he was replaced, his negative image overshadowed the Turnbull government. The relief and high expectations that greeted Turnbull's initial ascension soon dissipated as he became indecisive and hostage to his phalanx of right-wingers. The Turnbull government also pursued some unpopular policy agendas that were especially controversial with the party's own supporters. Equally importantly, the Coalition managed to run an abysmally poor campaign with threadbare policies, insipid messages and a widespread perception that they had jettisoned notions of fairness.

Turnbull managed to win the barest of majorities in the House of Representatives, and after the election led a party with less capacity to manage its internal party politics. To get legislation through the Senate, the government faced an unpredictable hodgepodge of players beholden

to ideological and populist sentiments. The composition of the Senate will likely force the government to rein in its legislative agenda. However, Labor has been inspired by their disciplined campaign achievement; a disgruntled Labor opposition has emerged more competitive as a political party, broadly united in its policy stances and internal dynamics, and with Bill Shorten's leadership cemented by the campaign in the medium term. Nonetheless, Labor's executive called for a full review of the party's election strategy in October, especially its residually low primary vote in both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

The 2016 election campaign and outcome clearly showed that Australian voters had continued their disaffection with the two major parties, and further eroded traditional party identification. The validity of Duverger's law—that two-party systems (and their electoral mechanics) discriminate against other contenders and squeeze out minor parties—appears to be questionable in the context of a disaffected electorate, a preferential voting system and a Senate list voting system. After all, at the 2016 election, the Senate combined vote for the major parties was just 65 per cent, with the Coalition receiving 35.2 per cent against Labor's vote of just 29.8 per cent. The ploy to change the Senate voting system, which was designed to cartelise the results and reduce the opportunities for minor parties to game the system, failed to halt the continuing rise of the Independents and minor parties. Obviously, the double dissolution was an important factor. While it halved the quota required to be elected, it paved the way for the Independents and minor parties to be attractive alternatives to the established combatants, who increasingly appeared to be hollowed-out, 'me-too', 'cardboard cut-outs' to many in the electorate.

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# 3

## The Ideological Contest: Election 2016

Carol Johnson

Analysing the ideological components of election campaigns can provide key insights into the arguments that parties use to try to influence voters and the differences in their policy positions.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly so in the case of the 2016 election campaign, which arguably saw a more explicit and substantial ideological divide than many recent elections. However, as usual, the term ideology was only used pejoratively to criticise opponents' incorrect views, rather than being something that parties positively claimed for themselves. This chapter outlines the key features of this ideological contest, limiting its analysis to the two major parties: Labor and Liberal. The two major parties' ideological differences are focused on because their ideological contest is the one that is most crucial for influencing the formation of government. Furthermore, it would not be feasible to cover the ideology of all the minor parties contesting the 2016 election in one chapter, even the most significant ones such as the Nationals, the Greens, Pauline Hanson's One Nation and the Nick Xenophon Team. Nonetheless, the major parties' efforts to position themselves ideologically in regard to the minor parties will be examined. The major parties' ideological differences will be explored through the prisms of the parties'

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1 The concept of ideology is used here to refer to broad, umbrella-like frameworks of belief that can include differing strands (see further Johnson 2007: 15–20).

economic and social policies. The chapter will conclude by identifying some of the potential problems that the ideological contest posed for both major parties.

## Labor and economic policy

Several months before the election was announced, Bill Shorten argued that Labor was quite explicitly engaging in a battle of ideas with the Coalition government (Shorten 2016b). Labor had been undertaking substantial policy work with that in mind. Indeed, policy differences soon became apparent as Shorten proudly stated that Labor had moved away from using a small-target election strategy (whereas, in recent election campaigns, Labor had often avoided stating controversial positions on social and economic issues) (Shorten 2016k; see also Marr 2016: 174). In particular, Labor positioned Malcolm Turnbull and the Coalition as supporting the big end of town and argued that the Coalition's proposed tax cuts to business, their opposition to Labor's attempts to restrict negative gearing, their budget cutbacks and their opposition to a Royal Commission into the banking sector were all evidence of this. Turnbull was depicted as elitist and out of touch with ordinary voters (Shorten 2016f).

By contrast, Labor depicted itself as supporting the interests of the middle and working classes against the Coalition's support for big business. It is ideologically significant that the word 'class' was quite explicitly mentioned in Labor's campaign material, given that it had tended not to be mentioned in recent years.<sup>2</sup> Even the Labor and union campaign against John Howard's WorkChoices in the 2007 election had tended to use the term 'working families' as code for class. In line with that narrative, Shorten attempted to throw off his image as a ruthless, factional powerbroker (Marr 2016). He was depicted as a caring and empathetic person who believed government should ensure good-quality healthcare and education, the creation of jobs, good pay and working conditions, along with a strong welfare safety net (Shorten 2016f).<sup>3</sup>

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2 For example, the Labor website proudly proclaimed that: 'A Shorten Labor Government will stand up for middle and working class families across Australia' (see Australian Labor Party (ALP) n.d.-a).

3 Polling suggested that Shorten was indeed seen as more caring and empathetic than Turnbull, though Turnbull was seen as a more capable economic manager (Hudson 2016).

Labor argued that Australian society had been characterised by a growing economic inequality that Coalition policies had fostered and that the election of a Turnbull government would worsen this situation (Shorten 2016c). Indeed, issues of ‘inequality’ featured far more prominently and explicitly in this election campaign than in other recent Labor ones. Labor argued that such inequality was not only unjust, but also bad for the economy since:

the best way to have sustainable economic growth in Australia is to have fair distribution of income. We’ve got to ensure that we have inclusive growth. Inequality—and it’s at a 75-year high—is a handbrake on economic growth (Shorten 2016d).

Labor produced a 138-page report, ‘Growing Together’, which quoted the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Nobel prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz to back up Labor’s case that increasing inequality dampens economic growth, including via low incomes reducing people’s ability to consume (ALP n.d.-c). Shorten also argued that funding an excellent education system that produced highly skilled employees was essential for Australia’s economic growth and that properly funding Medicare was not just a social justice and equal opportunity measure, but also improved employees’ health and their ability to participate in the labour force (Shorten 2016c).

By contrast, voters faced the ‘same old Liberals; just give tax cuts to the top end of town and let the rest of the people just make do with not much at all’ (Shorten 2016h). Labor’s so-called ‘Mediscare’ campaign—in which Labor claimed that the Coalition was intent on privatising Medicare (rather than just undermining it by increasing the user-pays component)—reinforced the Labor narrative, even though the accuracy of such claims was questioned by many commentators (ALP 2016; Shorten 2016m; for Turnbull’s denials see Turnbull 2016k). Shadow Treasurer Chris Bowen also outlined what he saw as the major (ideological) policy differences between Labor and the Liberals when it came to budget measures.

The differing approaches to fiscal repair between the two major parties this election could not be more stark. The Liberals’ Reagan-esque approach of delivering tax cuts for big business and hoping it will trickle down through the economy will blow an ever increasing hole in the Budget bottom-line. Labor will undertake responsible reforms in areas such as negative gearing and capital gains tax and will close tax loopholes to deliver ever increasing improvements to the Budget bottom-line (Bowen 2016a).

Labor also argued that the Turnbull government had gone too far in its support for free trade. While supporting free trade agreements, Labor stated its support for ‘proper social democratic institutions and progressive policies’. Consequently, trade agreements needed to maximise the employment of Australians and avoid undermining ‘public policy in healthcare, the environment or labour rights’ (Wong 2015). Labor would not accept Investor–State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) provisions in new trade agreements and would attempt to remove or mitigate such provisions in existing free trade agreements already negotiated by Coalition governments (Wong 2016a). Meanwhile, Shorten endorsed a ‘Made in Australia’ campaign, claiming:

there’s a lot of blue-collar working-class and middle-class families who are sick of seeing all of our jobs being exported overseas, who are greatly sceptical that there aren’t rorts in some aspects of our visa system (Shorten 2016o).

Shorten was aware that dissatisfaction with globalisation and neoliberalism were reshaping politics internationally, as reflected in some voters’ support for Donald Trump in the United States (US) and Brexit in Britain. He argued that Labor’s plans for ‘inclusive growth’, good health and welfare systems along with good pay and working conditions (including penalty rates) were the best way of ensuring that voters’ needs were met and that they did not resort to extreme protest votes. By contrast, Turnbull’s policies, including his ‘tax policies for the elites’, would result in an economically ‘divided society’ and reflected the type of politics that many voters were rejecting internationally (Shorten 2016o).

So Labor was implying that Turnbull was influenced by a right-wing ideological belief in austerity-style cuts to the public sector, ‘trickle-down’ economics and a reduction of necessary regulation in free trade agreements that would have dire consequences for ordinary Australians. In many respects, Labor seemed to be consolidating a move away from the neoliberal ideology that had influenced it under the Hawke and Keating governments and had begun to be questioned from the Rudd period on, despite some continuing flirtations with market-influenced policies (Johnson 2011).

However, Labor was hesitant to acknowledge any differences with the iconic Hawke and Keating governments, even using Bob Hawke as a figurehead in campaign advertising. Bowen answered critics who accused Labor of moving away from Paul Keating’s support for tax cuts

by pointing out that Keating would not have supported an unfunded cut to corporate tax, and had only supported such cuts as part of a tax package that increased revenue from other sources (Bowen 2016b). He also claimed that neither he nor Shorten ‘oppose corporate tax relief as a matter of ideology, but as a matter of hard-nosed prioritisation’ (ibid.). A concern with eventual fiscal balancing in the longer term indeed led to some hard Labor decisions (such as only reinstating \$2 billion of the Coalition’s proposed \$57 billion cut to hospitals in the 2014 Budget, or reducing family tax benefit for families earning over \$100,000) (Shorten 2016o; Shorten, Bowen and Burke 2016). As Shorten put it: ‘[O]ver the next four and 10 years we start the action to fundamentally reduce the level of government debt in this country. We will need to make difficult decisions as this election unfolds’ (Shorten, Bowen and Burke 2016). Labor pledged that while deficits would be bigger in the first few years than those projected by the Coalition, budgets would be brought back into surplus by the same year as the Coalition pledged—2021 (ibid.). Bowen suggested it was ridiculous that Labor was accused of being antibusiness by the Coalition, just because they were suggesting that business continue to pay the existing tax rate.

If you believe the rhetoric of the government, you would be forgiven for thinking our policy is reminiscent of Che Guevara. In fact, we are simply arguing that the budget can’t afford at this time to change the tax rate Peter Costello introduced (Bowen 2016b).

Nonetheless, there was more than just a shift in populist rhetoric particularly targeting Turnbull’s links with business and the big end of town. It was noticeable that Labor was making far fewer statements *explicitly* mentioning the positive role of private enterprise and markets in the economy, compared not just with Hawke and Keating but also with Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard (Johnson 2011: 562–79). It was as though, after deciding to reject key elements of their 30-year engagement with neoliberalism, Labor had forgotten how it had nuanced its message to the electorate prior to then. Claims Labor is antibusiness can scare electors by suggesting that Labor will not be able to manage an economy in which the private sector plays such a crucial role, including as employers of many voters. Traditionally, Labor has tended to argue that its policies were fortuitously in the interests of both labour and socially beneficial sections of private enterprise; that there is a harmony of interests between

the two (Johnson 1989).<sup>4</sup> For example, even when Ben Chifley advocated nationalising the banks, he argued that he was doing so not only because their financial practices harmed workers, but because the banks had failed to give essential credit to small business in times of economic downturn and had also failed to fund the development of Australian manufacturing industry because of their links with competing overseas capital (Johnson 1986: 48–49). In the 2016 election campaign, Labor did emphasise that its policies were good for economic growth, but rarely explicitly spelled out that this meant they were also good for business.

## Labor and social issues

Labor's rejection of the small-target strategy did not just cover economic issues. It also extended to many social issues (though Labor continued to support turning back asylum-seeker boats, and the offshore processing of asylum seekers). Shorten strongly supported Indigenous equality and reconciliation, implying that he might support a Treaty, and denounced 'systemic racism' (Shorten 2016g, 2016k). Shorten strongly supported equal rights for women—in political representation, in countering domestic violence, in terms of encouraging women into new information technology careers and in terms of equal pay (Shorten 2016i, 2016j, 2016k; ALP n.d.-b). He had 'always been a feminist' (Shorten, Bowen and Burke 2016).

Shorten began a major appearance in the western Sydney suburb of Penrith with a statement of empathy, not only for the victims of the US Orlando massacre and their families, but also for the pain that members of the Australian lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) community would be feeling (Shorten 2016k).<sup>5</sup> Labor supported marriage equality (albeit formally retaining a conscience vote until around 2019) arguing:

at its heart, marriage equality is about removing discrimination from our laws. It is a recognition that love between two people of the same gender is of equal meaning, equal value and entitled to equal respect (ALP n.d.-d).

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<sup>4</sup> Yet Shorten articulated clear social harmony arguments in his own book (as well as having a reputation as a union official who sometimes negotiated deals that were too conciliatory towards business) (see Shorten 2016a: 4–5, 26).

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, after the Orlando shootings, a number of LGBTI leaders argued that Turnbull should drop the idea of a plebiscite (Power 2016).

By contrast, Labor stated that ‘Malcolm Turnbull’s plebiscite will give a taxpayer-funded platform and a megaphone to the very worst forms of hateful abuse’ (ibid). Labor also pledged to support the ‘Safe schools’ antihomophobic bullying program from being cut when the Turnbull government would cease funding (ALP n.d.-e). Earlier Shorten had stated:

So when it comes to the welfare of our children, if I have to choose between: the teachers, the principals and the school counsellors of Australia, or the rabid ideologues of the Liberal-National parties – I will choose Australian teachers and schools any day. Mr Turnbull has a very simple choice here. Stand with the great majority of Australians or a small right-wing fringe. Today we will see how scared he is of his Liberal party (Shorten 2016e).

Consequently, Labor’s increased emphasis on an equality agenda not only reflected changing Labor values, it was being used to suggest that the Liberals were deepening inequality. More specifically, it was being used to target Turnbull’s ideological position in another way, by suggesting that Turnbull had backtracked on his own moderate, small ‘l’ liberal beliefs by giving in to conservative forces in his own party on issues ranging from climate change and the republic to same-sex marriage (Shorten 2016h).

In other words, Labor was suggesting that Turnbull was simultaneously dangerously ideological in his support for big business and ‘trickle-down’ economics while being untrue to his own ideological position on socially progressive issues. Shorten questioned Turnbull’s masculinity, suggesting that he was ‘a weak man beholden to the right wing of his party’ (Shorten 2016o). Anthony Albanese, a senior minister from the Labor Left, argued that voters were disappointed in Turnbull because ‘when they look at Malcolm Turnbull, they hear Tony Abbott’ (Albanese 2016).

## The Liberals and economic policy

Turnbull came to office portraying a positive message of hope and claiming that ‘there has never been a more exciting time to be an Australian’ (Turnbull and Bishop 2015). His government would have a plan to ensure that Australia could meet the economic and technological challenges ahead, but one that would be based on being ‘a thoroughly Liberal Government committed to freedom, the individual and the market’—in other words, committed to the traditional tenets of Liberal ideology (ibid.). These themes were to underlie much of the subsequent election campaign.

However, by the time of the election, Turnbull was increasingly aware that some people were feeling concerned rather than excited ‘about the security of their job, the prospects for their business, the security for their children’s jobs’ (Turnbull 2016e). There were leaks from within the Coalition (Mayer 2016) that internal polling revealed many voters were nervous about Turnbull’s claims that Australians were living in ‘exciting times’ and preferred Howard’s aim of making voters ‘relaxed and comfortable’. Some conservative MPs claimed that, while it might play well in inner-city seats such as the Prime Minister’s own Sydney electorate of Wentworth, it did not go down well in suburban or regional seats. In the words of one MP:

nobody knows what it is about. If they do know, they are scared of it. They don’t want to live in exciting times. If you are a truck driver or bank teller, it might cost you your job (cited in Mayer 2016).

Consequently, Turnbull finessed this message, arguing that they were exciting but also challenging and uncertain times that required good economic management (Turnbull 2016g). He acknowledged that ‘hardworking Australians are seeing this reality on the nightly news—how trade, globalization, and, above all, technological change is producing both new opportunities and also uncertainty in their world’ given an ‘intensely competitive and volatile’ global economy (Turnbull 2016f). He pledged that the government’s economic plan would ‘deliver stronger economic growth and more jobs and better jobs and take advantage of the great opportunities in the current economic environment’ (Turnbull 2016e).

Turnbull argued that Australians were faced with ‘two very different versions of what Australia should look like in the future’ (Turnbull 2016f). The Coalition’s economic plan would make Australia a successful, innovative, twenty-first-century economy in which ‘we can secure our future as a high-wage first world economy with a generous social safety net’ (ibid.). By contrast, Labor seemed to assume that economic growth would continue however much they taxed or spent (ibid.). Shorten was ‘setting up an anti-business, high-taxing high-spending, big borrowing program that will put our economy backwards. It will put our economy into reverse. It will put the jobs of every Australian at risk’ (Turnbull 2016g). Labor was engaging in ‘class war’ and ‘the politics of envy’ (Turnbull 2016b). In short, while Turnbull denied that he himself was ideological, he accused Shorten of running ‘an incredibly ideological war against business’ and therefore against the interests of economic growth



and everyone employed in the private sector (Turnbull 2016e, 2016r).<sup>6</sup> Turnbull's support for greater restraint on government spending and tax cuts for business was quite consistent with his previous positions, including his arguments against what he saw as the excessive Labor spending in the Rudd government's stimulus package during the global financial crisis (GFC), and that government's failure to institute tax cuts instead (Turnbull 2009).

However, Turnbull attempted to counter Labor scare campaigns about public sector cuts by stating that the government would never privatise Medicare.

Medicare is a core government service. It will always be delivered by the government and every element of Medicare's activities will continue to be delivered by the government ... Now what Mr Shorten is doing ... is running is a disgraceful scare campaign (Turnbull, Joyce and Nash 2016).

Turnbull also made an effort to depict himself as more caring and empathetic, arguing for example that, if re-elected, his government 'will invest \$15 million to ensure older Australians feel safe, cared for, and respected' (Turnbull 2016i). Despite calling the election on two policies designed to curb union power (a position that Turnbull also claimed was not ideological), Turnbull gave an undertaking that 'we will not make any changes to penalty rates. It is a matter for the independent umpire, the Fair Work Commission', but ruled out the government making a submission, as Shorten had pledged to do, in support of penalty rates (Turnbull 2016j, 2016q).

The government did not always provide a great deal of detail regarding their economic plans, other than support for measures such as tax cuts. Turnbull had an ideological dilemma. He wanted to develop an agile, innovative, twenty-first-century economy. However, given his neoliberal-influenced views, he also believed in there being limits on how much government should intervene in the economy, despite occasional forays to shore up shipbuilding or the steel industry in electorally at-risk seats (Turnbull 2016m, 2016p). In such situations, talking up innovation and opportunities is actually seen as one of the important ways in which government can change the culture. Rhetoric about changing the culture to make it more entrepreneurial and friendly to innovation is seen as itself contributing to an increase in business confidence.

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<sup>6</sup> Turnbull regularly claims not to be ideological (see Crabb 2016: 175–78).

## The Liberals and social issues

In an interview with Peter Hartcher (2016), Turnbull strongly denied Labor claims that he was rejecting his own previous ideological positions on progressive social issues. He pointed out that he still supported a republic and that the issue should be revisited when the Queen's reign ends. On climate change, Turnbull argued that 'Australia would meet its emissions reduction targets by 2020, and could strengthen policies if necessary to meet 2030 targets' (Hartcher 2016). Turnbull restated his support for same-sex marriage. However, he noted that he had inherited a plebiscite and, despite having previously argued against one, it would be too hard to remove the possibility of a popular vote now (*ibid.*).

Turnbull might have been hamstrung by socially conservative forces in his party in terms of supporting a plebiscite on same-sex marriage. However, the tone of the statements he made during the election campaign was very different from that of his immediate Liberal prime ministerial predecessors, particularly Howard, especially when it came to 'Culture Wars' issues, in which socially conservative values had been mobilised against more 'progressive' views on issues such as race, gender and sexuality. Turnbull proudly proclaimed that 'I would describe myself as a feminist' and supported encouraging women into STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) areas (Turnbull 2016d). He also strongly supported policies for Indigenous entrepreneurship and reconciliation (Turnbull 2016c). Furthermore, rather than mobilising Howard-style arguments about 'black armband' views, Turnbull argued that we needed to be prepared 'to look into the darkest corners' of our history (*ibid.*).

The difference with both Howard and Abbott was particularly clear in the wake of the Orlando massacre in the US. A few days after this event, Turnbull hosted an Iftar dinner, ending the Ramadan fast. Unlike Howard or Abbott, there was no emphasis on the Anglo-Celtic heart at the core of Australian identity. Rather, Turnbull used the occasion to state that 'we are the most successful and harmonious multicultural society in the world. Our multicultural success is at the heart of our national identity. It is intrinsic to our history and our character' (Turnbull 2016h). While denouncing the perversions of Islam used by terrorists, Turnbull stated that 'by breaking bread, by sharing food across religions and by bringing diverse people of diverse backgrounds together, we embody Islam's emphasis on the diversity of humanity' (*ibid.*). He praised the contributions that Muslims had made to Australian society from the days

of the ‘Makassan fishermen who traded with our first Australians in the 1600s, to the Afghan camel drivers who opened up the interior of our vast continent’ and continued with the contributions that Muslims of every profession and calling continue to make to Australia (ibid.). He assured Australian Muslims:

that the Australian Muslim community is valued and respected – and it is not confined to a narrow security prism – you are an integral part of an Australian family that rests on the essential foundation of mutual respect and understanding. Every one of us is enriched by the culture and the faiths of our friends and neighbours (ibid.).

He subsequently stated that he would not have invited a sheikh who had homophobic views if he had known, because ‘I will always condemn any remarks which disrespect any part of our community, whether it is on the basis of their sexuality, their gender, their race, their religion’ (Turnbull, Joyce and Nash 2016). Nonetheless, while he avoided ‘Culture War’-style arguments on other issues, Turnbull endorsed the effectiveness of both Howard’s and Abbott’s policies on stopping asylum-seeker boats. He argued, ‘[W]e have once again restored the security of our borders. The security which Labor abandoned’ (Turnbull 2016r).

Insofar as there were ‘Culture Wars’-style comments highlighted in the campaign, they tended to be made by Liberal politicians other than Turnbull. A key example, in regard to heteronormative ideology and same-sex marriage, was exemplified in an exchange of views between Penny Wong and Scott Morrison. Wong had argued that heterosexual politicians who supported a plebiscite did not adequately appreciate or acknowledge that encountering hate speech was part of gays’ and lesbians’ everyday life. The plebiscite would therefore undoubtedly unleash homophobia that would be very hurtful to many gays and lesbians and their families (Wong 2016b). Morrison responded by saying that he did understand Wong’s concern because:

I know it from personal experience, having been exposed to that sort of hatred and bigotry for the views I’ve taken ... Frankly people of very strong religious views have been subject to quite dreadful hate speech and bigotry (cited in Dziedzic and Norman 2016).

However, Wong argued that Morrison’s situation was fundamentally different because while all politicians ‘receive pretty robust’ emails, gays and lesbians are ‘targeted in their schools and in their workplaces as well as in public. They’re not targeted because of their beliefs or the things

that they say. They are targeted because of who they are' (Wong 2016c). Furthermore, in her original comments, Wong had pointed out that there was not only a long history of male homosexuality being illegal, and of legal discrimination against gays and lesbians when it came to citizens' rights and entitlements, but that many gays and lesbians were still fearful of the consequences of even holding hands in public (Wong 2016b). Consequently:

it would be good if people had some empathy and compassion for the experience of LGBTI Australians, gay and lesbian Australians, young people in our schools who are still at greater risk of suicide because of the prejudice and discrimination they experience (Wong 2016c).

The exchange between Wong and Morrison is particularly relevant to the analysis of ideology in this chapter because it harked back to Howard-era 'Culture War' arguments that it was actually 'mainstream' Australians who were being predominantly discriminated against by 'politically correct' views about minority rights (Johnson 2007: 39–72). Empathy was to be reserved for the put-upon 'mainstream', rather than minority groups. So Morrison's argument was an important signal to socially conservative voters that such perspectives were still present amongst government MPs, despite Prime Minister Turnbull's own more small 'l' liberal beliefs.

Turnbull himself largely avoided discussing such issues. He simply asserted his belief that the plebiscite would pass (thereby revealing an underlying assumption that numbers in the new Senate would not allow a plebiscite to be blocked) and that legislation in support of same-sex marriage would then 'sail through the Parliament' (Turnbull 2016o).<sup>7</sup> There were also other signs that Turnbull was reluctant to engage in 'Culture War' arguments to shore up socially conservative ideology. For example, Turnbull alerted socially conservative MPs, and 'Culture War' warriors, such as George Christensen and Cory Bernardi, to the need to be cautious about the language used when discussing issues such as the Safe Schools program and same-sex marriage (Turnbull 2016a, 2016n; though on the latter see Bernardi's denial in Lewis 2016).

The Coalition has run scare campaigns in many previous elections suggesting that a Labor government would be bad for the economy. In respect to economic policy, the ideological position of the Turnbull

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<sup>7</sup> This assumption would ultimately prove incorrect. In November 2016, the Senate defeated the proposed plebiscite 33 votes to 29.

government going into the election was very similar to that of previous Liberal positions. However, despite arguments that Turnbull had sold out to the social conservatives of his party on key issues, it was noticeable that Turnbull avoided mobilising ‘Culture War’ fears, although he did play the ‘border security’ card. By contrast, Howard had aimed to develop an electoral coalition of socially conservative ‘mainstream’ Australians, which also targeted Labor-voting economic ‘battlers’ who were concerned about social change. Indeed, Howard had attempted to reconcile voters to rapid economic change by suggesting that social change could be held back (Johnson 2007: 39–72). It was a mantle that Abbott, and other social conservatives in the Liberal Party, had largely inherited. Turnbull’s vision of a Liberal voter’s identity seemed to be more diffuse and less clearly articulated. Turnbull made traditional Liberal appeals to those concerned about sound economic management, free markets, economic growth and jobs. However, the ‘exciting’ future he was selling also highlighted a focus on innovation that may have been more attractive to entrepreneurial sections of the business community than to some ordinary voters. His focus on social diversity pleased moderate Liberal voters and could have crossover appeal to some Labor and Greens voters. However, it also risked alienating some former Liberal voters who had supported Howard’s and Abbott’s social conservatism.

## Major parties—differentiating themselves from the minor parties

Key minor parties are analysed in more depth in the chapters by Gregg Cockfield and Jennifer Curtin, Glenn Kefford and Stewart Jackson in this volume. However, both major parties drew on their key ideological positions to distance themselves from minor parties and Independents and to implicate their opponents in what they depicted as extreme policies. (Though the Liberals depicted their permanent Coalition partner, the Nationals, as being part of a stable majority government.) For example, Turnbull argued that the Greens and Xenophon were opposing free trade and would add their weight to the pressure the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) was already placing on Labor to re-open free trade agreements (Turnbull 2016f). In Turnbull’s view: ‘it is another pointer to the chaos and economic uncertainty likely to arise if a Labor–Greens–Independents alliance is revived at this election’ (ibid.). Turnbull contrasted such uncertainty with the ‘stable Coalition majority government which

I lead', emphasising that such stability was needed to tackle the economic and other challenges ahead (Turnbull 2016s). Meanwhile, Morrison put out an attack ad, 'The Greening of Labor', suggesting that Labor was being infiltrated and pressured by Greens into taking up ideologically extreme positions (Liberal Party of Australia 2016). Turnbull also moved to distance the Liberals from Pauline Hanson's One Nation. In line with his own small 'l' liberal position on social issues, Turnbull argued that 'Pauline Hanson is not a welcome presence on the Australian political scene—remember she was chucked out of the Liberal party' (SBS 2016).

By contrast, Shorten claimed that, despite such statements, Turnbull was actually under increasing pressure from the right in his party to embrace the type of 'extreme', socially divisive policies advocated by Pauline Hanson and that this pressure would become even greater in the aftermath of international developments such as the Brexit vote (Shorten 2016o). Similarly, far from seeing Xenophon as being in the same camp as Labor, Shorten argued that Xenophon-team candidates could not be trusted to stand up for workers' penalty rates and actually had more in common with the Liberals on such issues (Shorten 2016n). Meanwhile, Deputy Leader of the Labor Party Tanya Plibersek mounted a sustained attack on the Greens, claiming that their extreme ideological rigidity undermined Labor's ability to bring in reforms (which often involved a long and incremental process). Furthermore, she argued that the Greens' strategy of trying to grow by targeting Labor voters rather than Coalition ones meant that the Greens saw Labor as their immediate enemy. Consequently, she claimed that the Greens' electoral strategy could end up assisting the conservative side of politics and preventing the election of a Labor government (Plibersek 2016). Shorten totally denied that Labor would be prepared to form either a 'coalition' or an 'alliance' with the Greens, emphasising the importance of voting for the certainty that would be provided by a Labor majority government (Shorten 2016m).

In other words, both major parties argued for the need to elect a majority government that, they claimed, would provide stability and policy certainty. Both suggested that their major party opponents would be hostage to ideologically extreme, minor party views.

## Conclusion

The narrowness of the Coalition's victory raises some questions about whether neoliberal economic policy is so easy to sell to the electorate these days, or whether Turnbull was partly facing the type of economic protest vote that Shorten had hoped to address with his more economically inclusive policies.<sup>8</sup> It is also possible that Turnbull's relative reluctance to mobilise 'Culture War' issues, combined with his neoliberal economics, opened up opportunities for protest votes for extreme right parties, such as Pauline Hanson's One Nation, given their combination of Islamophobia and protectionism.

There were significant policy differences and perspectives between the major parties in the 2016 election, even if both claimed that only their opponents were ideological. Those ideological positions were reinforced via the evoking of emotion. Labor's 'Medicare' campaign, for example, reinforced social democratic views on government providing good-quality public healthcare, while the Coalition's scare campaign that Labor was antibusiness and would ruin the economy reinforced their neoliberal ideology. Class and same-sex issues were also mobilised by both sides to make ideological points.

Somewhat unusually, Labor criticised Turnbull for being too ideological on economic policy and not ideological enough when it came to maintaining his small 'I' beliefs. Meanwhile, Turnbull criticised Labor for being ideologically antibusiness—a criticism that was potentially reinforced by (the historical aberration of) Labor's reluctance to spell out explicitly that many of its policies would benefit both labour and private enterprise. While Labor had firmly rejected a small-target strategy, was articulating a clearer ideological position than in some previous elections and had achieved a better result than many had anticipated, its primary vote remained relatively low (at 34.73 per cent, though up 1.35 per cent from the last election). Among other issues, Labor needs to reflect on whether its populist antibusiness rhetoric made it more difficult for it to counter the Coalition's claims that it was antibusiness and would therefore be a poor economic manager.

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<sup>8</sup> Paul Strangio (2016) has suggested that Turnbull is facing a historically changing policy cycle, moving towards support for a more activist state that is more compatible with Labor traditions than Liberal ones.

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# 4

## Turnbull versus Shorten: The Major Party Leadership Contest

Paul Strangio and James Walter

### The dilemma of leadership in a time of leadership insecurity

Federal election success has been a poor guarantee of leadership security in Australia's recent past. The 2016 campaign was the third in succession not to be fought by the leader who had emerged as Prime Minister from the previous election. Ironically, having capitalised mightily on the Labor leadership civil war between Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard, Tony Abbott's fate mirrored Rudd's—a first-term prime minister overthrown by a party room insurrection (see Errington and van Onselen 2015). Yet Malcolm Turnbull's replacement of Abbott as Liberal leader and prime minister in September 2015 aroused nothing like the degree of community shock or resentment associated with Rudd's removal of June 2010. Putting to one side the uncomfortable question of whether this reflects greater forgiveness of ambition by male rather than female aspirants (Hall and Donaghue 2012), a reason Abbott's downfall failed to astonish was that there had been several months to prepare for the prospect. Abbott's hold on office had been tenuous since February 2015, when he unconvincingly staved off a leadership spill motion. And despite Abbott's attempt to incite public indignation when facing party room defeat ('our party is better than this ... our government is better than this and, by God ...

our country is so much better than this' (2015)), there was not sufficient goodwill for him within the electorate for that appeal to gain traction. The consistently poor poll ratings that had plagued Abbott in office seemed to confirm that his hyperaggression as opposition leader, and a related stubborn public coolness towards him even when the Coalition prevailed at the 2013 election (Strangio and Walter 2015: 56), had helped booby trap his own prime ministership.

But was there another factor? Had Australians grown inured to the spectacle of prime ministerial assassination and, schooled by several years of leadership upheaval, developed better appreciation of the reality that the office is, after all, the gift of the party room? The 2007 federal election, which ushered in the recent era of prime ministerial instability, had been characterised by a new high-water mark of the personalisation of political campaigning in Australia. As encapsulated in Labor's successful 'Kevin '07' slogan, Rudd's personality and his carefully choreographed media profile dominated Labor's appeal to the electorate (Jackman 2008), which in turn licensed his domineering prime ministerial leadership. Yet Rudd's subsequent rollercoaster trajectory afforded a sobering lesson in the perils of excessively personalised leadership, and not only for a traumatised Labor Party.

Indeed, if there was a dominant theme to the contest between Turnbull and his Labor opponent, Bill Shorten, at the 2016 election, it is of leaders hedged by their own parties: of a contraction in autonomy between leaders and their parties. This is not to say that the respective campaigns of the Coalition and Labor were not chiefly centred upon Turnbull and Shorten respectively—they were. Nor is it to suggest that voters' estimate of the virtues of the each of the leaders (their competence, authenticity, trustworthiness and so on) was not a significant influence on the result of the election. Leadership matters. However, against the background of the leadership upheavals of the previous decade, neither Turnbull nor Shorten were prepared to create much distance between themselves and their parties. This created another dilemma. At a time when party bases are narrowing, or at the very least not keeping pace with a diversifying society, close identification with the party (or even more problematically an ideological strain within it) can limit leadership affinity with the electorate. The quandary was most acute for Turnbull, for the reason that he came to the prime ministership with the expectation that he possessed an appeal to the electorate that transcended his party, but he could only maintain internal support by observing limits that obviated that appeal.



## Background to the campaign

The September 2015 decision of the Liberal party room to oust Abbott and return Turnbull to the leadership—he had been opposition leader from September 2008 to December 2009—did seem to reaffirm the logic of personalisation with the calculation that the government’s survival depended on Turnbull’s superior public popularity. In making his case against Abbott’s leadership, Turnbull emphasised that the Coalition had trailed in 30 consecutive Newspolls and required a more persuasive communicator-in-chief (Errington and van Onselen 2015: 198). Stylistically, the difference between the two leaders was stark. Whereas Abbott predominantly traded in fear and threat, Turnbull’s emotional signature was optimism. ‘There has never been a more exciting time to be alive than today and there has never been a more exciting time to be an Australian,’ he proclaimed upon becoming Prime Minister (Turnbull 2015). But, as detailed later, it was soon apparent that Turnbull, long regarded as a philosophical outlier in his party because of his progressive inclinations, was not prepared to rock the boat on conservative policy positions established under Abbott, most emblematically in the areas of climate change and same-sex marriage. This invited scepticism about what was substantially different between his and his predecessor’s government, a matter left unresolved by Turnbull’s resort to the clumsy—and soon abandoned—slogan that he was offering, ‘continuity and change’ (Koziol 2016a). The price was an erosion of his authenticity in the eyes of voters, and a diminution of what undoubtedly had been an important element of his appeal compared to Abbott: that he was not perceived narrowly as a partisan warrior, and could reach out to a broader constituency.

Initially, that appeal had been abundantly evident with the public responding buoyantly to the removal of the deeply unpopular Abbott, and to the promise of Turnbull. The Coalition streaked ahead in the polls and Turnbull recorded dizzying leadership ratings. By November 2015, Newspoll found him boasting a net approval rating of 38 points—the highest for a prime minister since Rudd in 2009—and a mammoth 49 per cent lead as preferred prime minister over Shorten (Hudson 2015a). Coinciding with this, Labor’s focus-group research showed Turnbull ‘peeling off voters deemed to be “soft Labor”... energised by issues like same-sex marriage, climate change and a republic’ (Bramston 2016a). During the early months of 2016, however, the gloss rapidly came off Turnbull as the (excessive) expectations of him went unfulfilled

and the constraints he was operating under grew manifest. This was made worse by his dithering over tax policy. Though the Coalition was still strongly favoured to be returned to government when he officially called the election in May 2016—a common journalistic construction was that it was Turnbull’s ‘to lose’ (e.g. Kelly 2016a)—he entered the campaign with his approval rating sliding (Kenny 2016a; Medhora 2016) and escalating confusion about his prime ministerial identity. A popular street art poster of Turnbull mockingly titled ‘Fizza’ epitomised the rising tide of disappointment. But his promise had not completely dissipated: a decisive election victory, anticipated by many commentators, would deliver him the authority to assert his true colours within his government and party.

On the other side of the political fence, Shorten’s journey to the 2016 election had been even more evidently one of closeness—and, in this case, natural affinity—between leader and party. Unlike Turnbull, Shorten was unmistakably a creature of his party as a former national secretary of the Australian Workers’ Union (AWU) and long-time factional player. He was the first Labor leader to survive a full term since Kim Beazley in 1998–2001. That longevity was aided by Shorten being elected under new rules, adopted by Caucus in 2013, meaning that for the first time a major Australian political party granted rank-and-file members a say in leadership selection. Under a hybrid system that evenly weights party room and ordinary member votes, Shorten narrowly won the leadership from Anthony Albanese despite securing only 40 per cent of the rank-and-file vote, but with two thirds of Caucus support. Nevertheless, by raising the threshold for triggering a leadership contest (a petition of 60 per cent of Caucus is required in opposition and 75 per cent in government), and removing the option for a quick strike against an incumbent, the new rules undoubtedly insulated Shorten’s leadership during the Turnbull honeymoon period when otherwise all the usual omens were in place for a challenge. These included dismal public poll numbers, intriguing by right-wing factional heavyweights and the circulation with menace of internally commissioned focus-group research on Shorten’s ‘diabolical’ standing with voters (Bramston 2016a, 2016b).

Shorten’s survival, however, also owed something to Labor still being chastened by the leadership bloodletting of the Rudd–Gillard era and, more positively, his diligent efforts to heal those wounds and restore solidarity to the party’s ranks. Campaigning for the leadership in 2013, Shorten had vowed that, if successful, ‘you will hear less about I and more about we. The era of the messiah is over’ (quoted in Strangio and

Walter 2015: 60). If this was a pragmatic pitch to a party burnt by the imperious Rudd, a major profile of Shorten published at the beginning of the 2016 election campaign observed he had indeed delivered on that promise of collective leadership since 2013. '[I]n the past three years, Shorten has never styled himself as being somehow bigger than the party ... he has consistently prioritised unity over decisiveness' (Murphy 2016a). In another signal of his enmeshment with the party and wider labour movement, Shorten had also declined to distance himself from his trade union origins. In a personal memoir-cum-policy manifesto released in early 2016, he directly attributed his consensual leadership approach to practices he had perfected as an AWU official and declared that he still thought 'like an [union] organiser' (Shorten 2016: 33, 42, 45). Shorten's team orientation was further demonstrated by his facilitating lengthy internal conversations on policy, while the headline policies developed through those deliberations—significant public investment in health, education and infrastructure, and redistributive measures in superannuation, negative gearing and capital gains—reinforced the image of a leader in *simpatico* with Labor traditions.

Arguably, Shorten's modest leadership style and tribal allegiance, together with a lingering reputation as a party fixer (Marr 2015), inhibited the development of a connection with the electorate (Strangio 2016). His lack of resonance with the public loomed not so much as a liability during Abbott's prime ministership with Labor consistently ahead in the polls regardless, but came under intense scrutiny during the early romance of Turnbull's ascension. The internal focus-group reactions to the beleaguered Shorten in that period were cruel. He was variously described as 'bland', 'inadequate' and 'blah' (Bramston 2016b). Weathering the initial surge of support for Turnbull, however, he entered the election campaign still as underdog, but incrementally gaining ground on his rival.

## Turnbull's campaign

Turnbull's personal style, and the character of his performance between September 2015 (when he overthrew Abbott) and the commencement of the 2016 election are important in contextualising his campaign. Victorian Liberal Party president Michael Kroger argued persuasively that the nature of the campaign must be understood in relation to the leadership behaviour and policy confusion that preceded it (see Choahan 2016).

Notwithstanding past failures (as leader of the republican movement and in his first incarnation as Liberal Party leader), Turnbull's public record in business, journalism and the law encouraged the belief that he was a man of considerable capacity: courageous in the pursuit of his objectives, an independent thinker, intelligent, articulate, imaginative, driven by endless curiosity to Hoover up information, and hence enormously well informed. He was also opinionated, did not suffer fools gladly, preferred his own view to that of any other and married boldness with aggression when confronted (Crabb 2016; Manning 2015). Yet, there was a hint that he needed direction to harness these capacities effectively (Crabb 2016). To whom, now, should he turn: was it the electorate opinion or the party to which he should respond? To depend upon the latter was to invite electoral problems. Typically, the leader is a powerful figure in the Liberal Party (Brett 2013), but in the fractious context in which Turnbull had defeated Abbott, he had made assurances to the party Right—a cohort whose preferences are demonstrably at variance with majority views on key issues (see further below).

This point would prove crucial. It had been argued before his second incarnation as party leader that:

Turnbull must do five things to mollify the Right: stick to the harsh border protection policies, not seek to adjust the climate change policy, preserve the party room's right to decide whether a vote on gay marriage becomes a matter of conscience, avoid the temptation to reinvigorate the republic debate and show he can work constructively with the Nationals (van Onselen 2015: 22).

These would be significant restraints, given that he had made a series of bold statements and speeches between 2009 and 2015, most of a small 'l' liberal bent, with many well outside his portfolio and at odds with then Coalition orthodoxy (Manne 2012). Indeed, the poll popularity that eventually saw him replace Abbott was thought to have stemmed from precisely this willingness to go 'off message' in relation to the muscular conservatism of the Abbott regime. On assuming the prime ministership, he spoke effusively about innovation, the cities and reinvigorating an 'adult' conversation with the electorate and trusting their intelligence rather than resorting to sloganeering. Could he now find a way to manage the five points of resistance noted above, and move the Coalition towards the broader agenda the electorate plainly wanted?

It soon became apparent that the portents were not good. While the poll boost that followed Turnbull's ascension lasted until the new year, by March 2016 polls were rating the parties at 50–50 and commentators were remarking on voter disappointment in a Prime Minister who 'hasn't appeared to do anything since coming to office' (Tingle 2016). Soon after, Newspoll (4 April) showed Labor ahead of the Coalition for the first time since Turnbull's rise. His willingness to talk, initially a boon after Abbott's three-word slogans, began to seem mere verbosity and lacked focus. He dithered over policy, pursuing leads that went nowhere (e.g. enthusiasm for a cities portfolio that withered when the responsible minister resigned following an incident unrelated to his portfolio), mooting grand plans (e.g. for addressing comprehensive tax reform) that then sank in the face of opposition, floating ill-considered thought bubbles apparently without consultation that disappeared within days (e.g. returning taxing powers to the States) and retreating from the very proposals (e.g. in relation to climate change) that had won him popular support. As Kroger was later to remark, 'in that period ... we were putting things on and off the table and the electorate formed the opinion, "well, if you fellas don't know what you're doing, that's a problem"' (Choahan 2016). Arguably, on such issues Turnbull had been reined in by the need to manage potential party dissent. (On climate change specifically it is said that a stipulation that he would not contravene Coalition policy had been included in a written agreement with the National Party.) But the abiding impression was of a risk-averse, indecisive leader. Only a significant election victory, it was argued, could restore his authority and keep his restive right wing 'a little more in its box' (Tingle 2016). Talk began to circulate about a double-dissolution election.

Then Turnbull initiated what some observers (e.g. Harper 2016) thought a masterstroke. He unveiled a Senate Reform bill intended to threaten the tenure of crossbenchers, and reintroduced blocked legislation (in particular, the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC) bills) to the Senate. Thus, he issued a challenge that the crossbench either pass it or he would call a double-dissolution election.

While some saw this as Turnbull finally seizing the initiative to precipitate a 'crash-through' moment, a double-dissolution election, in halving the quota a candidate needed for Senate election, made it more, not less, likely that minority candidates would succeed. The Senate refused to be cowed and so a double-dissolution trigger was instituted; the Budget was presented and supply was assured; Turnbull duly visited the Governor-General

and parliament was dissolved. The election campaign proper kicked off on 8 May 2016, when the election was formally announced. In effect, parties swung into campaign mode immediately after the 19 April press conference at which Turnbull had issued his challenge to the Senate over industrial relations legislation and outlined his plans for a double dissolution. It was to prove virtually the only instance of drama in the campaign. There was no further evidence of boldness on Turnbull's part.

While Shorten ramped up a process that had been in train for about a year, amplifying Labor's policy difference and demonstrating that he was prepared to take risks, Turnbull's presentation was unusual in that there was no single new policy announcement in the course of the campaign. The man who claimed to thrive on excitement and disruption was intent on presenting a small target. The focus was relentlessly on 'jobs and growth' (said to be assured by the budget measures, and especially by cuts to business taxes), the 'innovation agenda', border security and the need for stability in an uncertain world.

Following what is now the convention in electoral professional parties, the leaders on both sides were front and centre. Each crisscrossed the country for eight gruelling weeks, concentrating on marginal seats. In the senior Coalition team, Scott Morrison, Julie Bishop and Barnaby Joyce (for the Nationals) gained some attention, while others were occasionally highlighted for their gaffes. Peter Dutton, for instance, not only revealed the preferences of the party's Right, but also provoked outrage with a comment on refugees being illiterate and innumerate, taking Australian jobs and imposing burdens on health and social security (Bourke 2016). In the main, however, attention remained focused on Turnbull.

Yet now it was a controlled Turnbull, avoiding the very qualities that had made him attractive and never straying off message. It was, presumably intentionally, methodical and unexciting. Surrounded by party professionals, national campaign director Tony Nutt, cabinet secretary and former Howard chief of staff Arthur Sinodinos, principal strategist and pollster Mark Textor, and Vincent Woolcock, who had worked on Liberal campaigns right back to Malcolm Fraser, it might be said Turnbull was on a short leash. He was constantly presented with focus-group findings organised by Textor, and demanded that information be provided on every conceivable question that might come his way (Wright 2016). Everything needed was at his fingertips, but did he have direction? It was a reactive, defensive strategy rather than a forward-looking scheme.

And far from facilitating ‘intelligent conversation’, Turnbull’s perpetual resort to a signature slogan, ‘jobs and growth’, backfired to become a point of ridicule in letters to the Fairfax press, on social media and even a Facebook page, referring to a fictional character ‘Jobson Grothe’ (*Sydney Morning Herald* 2016).

There were three problems with the Turnbull campaign’s strategy. First, the repeated invocation of ‘jobs and growth’ not only became an object of ridicule, but made sense only in relation to the assertion that business tax cuts would trigger both. Yet, the Coalition’s own modelling indicated that the benefits would be relatively meagre. Any gains might well be further diminished by the capacity of multinationals to capitalise on those advantages offshore rather than investing in growth in Australia, and in any case they would appear a long way down the track. It was clearly based on a notion of trickle-down economics, and this at a time when the popular experience of the inequitable distribution of benefits from such reform was all too clear, and when the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank had conceded that evidence was to the contrary.

Second, the innovation agenda—a policy suite providing incentives for start-ups, research and collaboration—while certainly providing for events where Turnbull could appear at his most knowledgeable and enthusiastic, encouraging his liveliest performances, also failed to enthuse voters. It concentrated on examples arguably only relevant to youthful, educated and savvy knowledge workers without pausing to explain what it would actually achieve for people who realised that their town would not be the next Silicon Valley, as the Liberal MP for Canning remarked (Koziol 2016b). In other words, Turnbull’s initial pitch appeared insensitive to the real-life economic experience of much of the population.

Third, as these principal appeals lost traction, with Turnbull’s net approval rating reaching its lowest point in mid-campaign,<sup>1</sup> and Shorten progressively gaining ground on the policy front, Coalition leaders, particularly Turnbull and Morrison, resorted not to policy recalibration or ‘intelligent conversation’ about their initiatives, but to the danger represented by Labor’s weakness on border protection, national security and economic management. Their overheated rhetoric about Labor’s ‘war’

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1 Eleven per cent more voters questioned his performance rather than praised it (see Farr 2016).

on business, on taxes, on assets, on house prices—all of them said to presage economic collapse—at first was called for what it was, a strained metaphor. But, at the last, the coincidence of the UK public's vote in favour of Brexit, provoking widespread international apprehension about a groundswell of electoral populism and the spectre of economic uncertainty, gave Turnbull ground for arguing that stability, security and sound management—which only the Coalition could promise—were a premium in such dangerously turbulent times.

Thus, Turnbull's campaign launch—on the last Saturday prior to the election—was framed by the invocation of uncertainty and volatility, in an attempt to give new life to the Coalition's interpretation of the economic agenda.<sup>2</sup> National security was a prerequisite for economic security, which could only be guaranteed if voters resisted the urge to flirt with minor parties and the havoc they would cause to sensible plans to ensure stability—all the more necessary in a now-threatening environment. Disciplined immigration policy and border protection were more essential than ever in the unsettled climate. Brexit was explicitly referenced, and the other aspirations Turnbull flagged were all dependent on this central appeal for staying the course against the chaos and insecurity that would be unleashed if the wrong choice was made.

A Newspan poll published two days later, on 27 June, showed the Coalition ahead for the first time in the campaign, 51 to 49 per cent on two-party preferred terms; the Turnbull campaign appeared at last to have found a message attuned to the moment. Turnbull's net approval had returned to roughly where it had been prior to the election. His performance lifted; he seemed to be keener, more focused and infused with confidence, but paradoxically appeared less frequently and travelled less at a time when Shorten's level of activity was as frenetic as ever. With the News Corporation Australia (News Corp) (Murdoch) press, which had in general remained staunchly pro-Turnbull, now opining that he was ahead and would remain there (e.g. Shanahan 2016a), he took his foot off the accelerator. In the closing days, it was almost as if the campaign had been won.

This proved a misreading of the electorate's mood. What the polls collectively had indicated all along—that there would be a near 50–50 split—came to pass. On the night of the election, it was not even clear if the

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2 For a summary, see Australian Associated Press (AAP) (2016).



Coalition would be returned, and Turnbull's bitter, bellicose post-midnight speech blamed everyone but himself, including, by implication, the voters said to have been taken in by Labor's 'grotesque "Mediscare"' campaign (for an analysis of the 'Mediscare' campaign, see Elliot and Manwaring, Chapter 24, this volume). It would take three days before he gave a more measured account and accepted responsibility for the campaign (Kenny 2016b). The election result would take still longer to clarify, but the final count ultimately saw the Coalition reduced to a single-seat majority in the House of Representatives. In the Senate, the government also lost ground and faced the prospect of having to wrangle support for its legislative program from an enlarged and potentially unmanageable crossbench that included conflicting blocs: nine Green Senators, four Pauline Hanson's One Nation Senators and three Nick Xenophon Team Senators.

The double-dissolution masterstroke had gone awry. Recriminations from the conservative Right were immediate and continuing: far from being 'back in their box', they were scarifying of a leadership that had failed to listen (McIlroy 2016; Murphy 2016b). The victory Turnbull needed to establish his authority had eluded him. Many observers agreed that, as one put it, 'he has not been the victim of outside forces, nor an ambush, nor terrible luck. He has inflicted the damage on himself ... This ... goes to Turnbull's real problem: he's not a very talented politician' (Carney 2016a). Even leading News Corp columnists, usually supportive of the Coalition (e.g. Albrechtsen 2016; Sheridan 2016), joined in the chorus questioning Turnbull's political astuteness.

## Shorten's campaign

A familiar image of Shorten's campaign was of his daily early morning jogs through city streets, flanked by a contingent of younger, fitter-looking security officers and Labor volunteers. As ungainly as Shorten appeared on those runs, his fitness regime was one of several initiatives taken to strengthen his performance as he readied for the election contest. Another was personnel change at the top of his private office with the appointment of a new chief of staff (former Queensland Labor Party State Secretary Cameron Milner) and communications director (Ryan Liddell). Journalists noticed an improvement in his media appearances: 'his communications weren't inspired but they were sharper, the zingers [corny attempts at humour notoriously lampooned by satirist Shaun

Micallef] binned, the woolly digressions trimmed’ (Murphy 2016a). Shorten also credited the clearer focus to being more discriminating when it came to other sources of advice. It was reported that his most trusted counsellors were senior shadow ministers, Chris Bowen and Penny Wong, while confidants outside his parliamentary colleagues were former Victorian Labor premier Steve Bracks and ex-Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) secretaries Bill Kelty and Greg Combet (Hyland 2016). The process of refining his message was further facilitated by Shorten embarking on a series of town hall-style meetings in marginal electorates. By the time the election campaign commenced, he had participated in around 25 of these events, each of them drawing hundreds of voters. The meetings were an opportunity ‘to road test his rhetoric and his policies on the hot political issues of the day’ (Anderson 2016).

Once the campaign was in swing, these preparations, and the longer-term policy development undertaken by Labor, reaped dividends. Shorten projected considerable surety and discipline on the hustings. He insisted—and most observers accepted—that he was relishing the experience. Modern campaigns are invariably highly orchestrated affairs, but Shorten braved more direct encounters with the public than did a cloistered Prime Minister. While there is little evidence to suggest the leadership debates significantly impacted on the campaign, Shorten parlayed his greater ease in interacting with ordinary voters into a ‘win’ in the first of those encounters—a Sky News ‘People’s Forum’ held in a western Sydney electorate. Shorten had proved more adept at responding to the ‘hip pocket’ concerns of audience members (Crowe 2016; Whinnett 2016). The sole free-to-air debate of the campaign was assessed to be a lacklustre affair and greeted with apathy by voters; however, with Shorten once more regarded as earning the upper hand (Taylor 2016; Bean, Chapter 10, this volume), it was perhaps telling that Turnbull declined another ‘People’s Forum’. He opted instead for an alternative ‘online’ debate, only to be again judged to have been outpointed by a punchier Shorten (Gartrell 2016; Owens 2016).

Possibly, the opposition leader benefited in these head-to-head match-ups against the Prime Minister because audiences had low expectations of him. However, a seasoned political correspondent surmised that the superior sensibilities displayed by Shorten on the campaign trail, compared to the Prime Minister, were also a product of contrasting backgrounds. Turnbull had been ‘a top table guy ... He made his name impressing wealthy and powerful men: judges, bankers, CEOs’. Shorten, on the other hand:

an organiser with the AWU, a blue collar union covering people who work with their hands across a wide range of industries ... learned how to win them over ... learned about the things that motivate them and concerned them in their lives (Carney 2016b).

Inevitably, Labor's was a leader-centric campaign. Yet, whether by necessity, given Shorten's distinct lack of celebrity power, or deliberately congruent with his positioning as a leader in touch with everyday voters, this was personalisation in monotone. Labor's travelling campaign road show—a coach popularly known as the 'Bill Bus', which was plastered with a giant headshot of Shorten—evinced the no-frills marketing of its leader. There was some effort to brighten his stolid image with his wife, Chloe, accompanying him on the hustings, but even those appearances mostly elicited a kind of self-deprecating 'aw shucks' routine from the Opposition Leader. Meanwhile, Shorten took the opportunity in interviews to disavow any ambition for individual predominance and restate his preference for collaborative leadership: 'I don't have to be the smartest person in the room; what I have to be good at is getting all the smart ideas in the room organised' (quoted in Hooper 2016); and, 'I'm a listener. My view of leadership is to be the coach ... My job is to coach a team to get the best out of people' (Ferguson, Stevens and Worthington 2016). Labor's campaign did give considerable prominence to the shadow ministers who made up the parliamentary party's leadership group, including Deputy Leader Tanya Plibersek, Bowen and Wong. It was a long way from the popstar 'presidential' campaigns of Rudd.

The contrast was also evident in policy terms. 'Shorten's 2016 Labor Party is a different beast to the Kevin Rudd party ... with Labor now more attuned to public sector Keynesianism, traditional union-business rivalry and a highly redistributive tax policy', observed Paul Kelly (2016b). It was a theme that News Corp's stable of columnists persistently returned to throughout the campaign, painting Shorten as a throwback to antediluvian Labor populism (e.g. Kelly 2016c; Bramston 2016c). The media was collectively aghast when Labor announced they were planning to run higher deficits for the duration of next parliament. In a *Four Corners* special on the leaders a week out from polling day, Shorten was quizzed: 'Is that the moment you lost the election' (Ferguson, Stevens and Worthington 2016). In fact, Labor's focus on investment in core social policy areas had registered in the electorate. In early 2016, polling had shown that voters rated Turnbull in front of Shorten as the best to handle every major policy field. As the campaign headed towards

its midway point, however, Shorten had jumped ahead of Turnbull in the areas of health, education and climate change, while the Prime Minister remained by far the preferred choice for managing the economy, national security and asylum seekers (Hudson 2016). It was clear evidence of a campaign in which each leader had aligned with their respective party's traditional strengths. For Labor, there was encouragement that health rated as the most important issue by voters. It was a trend that helped explain, as polling day neared, Shorten's increasingly shrill warnings about the Coalition being a threat to Medicare.

Polling also revealed that Shorten continued to edge upwards in voter estimates. Though still trailing behind Turnbull as preferred prime minister, by the final stages of the campaign the deficit had closed by around two thirds from the massive gulf of late 2015 (Shanahan 2016b). By historical measures, however, both leaders were unpopular—a point we return to below. Despite Shorten's improving ratings, and what little separated the Coalition and Labor on two-party preferred numbers, by the final fortnight of the campaign the consensus of the political media was that Shorten's momentum was stalling and that hopes for a Labor victory had largely vanished. 'Malcolm Turnbull is coming home with the wind in his sails, Shorten is running out of puff' (Shanahan 2016a) typified the press gallery punditry. Confident that Labor was heading for defeat, there was a corresponding outbreak of journalistic speculation about Shorten's post-election fate since under Caucus rules the leadership would be automatically thrown open upon a loss. Unnamed Labor sources were quoted as saying that a gain of 10 seats was the benchmark for Shorten to retain factional support crucial to his leadership survival (Massola 2016; Clennell 2016).

Ironically, by all but writing off Labor's chances, the media unwittingly performed a favour for Shorten. When it became apparent on election night that Labor had exceeded their pessimistic forecasts, though not necessarily having done better than the polls had been signalling, his leadership assumed a triumphal aura. With the result still in doubt and the Prime Minister nowhere in sight, Shorten emerged to declare exultantly, 'there is one thing for sure—the Labor Party is back' (quoted in Harris 2016). In the afterglow, despite the chances of his cobbling together a minority government slipping away, and the reality that Labor's primary vote had been disappointing, Shorten's leadership was impregnable. Reports that Albanese might challenge him were swiftly snuffed out. In accordance with Caucus rules, nominations for the leadership were formally called

for, but with Shorten the only nominee, he was re-elected unopposed. When reform of Labor's leadership selection system had been announced in 2013, two rationales had been provided: stability and empowerment of party members. For Shorten, the first objective had been fulfilled, but by forgoing a ballot the party had set aside the second with little compunction and an absence of protest by the rank and file.

## The significance of the 2016 leadership contest

The 2016 federal election had a paradoxical legacy for the major party leaders. The winner, Turnbull, emerged a loser. His gamble on a double-dissolution election misfired. With his government's parliamentary position seriously weakened, he returned to office with his authority diminished rather than enhanced, and with his internal Liberal Party critics emboldened. On the other hand, despite Labor being defeated at the ballot box, Shorten had strengthened his hold over his party to the extent that he was re-elected to the leadership unopposed. Moreover, as a result of Labor's reformed leadership selection process, Shorten enjoys a distinct advantage in holding rivals at bay during a second term of opposition. After the election, Turnbull's leadership was under pressure rather than Shorten's.

Neither Turnbull nor Shorten were popular (Bean, Chapter 10, this volume), which continued a trend of the 2010 and 2013 federal elections of voters being seriously underwhelmed by both major party leaders. By the time of the election, Turnbull had haemorrhaged most of the public goodwill he had generated upon coming to office. At the same time, there is evidence (Bean, Chapter 10, this volume; van Onselen 2016) that had Abbott stayed prime minister, the Coalition would have been doomed at the election. With the caveat that it is impossible to test hypothetical alternative scenarios conclusively, Turnbull's leadership can be construed as having 'saved' the government. According to published opinion polls, Shorten incrementally improved his standing with the electorate during 2016. Yet this was from a low base and the approval he won from the public seemed to be grudging. Indeed, the best that can probably be said of the electoral effect of Shorten is that, while still a drag on Labor's vote (Bean, Chapter 10, this volume), he proved not to be quite the millstone for his party that had been feared going into the election year. The contest

between the two men was a relatively benign affair lacking the intensity of the abrasive Abbott in the preceding elections. Shorten's profession to liking Turnbull (Gordon 2016a) illustrated the comparative civility. Correspondingly, the electorate, while not particularly favourable to either leader, did not much dislike them either. In short, this was a tepid contest in which the leaders failed to inspire strong feelings either way (Maley 2016).<sup>3</sup>

During the campaign neither leader strayed far from the established scripts of their respective parties. Turnbull did not live up to his reputation as a straight talker or philosophical free spirit within his party, straining credibility and undercutting his appeal in the electorate. For Shorten, close identification with his party mattered less since the electorate is unlikely to have ever regarded him as bigger than his party. He performed creditably as a tribal healer, but the failure to improve significantly on Labor's primary vote also suggested the limited utility of hugging a dwindling and increasingly unrepresentative party base. A question about Shorten going forward is whether he has the capacity to make the transition 'to a more creative and expansive project' on behalf of the Labor Party (Strangio 2016).

The 2016 election contest was inseparable from the leadership churn that preceded the advent of both Turnbull and Shorten, and demonstrated four things to which we should be alert in the campaign. First, leaders matter. For example, the surge in personal popularity enjoyed by Rudd on attaining party leadership and then the prime ministership was matched by a surge in the polls and the Labor vote. An equivalent pattern of poll support was enjoyed by Turnbull, and by his party, when he replaced Abbott in 2015. It is commonly argued that this is a consequence of the personalisation and mediatisation of the role in a leader-centric age (Brants and Voltmer 2011; Karvonen 2010; Wilson 2014). And it is why leaders who pass the popularity test (like Rudd and Turnbull) are granted so much authority in contemporary politics. However, it is important to remember that the voter connection to a leader is not simply a response to individual qualities or strength. Rather, leaders have come to 'stand in' for the party (McAllister 2011: 240–65). As class and

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3 The ABC's Vote Compass survey indicated that, rated on questions of competence and trustworthiness, Turnbull maintained a slim advantage over Shorten. However, the ratings of both leaders largely plateaued during the campaign and seemed to confirm that the electorate had lukewarm feelings towards both (see Blumer 2016).

ideology have declined as voter ties, leader communication has come to represent what a party stands for. Hence, the second factor: the leader must now perform as communicator-in-chief, an element now commonly identified as the crucial lack in Gillard's leadership performance. Turnbull also showed himself deficient in this respect, or at least did not meet the high expectations attached to him. Conversely, though an unpretentious communicator, Shorten performed more persuasively than anticipated.

Third, as was noted long ago (Kemp 1973), there must be a convincing combination of authority and philosophy. This latter element is now even more important as voters take a shortcut in leader assessment in determining consistency of purpose and what a party is likely to do to their benefit or detriment. When leaders base their pitch on some key element and then walk away (as Rudd did in elevating the response to climate change as the great moral issue of our time, then abandoning the cause, or as Abbott did in swiftly breaking promises made in his election campaign), there will be a savage voter response with ramifications not only for that leader, but for their party, as both Rudd and Abbott found to their cost. In the end, popularity would not shore up Turnbull either; taking things on and off the table, defaulting to trickle-down economics and resorting to sloganeering eroded his claim to authenticity. In contrast, Shorten's efforts to link new policy to Labor values, though derided as archaic by News Corp journalists, found their mark and enabled him to reel in the always more popular Turnbull.

Fourth, the leader's task in conveying a message that reconciles broad public opinion and the demands of the party base is now more difficult than ever as the major parties are fragmenting and proliferating media channels have become less reliable as a means of aggregating opinion. There has long been concern in Labor Party circles about the difficulty of harnessing the interests of postmaterialist progressives with those of the residual working-class battlers. Less attention, however, has been given to the divisions in the Coalition between moderate, cosmopolitan, progressive individualists and so-called conservatives—a rather misleading designation, given that it has come to represent a somewhat contradictory amalgam of social illiberalism and market fundamentalism that has little relation to the tradition of respect for institutions, cautious, incremental reform and community obligation once characteristic of the Liberal Party (Menzies 1943).

There is a heightened risk, in these circumstances, for a leader who is handcuffed to the party base, or even a faction within the party—whether by sympathy, necessity or a combination of both—to find themselves out of step with what the electorate wishes. With respect to the Coalition parties, for instance, such divergence between the party world view and public sentiment has been clearly demonstrated in relation to climate change (Fielding et al. 2012; Leviston, Greenhill and Walker 2015: 45–48; Lowy Institute 2015: 3, 13–14; Slezak 2016), economic policy (Lowy Institute 2015: 7–8), and marriage equality (Hudson 2015b; Sparrow 2016). Abbott’s unabashed alignment with the socially illiberal, market fundamentalist opinion within the Coalition in government is arguably what caused his downfall. Turnbull’s initial appeal was that he appeared to speak for a broader, more progressive liberalism, and one attuned to issues that resonated with a larger constituency than that with which Abbott and his supporters identified. Turnbull’s difficulty in sustaining such a message while containing party dissenters was a significant feature of the 2016 campaign. He did everything he could to avoid provoking the conservative wing during his campaign, but the compromises were never enough (Murphy 2016b). It will be a continuing challenge.

The interplay of all four factors that had so much effect in precipitating previous leadership churn surfaced in both major party leaders’ 2016 election campaign performances, with decisive effects on the election outcome. The capacity to manage them will continue to shape the politics of leadership, most particularly for the prime minister who must now battle for the authority that the election failed to yield.

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# 5

## National Polls, Marginal Seats and Campaign Effects

Murray Goot

The most widely remarked feature of the national polls for the House of Representatives was how close their final two-party preferred figures were to the two-party preferred vote. Given anxieties about the validity of the pollsters' sampling frames and falling response rates, the poor performance of the polls in Britain and the media's increasing inability to invest large sums in polls (thanks to a decline in revenue from both advertisers and audiences; see Carson and McNair, Chapter 19, this volume; Chen, Chapter 20, this volume), the accuracy of the polls, on this measure, generated relief all around. Based on the two-party preferred vote—the share of the vote going to the Labor and non-Labor parties after the distribution of minor party and Independent preferences—the polls throughout the campaign were able to anticipate a 'close' result. But, however 'close', even a 50–50 two-party preferred meant that the Coalition was more likely than Labor to form a government.

Less prominently discussed than the two-party preferred vote were the estimates of the major parties' first preference votes. Here, the polls were less accurate. While the spread of *two-party* preferred results—from the most favourable to the Coalition to the least favourable—reported by the polls was 2 percentage points, the spread of *first* preferences for the Liberal–National parties, for Labor, for the Greens and for Others was 3 percentage points. Among journalists and others, the failure of most of

the polls to report the level of support for any of the minor parties other than the Greens—only two organisations estimated the level of support in the House for the Nick Xenophon Team—passed without notice. The failure of the media to commission a single poll on the Senate also passed without remark.

Unremarked as well was the quality of the polling in individual seats—some of them ‘marginal’, some of them not—all selected on the grounds that they might change hands. In what loomed as an election too close to call, it was the battles over these seats that were seen as likely to determine the outcome. However, the polls in these seats proved much less reliable than the national polls. It was not just the fact that they were automated opinion polling system telephone calls (‘robo polls’), which have problems capturing younger voters, that was the problem. It was a series of other problems, not least the fact that, as usual, their samples were too small. And, for the most part, the pollsters had no other pollsters’ results with which to compare their own to see whether or not they were outliers or in line.

One of the remarkable things about the national two-party preferred was how close the final polls were not only to the actual two-party result but to each other. This might be taken as a sign that the pollsters’ various methods proved equally good. But it also might raise concerns about pollsters’ adjusting their results so that they are in line with those of others; statistically, the chances of all the polls saying exactly the same thing are not great. In marginal seats, usually polled by no more than one or two pollsters at quite different times, the opportunities for ‘herding’ are minimal.

## Predicting the House vote nationwide

All five polls taken in the last few days of the campaign got within 0.6 percentage points of the Coalition’s two-party preferred (50.4 per cent); Ipsos came this close by following the 2013 distribution of preferences used by most of the other pollsters, but not as close when it followed the preferences of its respondents. Viewed historically, the polls produced an exceptionally good result (see Goot 2012: 95, 106; 2015: 129). Especially reassuring for the industry’s public relations was the fact that the pollsters, having largely moved away from the use of landlines—a development lost on some observers (see Errington and van Onselen 2016: 118)—

produced good results using a variety of modes. Essential Media used ‘an incentivised online panel, quota sampled and weighted to correct for the known political bias of the panel’. Galaxy and Newspoll combined samples drawn from online panels (about 50 per cent for Galaxy, 60–65 per cent for Newspoll) with samples generated by random digit dialling using interactive voice recognition (IVR) or robo-polling, for which the use of quotas is not possible. Ipsos stuck by the traditional telephone method with interviewers using computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) to contact respondents on landlines (70 per cent) or mobiles (30 per cent). ReachTEL used robos (Ipsos 2016; Lewis 2016; Briggs, pers. comm., 29 August 2016). Two other firms also conducted nationwide polls but stopped early: one, Roy Morgan Research, which combined SMS texting (for roughly half the sample) with face-to-face interviewing for the other half, put its polls behind a paywall at the end of May; the other, Research Now, conducted an online poll in early June for the Australia Institute, which released it.

In addition, two media outlets invited their viewers or readers to fill out questionnaires during the course of the campaign: the ABC, through Vote Compass, attracted over a million participants; Fairfax Media, through Your Vote (a collaboration between Fairfax, Kieskompas and the University of Sydney), attracted almost 212,000 (Posetti, Gauja and Vromen 2016; Koziol and Hasham 2016). Both were conducted under licence from Vox Pop Labs, where Vote Compass was first used in the 2011 Canadian elections, or from Kieskompas launched in Europe in 2014. Neither was an opinion poll in the sense of being based on a systematic sample; respondents simply volunteered. Neither made access to its results easy. Above all, neither revealed how respondents intended to vote.

The differences between the best of the poll results for the Coalition and the worst were politically significant even if they were not statistically significant. David Briggs, the pollster for both Galaxy and Newspoll, was confident that, on his figures, ‘Labor did not pose a serious threat to the government’ (quoted in Benson 2016). Roy Morgan, ignoring its own two-party preferred and an earlier prediction of a contest ‘too close to call’ (Roy Morgan Research 2016a), predicted the return of the government with 80–84 seats (Roy Morgan Research 2016b: 22). On her figures, by contrast, Jessica Elgood from Ipsos saw ‘a hung parliament’, based on the 2013 preference distribution, though, based on the respondents’ stated preferences, the outcome was less likely to be a hung parliament and more likely to be a Labor victory (Ipsos 2016).

Post-election, the verdicts among poll watchers were based not on these predictions but on the pollsters' numbers. The 'five [sic] major national pollsters', Edmund Tadros of Fairfax Media remarked, weeks before the final result was known, 'were within about one percentage point of the two-party preferred result' (Tadros 2016). With the Coalition sitting on 50.1 per cent of the two-party preferred, when Tadros was writing, the Ipsos poll, he said, was closest. He was cherrypicking; Ipsos, conducted for Fairfax, had produced two results not one. One showed a 50–50 split; it was based on the 2013 distribution of preferences. This was the result given prominence by the Fairfax press (see Kenny 2016; Coorey 2016a). The other result, noted later in his article, showed the Coalition trailing 49–51; it was based on how respondents said they would distribute their preferences (Ipsos 2016). Ipsos, in its final report, had sent Fairfax journalists a mixed message. The report's headline had the Coalition 'edg[ing] forward' since the previous poll; but the text had Labor 'remain[ing] just ahead of the Coalition', based on how respondents distributed their preferences, while 'a hung parliament' was on the cards if preferences followed the 2013 pattern (Ipsos 2016). This way the pollster had all bases covered.

The *Australian* focused not on how accurate the polls had been in estimating the two-party preferred but on how well the polls had estimated the parties' share of the first preferences. On the Monday after the election, with 66 per cent of the two-party vote counted and Labor sitting on 50.2 per cent of the two-party preferred, the *Australian's* own poll (Newspoll) appeared to have been less successful than Ipsos in predicting the two-party preferred, though more successful than the *Australian's* stablemate (Galaxy). This was not the sort of contrast on which the *Australian* wished to dwell. By the *Australian's* reckoning, however, Newspoll had 'correctly predicted the primary vote' (Hudson 2016); the average difference between the official count at the time and Newspoll's estimate for the Coalition, Labor, the Greens and Others was about 0.2 percentage points. Ipsos (1.9 percentage points adrift) and ReachTEL (0.9 points), the two polls with which Newspoll was compared, had not got this close; neither had the Essential poll (0.8 points out) nor Galaxy (0.6 points). Newspoll had not only recorded the lowest average error, it had done best in predicting that the combined vote for the Greens, minor parties and Independents 'would be at the highest level in 82 years' (Hudson 2016). Newspoll's figure of

23 per cent was closer to the 22.8 per cent (finally 23.3 per cent) for these parties recorded by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) (Hudson 2016) than was any other poll.

Weeks later, when the final count had been completed, the Coalition had pulled ahead of Labor, 50.4–49.6, a swing to Labor of 3.1 percentage points two-party preferred. Dennis Shanahan’s boast that ‘Newspoll was the most accurate of the major published polls on both the primary vote and the second preference vote’ (Shanahan 2016) was misleading. Newspoll and Essential, both of which had the Coalition on 50.5, shared the honour for best estimate of ‘the second preference vote’, with Essential putting the Coalition ahead only in its last poll, having had it trailing Labor throughout the campaign. Galaxy and ReachTEL had the Coalition on 51 per cent. Ipsos, the only poll to underestimate the Coalition’s two-party preferred, had it on 49 per cent (stated preferences) or 50 per cent (2013 preferences). Since the primary purpose of a poll is to report responses, not make predictions, the case for preferring the allocation made by the respondents rather than the pollsters is strong. This is reflected in Table 5.1.

In terms of first preferences—the measure against which polls in every other part of the world are held to account—the performance of the polls was ‘more varied’ (Tadros 2016). This was partly because the number of parties on which the pollsters reported varied. Two measures tell us how well the polls did: the average ‘error’ based on the parties for which all the polls provided estimates, and the average based on all the parties for which any of the polls provided estimates (see Table 5.2). The first measure is the more conventional. All the polls estimated the level of support for the Coalition, Labor, the Greens and Others. On this measure, the most accurate poll was Newspoll (the average difference between its estimates and the final results was just 0.2 percentage points), followed by ReachTEL (0.6), Essential (0.8)—notwithstanding Essential’s executive director claiming the number two spot (Lewis 2016)—Galaxy (1.2), Ipsos (1.9), Research Now (2.0) and Morgan (3.4). The polls conducted by Research Now and Morgan were taken a month or so out from the election.

Table 5.1. Final pre-election public opinion polls for the House of Representatives election, national voting intention, 2 July 2016 (percentages)

Poll	Mode	Fieldwork	Lib*/Nat** LNP	ALP	Greens	NXT	FF	CDP	PHON	KAP	Other/ Independent	DK	N	2PP# (LNP)
Essential	Online	27–30 June	(39.5/3) 42.5	34.5	11.5	1.5 <sup>^</sup>					10.5	[6/7]	(1,212)	50.5
Fairfax Ipsos	CATI	26–29 June	40	33	13	2.0					12	[8]	(1,377)	49
Galaxy	Online + Robo	28–29 June	43	36	10						11	[6]	(1,786)	51
Newspoll	Online + Robo	28 June – 1 July	42	35	10						13	[4]	(4,135)	50.5
ReachTEL	Robo	30 June	(38.9/3.9) 42.8	34.6	10.7	1.5 <sup>^</sup>				0.6	9.8	[5.1]	(2,084)	51
Research Now	Online	23 May – 3 June	38	35	11						16	[22]	(1,437)	na
Roy Morgan	F-to-f- +SMS	21–22 & 28–29 May	(34/3.5) 37.5	32.5	13	5				1	11	[2.5]	(3,099)	49
Election		2 July	(37.2/4.9) 42.0	34.7	10.2	1.9	1.5	1.3	1.3	0.5	(3.8/2.8) 6.6			50.4

Notes: Lib: Liberal Party of Australia; Nat: National Party; ALP: Australian Labor Party; NXT: Nick Xenophon Team; FF: Family First; CDP: Christian Democratic Party; PHON: Pauline Hanson's One Nation; KAP: Katter's Australian Party; DK: Don't know/undecided; N: number of respondents; na: not asked or calculated; F-to-f: face-to-face; (); Bracket indicates that the figures are not percentages; []: Square bracket indicates that these percentages are not part of the array that add to 100.

\* Liberal Party + Liberal–National Party (QLD)

\*\* The Nationals + Country Liberals (NT)

<sup>^</sup> South Australian respondents only

## 5. NATIONAL POLLS, MARGINAL SEATS AND CAMPAIGN EFFECTS

# Two-party preferred based on the distribution of minor party preferences at the 2013 election, except for Essential and for Fairfax Ipsos, both of which reported a two-party preferred based on 2013 preferences (50–50 in both cases) while highlighting Labor's position based on which of the two sides respondents said they preferred.

*Question:* 'Have you already voted in the Federal election – which is being held this weekend?' If YES [22%]: 'Which party did you give your first preference to: Liberal [all except QLD], National [all except QLD, SA, TAS], Liberal National [QLD only], Labor, Greens, Nick Xenophon Team [SA only], Family First, Independent or other Party, Prefer not to answer [6%]'. 'Which party did you give your second preference to – out of the Liberal Party and the Labor Party?' 'Which party would you give your second preference to – out of the Liberal Party and the Labor Party?' If NO [78%]: 'To which party will you probably give your first preference vote in the Federal election being held this Saturday? Liberal [all except QLD], National [all except QLD, SA, TAS], Liberal National [QLD only], Labor, Greens, Nick Xenophon Team [SA only], Family First, Independent or other Party, Prefer not to answer [7%]'. 'Which party will you give your second preference to – out of the Liberal Party and the Labor Party?' If not sure; 'Which party are you currently leaning toward? Liberal [all except QLD], National [all except QLD, SA, TAS], Liberal National [QLD only], Labor, Greens, Nick Xenophon Team [SA only], Family First, Independent or other Party, Don't know'. 'Which party will you give your second preference to – out of the Liberal Party and the Labor Party?' (Essential).

Features characteristic of the inter-election period as a whole were not always evident in the final polls. While three firms (Ipsos, Research Now, Roy Morgan) underestimated the Coalition vote—an 'industry-wide' feature of polls conducted between the 2013 and 2016 election (see Jackman and Mansillo, Chapter 6, this volume)—four (Essential, Galaxy, Newspoll, ReachTEL) did not. And while five organisations (Essential, Ipsos, ReachTEL, Research Now, Roy Morgan) overestimated the Green vote—another 'industry-wide' feature of polls conducted over this period—two (Galaxy, Newspoll) did not.

The second measure takes into account the fact that Essential, Morgan and ReachTEL also measured support for the Liberal and National parties separately; that Essential, Ipsos, Morgan and ReachTEL measured support for the Nick Xenophon Team; and that Morgan and ReachTEL measured support for Katter's Australian Party. Essential, Morgan and ReachTEL under-reported support for the National Party—a longstanding problem for the polls, which is why most reported a figure only for the Coalition (see Goot 2012: 92; 2015: 129). Essential and ReachTEL also under-reported support for the Nick Xenophon Team, while Morgan vastly exaggerated it. For Essential and ReachTEL, the average of their differences on this measure was greater, as Table 5.2 shows, than the average of their differences on the more conventional measure; for Essential it was 1.1 percentage points (0.8 on the more conventional measure) and for ReachTEL 0.9 percentage points (0.6). ReachTEL's own analysis showed

it at 0.7 percentage points notwithstanding (ReachTEL 2016a). The performance of Ipsos, by contrast, was better on this measure, as was Morgan's. By either measure, however, every pollster proved better (or no worse) at predicting the two-party preferred.

Table 5.2. Mean differences between the final national polls and the election results, 2016 (percentage points)

Poll	Method	First preferences		2PP
		All parties and Others*	LNP, ALP, Greens, Other	LNP
Essential	Online	1.1 (6)	0.8	+0.1
Fairfax Ipsos	CATI	1.5 (5)	1.9	-1.4
Galaxy	Online + robo	1.2 (4)	1.2	+0.6
Newspoll	Online + robo	0.2 (4)	0.2	+0.1
ReachTEL	Robo	0.9 (6)	0.6	+0.6
Research Now	Online	2.0 (4)	2.0	na
Roy Morgan	Face-to-face +SMS	1.8 (6)	3.4	-1.4
Median		1.2	1.2	+0.1

\*Numbers in brackets indicates the number of results (parties and Independents) reported  
na: not asked or calculated

Source. Derived from Table 5.1, except for Roy Morgan's two-party preferred difference, which derives from a poll taken on 4–5 and 11–12 June 2016 (Roy Morgan Research 2016b: 15, 28).

Immediately after the election, Chris Mitchell, former editor-in-chief of the *Australian*, insisted that Newspoll had not only come closest to the actual result (at the time, Ipsos was closest on the two-party preferred, Newspoll closest on first preferences), but also that in doing so it had maintained 'its three-decade-long reputation as the best and most influential political pollster' (Mitchell 2016). While Newspoll's reputation undoubtedly remains high, it generally has not had the better of its rivals (see Goot 2012: 93–97, for 1987–2010; 2015: 128–33, for 2013). In any event, whether the Newspoll of 2016 was the same poll as the 'three-decade-long' Newspoll is moot. From July 2015, Newspoll outsourced its operation to Galaxy Research where it switched from CATI to a combination of online and IVR; a change that the formal announcement did not note (*Australian* 2015) and something to which the *Australian* never drew attention. The change had important consequences. From marginally underestimating Labor's first preferences, Newspoll now overestimated them (see Jackman and Mansillo, Chapter 6, this volume).



Ipsos, which started polling for Fairfax in October 2014 after Nielsen withdrew, continued to run CATI.<sup>1</sup> Fairfax's various providers had therefore shifted from face-to-face interviewing to CATI over the last 40 years. This raises the question of identity in a different way: can a poll conducted without interviewers be the same, in anything but name, as a poll conducted with interviewers?

Aside from their statistical accuracy, polls are also judged by their ability to predict who will form government. 'So convinced were we about a Coalition win', Peter Martin wrote in Monday's *Sydney Morning Herald*, two days after the election, 'that we paid scant regard to what was happening before our eyes.' Martin was about to repeat a widespread misunderstanding of the relationship between vote shares (two-party preferred) and seat shares—a misunderstanding that was a feature of the ways in which polls were reported throughout the campaign. 'Two days before the election, when the Fairfax Ipsos poll was split 50–50,' he continued, 'eight out of ten voters polled thought the Coalition would win.' With the two-party preferred count showing a 50.2–49.8 split in favour of Labor in the counting after the election and Labor 'steadily' increasing its seat tally, it had become 'theoretically possible' for Labor 'to form a minority government if it could persuade enough of the six successful independent and minor party candidates to join it' (Martin 2016).

But a 50–50 split in the two-party preferred never meant that the chances of Labor and the Coalition forming government were equal if the electoral pendulum was a reliable guide. To win office in its own right, Labor needed a national two-party preferred swing not of 3.5 percentage points (the Coalition had won 53.5 per cent of the two-party preferred in 2013) but of 4 percentage points. A swing of 3.5 percentage points would have yielded a gain of 14 or 15 seats, not the 17 seats Labor needed to secure an absolute majority of 20 seats—if we ignore the fact that three seats in New South Wales (NSW) had become notionally Labor following the 2015 redistribution. A 50–50 split would not only have been insufficient if Labor were to govern in its own right (something Elgood realised), but it also made it more likely that if there were to be a minority government it would be formed by the Coalition rather than by Labor. The final two-party preferred vote of 50.4 for the Coalition and an absolute majority of one meant that the number of extra seats Labor won—11 if we ignore the seats that were notionally Labor already—was precisely the number one might have predicted from the pendulum.

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1 Nielsen had decided that the publicity value of running a poll was no longer worth the cost.

## Exit and day-of-the-election polls

For election night, covered on all the free-to-air stations and on Sky News, only Channel Nine commissioned an exit poll. Conducted by Galaxy in ‘25 Coalition held marginal electorates’, between 8 am and 12.30 pm, the poll showed a swing to Labor of 3.4 percentage points—a 50–50 two-party preferred. The booths selected were in Coalition seats that required swings of up to 4.5 percentage points, and in the three NSW seats that were notionally Labor already. Galaxy solicited respondents’ first preference vote and then calculated a two-party preferred. In doing so, it assumed that Labor would secure ‘80% of Green preferences, 70% of Nick Xenophon preferences and just over half from all other minor parties’. With Labor ‘picking up as many as 14 Coalition held seats’—eight in NSW, two in Queensland (QLD), one in South Australia (SA), two in Tasmania (TAS)—this left the result ‘in the balance’ and ‘likely to be tight’ (Galaxy 2016). Galaxy did well. Its error, two-party preferred, across the seats it polled was just one tenth of a percentage point. On first preferences, it was out by an average of just 0.6 percentage points for all parties or an average of 0.5 percentage points if we consider just the Coalition, Labor, Greens and Others.

Sky News also commissioned a poll for its election night coverage, but it was neither an exit poll nor a day of the election poll, strictly speaking. Conducted by OmniPoll, a market research firm run by the former CEO of Newspoll, Martin O’Shannessy, the poll straddled the day of the election and the day before the election. The poll failed to divulge how its respondents had voted or intended to vote; more remarkably, Sky News did not require it. The information was gathered but not published because the budget allowed for only 500 interviews, a base the pollster deemed too small to produce a result that was sufficiently reliable.

Rather than try to second-guess the election result before the formal count had begun—the traditional payoff for television stations covering the results—OmniPoll confined itself to reporting three quite different things. One was the issues that respondents rated ‘very important’. The second was whether respondents were more strongly influenced by their ‘liking of the party’ they had voted for (or intended to vote for) or their ‘disliking of the other parties’. And the third was the party that respondents thought would win. The advantage of reporting the answers to these questions and not those to the voting question was that both

OmniPoll and Sky News avoided the damaging publicity that would have followed had it misreported the vote. Prudent though its decision with a sample of just 500 might have been, Omnipoll had not reported voting intention figures even when its samples were more than twice as large. This meant that none of its polls ever attracted much attention.

## Seats in play

‘Despite elections being awash with polls’, one advertising executive remarked after the 2013 election, ‘very few are relevant because most are national polls’ and ‘[i]t is always in the marginal seats that voter intention matters’ (Madigan 2014: 40). This is mistaken. In 2016, the number of single-seat polls far outnumbered the number of national polls; the same was true in 2013 (Goot 2015: 133). A hallmark of campaign professionals is not just their insistence that it is the swings in the marginal seats that determine the outcome but also that it is the campaign in the marginals that matters (Loughnane 2015: 199; Mills 2015: 123), even when national swings that predict the outcome perfectly, as in 2013, show this is not necessarily so (Goot 2016: 77). Media budgets, however, even more constrained than in 2013, made the commissioning of additional polls in 2016 more difficult, even with polls as inexpensive to run as robo polls (Goot 2014). That the race was sure to be tighter than last time made little difference.

In 2013, the media commissioned 83 polls in single seats (Goot 2015: 133). This time the number was 66. The number of polling organisations involved was fewer as well: just three—Galaxy in 29 seats; Newspoll, 13; ReachTEL, 24—down from five in 2013. And for the first time all the commissioned polls were robos; no media outlet was prepared to pay for interviewers.

Predictably, there was no consensus over which seats to poll, a reflection of the diversity of audience interests as much as it was a judgement of what seats were worth watching. Of the 40 seats polled, only 10 were polled by more than one organisation. A third of the seats polled were polled more than once: three were polled four times (Lindsay and Macarthur in NSW, Corangamite in Victoria (VIC)); two (Dobell, NSW and Bass, TAS) were polled three times; 13 were polled twice (Banks, Reid and Gilmore, NSW; Dunkley, VIC; Brisbane, Capricornia, Herbert and Longman, QLD; Mayo, SA; Braddon, Denison, Franklin and Lyons, TAS).

The seats most vulnerable on paper were not necessarily the seats most frequently polled; some of the most vulnerable were not polled at all. Of the 25 Liberal–National Party seats held on margins (two-party preferred) of less than six percentage points (the definition of a ‘marginal’ seat used by the Australian Electoral Commission), 18 were polled and seven were not. The seats not polled included Solomon (NT), where limited Indigenous access to landlines may have put off some (but cf. Walsh 2016); Eden–Monaro, a ‘bellwether’ seat, as well as Macquarie and Page (NSW); La Trobe (VIC); and Forde (QLD). Held by margins of 4.5 percentage points or less, these seats were either not considered to be in play or written-off by the media as certain losses; Solomon, Eden–Monaro and Macquarie would fall to Labor. Ten of the Coalition’s seats *not* classified as ‘marginal’ were also polled. Of these, Herbert and Longman (QLD) would fall to Labor and Mayo (SA) to the Nick Xenophon Team. Nine Labor seats, including the notionally Labor seat of Dobell (NSW), were polled too; Chisholm (VIC) would be the only one Labor lost. Two other seats that were polled were ‘safe’, though not for either the Coalition or Labor: Denison (TAS) held by Andrew Wilkie; Kennedy (QLD) held by Bob Katter.

There was nothing inherently odd about any of this. Introducing the pendulum to Australian politics, Malcolm Mackerras had emphasised that seats could swing in both directions; that the seats requiring the smallest swings to change hands were not necessarily the seats most likely to fall; and that the seats requiring the largest swings were not necessarily the safest (Mackerras 1972: 5). The only thing odd was to describe all the polls in single seats as ‘marginal seat’ polls.

Who polled in which seats, for whom and when? The first six of Galaxy’s single-seat polls were conducted in the first two days of the campaign, 10–11 May, for the *Daily Telegraph*; another two, a day later, were conducted for the *Courier-Mail*. Galaxy’s next poll, for the *Advertiser*, was not conducted until 15 June. During the middle weeks of the campaign, none of News Corp’s metropolitan mastheads commissioned any single-seat polling. In mid-June, Newspoll did single-seat polls for the *Australian*. Most of Galaxy’s single-seat polls were conducted a week later, 20–22 June (four seats for the *Herald Sun*, six for the *Courier-Mail*, two for the *Advertiser*) or 21–22 June (when it re-polled the original six for the *Daily Telegraph*). Another two seats, Adelaide and Port Adelaide, were polled for the *Advertiser* on 28–29 June, the last Tuesday and Wednesday—in time for Friday’s paper on election eve.

ReachTEL started and finished its single-seat polling at roughly the same time as Galaxy, but a higher proportion of its polls were conducted at the beginning and in the middle of the campaign. It polled five seats on Thursday 12 May for the *Mercury* (the only News Corp masthead to commission polls from a company other than Galaxy), Macarthur (NSW) the following Thursday for *7 News*, and Corangamite (VIC) for *7 News* the Thursday after that. On Thursday 9 June, ReachTEL produced eight more polls, seven of them for Fairfax—two in NSW and VIC, and one in each of the other mainland States; halfway through a very long campaign, they helped Fairfax inject something of interest into its reporting. A week later, ReachTEL polled Hasluck (WA) for *7 News*. On Thursday 23 June, it conducted another six polls (covering the five seats in TAS it had polled on 12 May plus Cowper in NSW) with a final poll in Chisholm on Thursday 30 June. Polling on Thursday meant the results were ready for the last Friday evening’s TV news or for the Saturday papers.

Aside from their news value, how useful were these polls as guides to the results? The short answer: not very. One measure of their success is the extent to which they picked the winners in these seats. On this measure, Newspoll did best and ReachTEL worst. In the 13 seats it polled, Newspoll predicted the winner in nine. In the 23 seats Galaxy polled, it had the eventual winner ahead in 15. In the 21 seats ReachTEL polled for either its media clients or the New South Wales Teachers Federation (2016), and for which it calculated a two-party or two-candidate preferred (it failed to do so in Macarthur), it picked the winner in just 10—roughly the number it would have got right had it assigned the two most likely candidates to win or lose at random.

A better measure is the difference between the estimates provided by the polls and the final result, *two-party preferred*. Here, Galaxy did best; Newspoll, worst. But the best was not very impressive and the worst was pretty poor. For Galaxy, the median difference across its 23 polls was 2.1 percentage points, the mean 3.0 points, with the differences ranging from 0.1 percentage points (Corangamite) to 12.3 percentage points (Port Adelaide). For ReachTEL, the median difference for its 21 polls was 2.6 percentage points, the mean 3.3 percentage points, the differences ranging from 0.6 percentage points (Deakin) to 8.3 percentage points (Macquarie). Across the 13 seats polled by Newspoll, the median difference was 4.1 percentage points, the mean 4.0, the best being 0.1 percentage points in Robertson, the worst Macarthur (8.3), Bass (8.1) and Batman (7.6). State by State, too, the performance of each of the pollsters was very uneven.

Table 5.3. Differences between polls' estimate of party support and the final vote, single seats, campaign period, 2016 (percentage points)

Poll	Dates	N	Two-party preferred		LNP, ALP, Greens, Other		All entities	
			Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
Galaxy	20–29 June*	21	3.0	2.1	2.6	2.4	2.4	2.2
Morgan	Jan – 11–12 June	31	na	na	5.0	5.3	4.7	5.1
Newspoll	13–15 June	13	4.0	4.1	2.9	2.9	2.9	2.9
ReachTEL	12 May–30 June†	21	3.3	2.6	na	na	na	na

Note. Where a firm conducted more than one poll in a seat only the poll conducted closest to the election is included.

\* Excludes Herbert and Leichhardt (QLD) polled 12 May; with these two seats included, the mean for LNP, ALP, Greens, Other is 3.3 and the median is 2.6 percentage points

† Excludes Macarthur (NSW) for which no two-party preferred was reported

Source. David Briggs, pers. comm., 23 October 2017, for Galaxy and Newspoll; Roy Morgan Research 2016c, 2016d; ReachTEL 2016c, 2016d, 2016e, 2016f; Clark 2016; Nicholas Clark, pers. comm., 1 September 2016; Mark Kenny, pers. comm., 2 August 2016.

The best measure—the most direct—is the average difference in *first preferences*. On this measure, the results are even less impressive. Galaxy estimated the level of support for the Coalition, Labor, the Greens and Others. The average difference between its measure and the actual results was 3.3 percentage points, the median difference 2.6 points. The mean was blown out by the very early polls (12 May) in Herbert, where the ‘Other’ vote was underestimated by 28 percentage points, and Leichhardt, where it was underestimated by 14.8 percentage points, thanks largely to Galaxy’s not having either Pauline Hanson’s One Nation (PHON) or Katter’s Australian Party (KAP) on the list of parties from which respondents could choose. In neither case, however, did this appear to have any impact on Galaxy’s estimate of the two-party preferred. If we exclude these two polls, the mean difference drops to 2.6 and the median to 2.4 percentage points. In 14 seats, Galaxy estimated support for some of the minor parties and Others separately. If we use this measure (and exclude Herbert and Leichhardt), the average difference between Galaxy’s measure for every party (including Others) and the final figures was 2.4 percentage points with a median of 2.2 percentage points. For Newspoll, the corresponding means and medians were 2.9 percentage points, regardless of whether the measure was based on Labor, LNP, Greens and Other, or on all the parties for which Newspoll furnished figures. ReachTEL did not always produce comparable first preferences; it showed how the ‘don’t knows’ might divide after being pressed to name the party to which they were ‘leaning’, but only Fairfax asked it to add these to its initial results to provide an overall distribution of its first preferences figures.

Morgan also released figures for a number of seats based on a combination of SMS texting and face-to-face interviewing. These figures proved to be the least reliable of all. The first tranche, which reported the responses from 1,951 South Australian voters between 2–3 April and 11–12 June, covered 11 seats (about 180 interviews per seat) where Morgan expected the Nick Xenophon Team to do well and to ‘nick’ the Coalition seats of Mayo and Grey (Roy Morgan Research 2016c). The second, derived from the Greens’ 20 ‘best performing electorates’ in 2013, was based on 6,283 respondents (about 310 per seat) contacted between January and 11–12 June; it led Morgan to predict that Labor would lose Batman in Victoria (Roy Morgan Research 2016d). Morgan’s errors were not confined to poor predictions. Its first preferences figures (it avoided the two-party preferred) were woefully poor guides. As Table 5.3 shows, both

the mean error (5.0 or 4.7 percentage points, depending on which parties one includes) and the median error (5.3 or 5.1 percentage points) were twice the size of those recorded by Galaxy seat-by-seat or by Newspoll.

Why such large errors? The time that elapsed between the taking of some of the polls and the holding of the election made a difference. However, leaving aside those cases where the time elapsed was considerable, the late polls were not necessarily more accurate than the early polls (see also Jackman and Mansillo, Chapter 6, this volume), the time between the taking of the polls and the casting of votes was reduced to some extent by the increased frequency of early voting. Sample size, almost certainly, played a bigger part. The number of respondents interviewed by Galaxy ranged from 502 to 714, the corresponding figures for ReachTEL being 610 to 836. Morgan's samples were smaller still; even so, '[s]tated confidence intervals' were 'far too small' (ibid.). No doubt, trouble drawing samples also played a part; robo-polling is restricted to landlines and oversamples women and older voters, those most frequently at home and most likely to answer the phone. That few seats were polled more than once or by more than one pollster cannot have helped either; the way pollsters adjust their raw figures in national polls depends in part on their being able to operate in an information-rich environment, allowing them to look back to how particular demographic groups responded in earlier polls and across at the published figures in other polls.

## The Senate

A Senate with a substantial crossbench that the government would struggle to control was as widely anticipated as the return of the government. Yet, while media outlets commissioned polls to determine the likely outcome in the House, they commissioned not a single poll on the Senate. One reason was the cost; it always has been. Elections for the Senate are State based; Senate polling, done properly, requires separate samples in each State. Another reason may have been the complexity of the ballot. The number of parties nominating candidates for the Senate is very large. In NSW, a ballot paper had to be fashioned to make room for over 40 parties and Independents; in no State did the 'tablecloth' list fewer than 22. Moreover, where a ballot may require six places to be filled (let alone 12), with the final place (or places) to be determined on the basis of complex preference flows, converting poll numbers into seats has



become fiendishly difficult. But the main reason for the dearth of polls was the lack of interest. No matter the Senate's importance, interest in Senate elections has always run a poor second to elections for the House.

The Australia Institute was responsible for the only poll released on the Senate. Conducted online between 23 May and 3 June, the poll, conducted by Research Now, reported the level of support for each of 10 parties (including Independents) among 1,427 respondents Australia-wide. Compared with the election results four weeks later, it overestimated support for Labor and the Greens, underestimating support for minor parties and Independents (Oquist 2016). It estimated support for the Liberals (34 per cent) and Nationals (2 per cent) at 36 per cent (the Coalition secured 35.2 per cent of the vote), Labor at 33 per cent (29.8 per cent), the Greens at 12 per cent (8.7 per cent), PHON at 5 per cent (4.3 per cent), the Nick Xenophon Team at 4 per cent (3.3 per cent), the Jacquie [sic] Lambie Network at 1 per cent (0.5 per cent), the Palmer United Party at 0 per cent (0.2 per cent), the Glen Lazarus Team at 0 per cent (0.3 per cent), Independents and Others at 8 per cent (17.8 per cent).

The underestimation of the vote for the minor parties, and the failure to conduct the poll State by State, led to a series of conclusions that were of limited value (Oquist 2016): that the proportion intending to just vote 1 'could lead to a big exhaustion of votes' (it did not; the informal vote was less than 4 per cent); the 'big exhaustion ... could mean last seats will be won with low primary vote' (a predictable outcome, regardless of any polling); 'Hanson likely to be elected in Queensland' (not one but two PHON candidates were elected in Queensland); 'Xenophon a chance of picking up seats outside South Australia' (he was not); 'Andrew Bartlett (Greens) a chance of returning to Parliament' (Bartlett was never in contention given the Greens' vote); and 'Coalition may require either Hanson or Greens votes in Senate to pass legislation' (since the Greens lost a seat, neither would prove sufficient).

## Reflections

Post-election, polls are largely assessed on their predictive value. In 2016, Newspoll's estimates were the best; Galaxy finished equal third (two-party preferred) or fourth (first preferences measured in two ways), though its exit poll was about as good as it gets. Perhaps, one rival suggested,

Newspoll did best because it polled last (Lewis 2016). Polling as close to an election as possible helps pick up any late swing. It also gives pollsters a ‘last-mover advantage’ (Goot 2012: 107), notwithstanding the risk that everyone gets it wrong. During the 1959 British election, one market research firm, appearing to be involved in producing polls for more than one brand, caused a stir (Butler and Rose 1960: 99–100). At this election, having Galaxy Research produce both the Galaxy poll and Newspoll was barely noticed.

Since estimates of the two-party preferred have become the pre-eminent measure of the vote (Goot 2016), it is important to note that while the estimates offered by some polls (Galaxy, Newspoll and ReachTEL) were based on how preferences flowed at the last election, those collected by Essential were based on respondents’ own reports, while those presented by Ipsos were based on both. Ideally, we should be able to compare two-party preferred results arrived at in the same way; preferably, the way respondents imagine they will distribute them rather than the way they were distributed at the last election (when some of the small parties did not even exist). Unless we can compare like with like, comparisons across polls remain flawed. The lower priority attached to how well the polls did in estimating the parties’ first preferences is a corollary of the focus on the two-party preferred. So, too, is the continuing lack of interest in commissioning polls on the Senate; an election to which the two-party preferred does not apply for political reasons, not technical ones (Goot 2016: 83).

That the national polls did well, especially in relation to the two-party preferred, is important; Wayne Errington and Peter van Onselen’s (2016: 150) lament that ‘published polls aren’t what they once were’ is misleading. Whether the accuracy of pre-election polls is a generalisable test of how well the polls measure party support between elections is a separate matter. The potential not just for a last-mover advantage but also for ‘herding’ (Linzer 2012) is one thing that sets elections apart. Another is the way elections concentrate respondents’ minds. This does not necessarily make polls in a non-election period ‘hopelessly hypothetical’ (Brent 2016), but it may mean that they need to be read differently. In addition, ahead of the vote, final samples tend to be uncommonly large. Newspoll more than doubled its final number to 4,135 (its sample size for its previous poll was 1,713), Galaxy boosted its sample to 1,786 (previously, 1,390) and Essential increased theirs to 1,212 (previously, 1,000). Only two polls did not increase their samples: Fairfax Ipsos and ReachTEL slightly reduced

them. Even if national polls are good at measuring party support, it does not follow that they are good at measuring anything else, whether during the campaign or in the inter-election period more broadly. But that's another story.

As for the single-seat polls—'marginal seats' is a misnomer for a practice that takes in seats that are not marginal and ignores seats that are—their accuracy did not become a topic in the media's post-election debate; as the pollsters knew, they were never likely to become a topic. That the polling in single seats was overlooked in the wash-up was just as well since their performance was far from impressive. Except for their value to the media as attention grabbers, polls with small numbers in 'battleground' seats remain dubious additions to polls nationwide. State-wide polls, whatever their commercial merits, would make more political sense. They would not satisfy an editor's interest in 'bellwether' seats, seats very narrowly held or other seats of special interest; however, by cannibalising the samples used in single-seat surveys, they would throw a more reliable light on State differences than national polls do—differences that, not for the first time, cancelled out in the national swing of 2016.

A close result, even a one-seat majority, which could have been inferred from simply knowing what the national swing would be (two-party preferred), raises fundamental questions not about marginal seat polls but about marginal seat campaigning. In *net* terms, local campaigns at this election, as in the last, would seem to have counted for little. Labor's marginal seat research conducted in the final week of the campaign, Troy Bramston argues, shows how 'saving Medicare' was used with 'devastating effectiveness' in NSW 'in winning Lindsay, Macarthur and Paterson'. The evidence he advances is the proportion of respondents in these seats mentioning some variant of 'saving Medicare', in research commissioned by the Labor Party, as 'the most important factor in deciding their vote' (Bramston 2016). But note that in Lindsay, where the two-party preferred swing to Labor was 4.1 percentage points (not much greater than the State-wide swing of 3.8 percentage points), 31 per cent nominated 'saving Medicare' (whether volunteered or from a list is not clear). In Paterson, where the swing was 10.4 percentage points, more than twice as great, the proportion (28 per cent) that had 'protecting Medicare' as the 'most important factor' was about the same. However, in Macarthur, where the proportion mentioning 'Medicare and bulk-billing' (42 per cent) was much greater, the swing (11.7 percentage points) was little greater than in Paterson. Evidence of 'devastating effectiveness'? Leaving aside

the question of whether the issue drew voters to Labor or whether the campaign simply gave Labor voters an issue they could name, the match between the number of times the issue was cited and the size of the swing is not very close.

If Labor's 'Medicare' was as successful as the conventional wisdom assumes (see, for example, Aston 2016; Errington and van Onselen 2016: 120, 179–80; but cf. Street 2016: 319–20), and as strategists on both sides appear to believe (see Aston 2016; Massola 2016), it can only have succeeded by neutralising some equally sizeable advantage the Coalition must have enjoyed before the scare campaign; otherwise, the Coalition would have defied the pendulum and won a disproportionate share of the seats. However, there is no clear evidence of the Coalition enjoying any advantage in the marginals prior to 'Medicare'. If they did, there is no evidence from the campaign that they thought Labor had reduced it. '[T]he Coalition appeared genuinely confident', Errington and van Onselen reported at the end of the campaign, 'that it could win' not 76 seats that might have been predicted from its share of the two-party preferred vote but 'somewhere between 79 and 83 seats' (2016: 151; see also Di Stefano 2016: 182, 194, 205, 208–209).

If 'Medicare' worked in marginal seats, it is difficult to say why it would not have worked nationally. The Omnipoll for the election-night coverage on Sky News, in which more respondents named 'health and Medicare' than named any other issue (from a list of seven) as 'very important' to their vote—a result said to have 'sent a chill down the spines of those watching at Coalition HQ' (Di Stefano 2016: 215)—was conducted not in marginal seats but nationally. (The Galaxy exit poll for Channel Nine, conducted mainly in Coalition marginals, also had 'health and Medicare' as the number one issue from a list of 11; Galaxy 2016.) Yet, the evidence from national polls is that there was very little movement in voting intention between the dissolution of the Parliament on 21 March and the day of the election, 2 July. If there was a small rise in Labor support in the last month of the campaign, there was also a small rise in the Coalition's support and in the Coalition's two-party preferred vote (see Jackman and Mansillo, Chapter 6, this volume, Figure 6.3; neither rise was statistically significant). Asked weekly by ReachTEL, between 2 June and 30 June, which of seven issues would influence their voting decision 'most', the proportion of respondents that nominated 'health services' changed hardly at all: 21 per cent at the beginning of the period, nine days before Bob Hawke's intervention started the 'Medicare', 23 per cent at

the end. Over the same period, the proportion nominating ‘management of the economy’ rose from 24 per cent to 30 per cent (ReachTEL 2016b). If the Liberal Party’s polling encouraged the government to believe it might be returned with a more comfortable majority on this evidence it was not because it missed the damage wrought by the ‘Mediscare’.

For an alternative explanation of how many seats were won or lost and which seats they were, we need to come to grips with the electoral forces at work nationally, including the slide in support for the Prime Minister from around March 2016 (Wikipedia 2016), but almost certainly involving other factors that, except in very close contests, make election results predictable from the outset of the campaign (Gelman and King 1993). In addition, we need to consider regional factors, including the electoral standing of the various State governments (Street 2016: 298), and State-based or regionally based differences in economic wellbeing. For Labor to win the six most marginal Coalition seats at the next election, it may need (as Shorten insists) to win just 2,000 extra votes (Coorey 2016b). It is all but inconceivable that Labor could win these seats, however, without winning many times this number of votes across the nation, including the corresponding States.

The paradox of the pendulum is that if it points campaigners to seats that they target, so that they win more seats than could be predicted from a national swing, then the pendulum does not work; but if it does work—as it did this time and it has, by and large, before (Goot 2016: 76, 86)—then we may have to accept the conclusion that when everyone targets the same seats, neither one side nor the other is likely to prevail. Yes, some seats will be won or saved. However, an equal number of seats is likely to be lost. In individual seats it may be only ‘the last-minute scare’—when there is not enough time for the other side ‘to learn of the tactic and denounce it as an outrageous lie’—that has any hope of being decisive (MacCallum 2002: 105–6); in 2016, ‘Mediscare’ was denounced before election day. On the most radical view, even the best-researched and best-resourced marginal-seat campaigns that meet no opposition may prove futile: ‘energetic’ campaigns run locally may be no more efficacious than ‘idle’ or ‘incompetent’ ones (Butler 1997: 235; but cf. Studlar and McAllister 1994: 402–4). It is the possibility that one side can prevail in the marginals, defying the pendulum, which keeps campaigners enthralled and pollsters floundering in their wake.

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# 6

## The Campaign that Wasn't: Tracking Public Opinion over the 44th Parliament and the 2016 Election Campaign

Simon Jackman and Luke Mansillo

Elections are a game of inches where political parties attempt to move the needle of public opinion just enough to get their candidates across the line when all the ballots are counted. It is a high-stakes game that political parties play: parliamentary careers are on the line, as is the public policy trajectory the nation will take—both with profound consequences for citizens. Polls are often a source of evidence with which to praise or admonish various campaign strategies and tactics in pre-election prognostication and post-election soul-searching.<sup>1</sup> Campaign directors, strategists, pollsters and the candidates themselves are often hailed as geniuses, dunces, heroes or villains in narratives about how elections are won or lost (Halperin and Heilemann 2010; Williams 1997). Generally, political scientists tend to be far more circumspect than journalists and commentators about the effects of campaigns on election outcomes. Decades of scholarship have shown that voter preferences are less pliable than is often supposed, the effects of political advertisements are at

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<sup>1</sup> The analytic and communication tools available to contemporary political campaigns (Issenberg 2012) regularly go under the microscope, as do the power of gaffes, mishaps and 'cut through' or unscripted moments, as well as the media portrayals of those events (e.g. Shorten 2004; Tiffen 2008).

best small and fleeting, and campaign efforts by the major parties often neutralise one another.<sup>2</sup> Many journalists and commentators have offered campaign-based explanations for the closeness of the 2016 Australian elections. For example, Labor's 'Medicare' strategy late in the campaign is often invoked in explaining the narrowness of the Coalition's victory. Wayne Errington and Peter van Onselen make the unqualified assertion that '[u]ndoubtedly, Labor's disingenuous scare campaign resonated with the electorate' (2016: 180).

In this chapter we present an alternative view, closer to the scholarly consensus about campaign effects. We examine change in public opinion during the 44th Parliament, providing context for movement in voting intentions during the 2016 election campaign period. We also examine the quality of seat-specific polling ahead of the 2016 election.

We make four major findings:

1. Large movements in voter support occurred well before the formal campaign period, around events such as the September 2015 leadership spill that resulted in Malcolm Turnbull's ascension to the prime ministership and the 2014 Budget.
2. In the formal election campaign, there was relatively little movement in voting intentions, which was consistent with the major party campaigns neutralising each other. Contrary to popular narratives about the campaign, movements in voting intentions during the formal campaign period were smaller in magnitude than at other comparable periods during the 44th Parliament.
3. Polling organisations systematically overestimate Greens voting intentions, but underestimate Labor voting intentions. Two-party preferred voting intentions estimates were accurate when averaged across public polling. It would seem that a small, industry-wide underestimate of the Coalition vote was offset by the industry-wide overestimate of the Green vote, yielding an accurate estimate of the two-party preferred division of the vote.
4. Seat-specific polling underestimates Labor, but overestimates support for the Greens.

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2 Reviews of the sizeable academic literature on campaign effects appear in Shanto Iyengar and Adam Simon (2000), D. Sunshine Hillygus (2010) and John Sides and Lynn Vavreck (2014).

In general, seat-specific polls are subject to substantial biases, so much so that the typical seat-specific poll should be treated as if it had just one-sixth the nominal, stated sample size of the poll.

## Data and methodology

The national-level polling data analysed here span the period between the 2013 and 2016 elections. The data collection includes virtually all polls in the public domain between the elections.<sup>3</sup> Only polls with known fieldwork dates and known sample sizes are analysed. There are 399 national polls in this period with primary vote estimates and 400 polls with two-party preferred estimates.<sup>4</sup> There are 10 de facto polling organisations responsible for the polls analysed (also see Goot, Chapter 5, this volume). Newspoll and Galaxy are treated as two separate polling organisations for the purposes of this analysis.<sup>5</sup>

Each poll is a snapshot of opinion, captured during a short temporal window. The precision of a poll is an increasing function of its sample size. For all but one day every three years (election day), the Australian public's voting intentions are not directly observed. The rest of the time, voting intentions are measured imperfectly through polls that change over time. In this chapter, we estimate the true state of public opinion underlying published polls with a statistical model (Jackman 2005, 2009). The model treats voting intentions as a hidden or latent state and uses what is visible—the published results of opinion polls—to recover the trajectory of voting intentions between the 2013 and 2016 federal elections.

By combining polls, the model increases the amount of information available for estimating latent public opinion, thus increasing the precision of the resulting estimates. By estimating and correcting for biases specific

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3 We thank William Bove for sharing data collected for *Crikey*, enabling data quality checks for missing data and data entry errors. We thank Murray Goot for graciously crosschecking our data collection with his own collection of polling data. Responsibility for the accuracy of the data remains our responsibility.

4 The difference between the two arises from an additional Morgan poll conducted immediately after the 2016 Budget, which published an estimate for the two-party preferred vote but did not publish primary voting intention estimates.

5 The contract that News Corp had with Cudex, a joint venture between News Corp and the British public relations firm WPP to conduct Newspoll-branded public-opinion polling research for the *Australian*, was transferred to Galaxy Research in July 2015 (*Australian* 2015). The Galaxy-run Newspoll adopts a mixture of robo-calling and online panel sampling techniques (Stirton 2015).

to polling organisations ('house effects'), the model improves the estimate of latent voting intentions. We refer to bias not as favouritism, a partiality or prejudice for or against a political party, nor do we assert or imply any normative quality or the intention of any polling industry participant to change the content or appearance of their polling results (i.e. fabricate their research). Rather, we borrow from statistics our meaning of bias.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the model has a dynamic component. This acknowledges the fact that voting intentions change over election campaigns and especially over the three-year term of a parliament. The model includes 'jumps' or discontinuities for events that can reasonably be expected to rapidly (if not instantaneously) move opinion. The model's estimates are further improved by anchoring voting intention estimates to the 2013 and 2016 election results; as on election days, voting intentions are not latent, but are directly observed.

Our model for poll results is

$$y_i \sim N(\zeta_{t,i} + \delta_{j,i}, \sigma^2)$$

where  $y_i$  is a proportion, the estimate of a party's vote share in a published poll  $i$ ;  $\zeta_{t,i}$  is the true but latent level of support for the party on day  $t$ , the median date of field work;  $\delta_{j,i}$  is the bias of polling organisation  $j$ , the polling organisation fielding poll  $i$ ; and  $\sigma^2$  is the variance of the error of poll  $i$ , a decreasing function of  $n_i$ , the known sample size of poll  $i$ . We set  $\sigma^2 = (y_i \times (1 - y_i))/n_i$ . The normal distribution is justified by standard large sample arguments about the form of sampling error.

The dynamic component of the model is

$$\zeta_t \sim N(\zeta_{t-1} + \gamma_k D_{k,t}, \omega^2), t = 2, \dots, T$$

where  $t$  indexes the 1,038 days between the 2013 and 2016 elections (inclusive). The model is a random walk in which today's voting intentions  $\zeta_t$  will be equal to the previous day's voting intentions  $\zeta_{t-1}$  absent any polling information to the contrary (which enters the model via the first equation explained above). The  $\gamma_k$  parameters are 'jumps', measuring the extent to which event  $k$  disrupts the trajectory of voting intentions;  $D_{k,t}$  is a binary indicator, set to one on the day that event  $k$  occurs and zero otherwise.

6 The bias function of an estimator is the difference between an estimator's expected value and the true value of the parameter being estimated. If the difference between an estimate and the true value is zero, the estimates are called unbiased. Bias is an objective property of an estimator.

The variance term  $\omega^2$  measures the day-to-day variability or volatility of voting intentions.  $\xi_1$  and  $\xi_T$  are set to the 2013 and 2016 election results, respectively, for a given party.<sup>7</sup> We specify two potential jump events: Turnbull's ascension to the prime ministership on 15 September 2015 and the prorogation of parliament on 21 March 2016.<sup>8</sup>

## Voting intentions 2013–16

Before the 2016 formal election campaign there was considerable movement in voting intentions. Figures 6.1 and 6.2 summarise these movements for Labor, the Coalition and Green first preferences and for Coalition two-party preferred voting intentions. Large, electorally consequential movements in voting intentions occurred within months of the Abbott government coming to power, and following the September 2015 Liberal leadership spill.

There was a steady decline in Coalition primary voting intentions from the 2013 election result until the presentation of the 2014 Budget on 13 May. Before the 2014 Budget, the Coalition's primary vote fell below its poor showing in the 2007 landslide result (42.09 per cent) and did not recover until Turnbull took the leadership. This is in contrast to much commentary that cites the 2014 Budget for the Abbott government's woes (see e.g. Kirby 2014; Makinda 2015; Marston 2014; Ryan 2015). The Coalition's primary vote remained little changed save a few small fluctuations, seldom statistically significant.

After Turnbull became prime minister in September 2015, the Coalition's primary vote briefly moved well above its 2013 result (45.55 per cent). There was an immediate 5 per cent increase in the Coalition primary vote the day Turnbull became prime minister (see Figure 6.2); this

7 The normal distribution is chosen largely for convenience; other assumptions about the form of the day-to-day innovations might be plausible—for example, a heavy-tailed distribution such as the t-distribution. The 'jump' component of the model captures some of the more obvious sudden or abrupt changes in public opinion, such that the remaining innovations are probably well accommodated by the normal model assumed here. Alternative distributional forms for the day-to-day innovations are a topic for another paper.

8 Breaks were tested for the opening of parliament, the three federal budgets, the first sitting day of parliament following the summer recess, and the start of the 'Mediscare' campaign initiated with a television advertisement featuring former Labor PM Bob Hawke on 11 June (ALP 2016). There was little difference to the fit of the model and these additional break points were dropped from the model reported here.

continued to improve until January. The Coalition's renewed popularity had a half-life of about four months—the 8 per cent gain in January from the leadership change dropped to a 4 per cent advantage by April. There was a net improvement (3 per cent) to the Coalition's vote from Tony Abbott's defenestration until the prorogation of parliament in March 2016. Or when viewed from the peak, there was a 5 per cent fall in Coalition voting intentions, from Christmas 2015 until the prorogation of parliament. Leadership changes have been quite frequent in recent Australian political history, with large boosts in a party's electoral standing in the polls followed by steady decline to the status quo ante or lower. The reasons for the rapid reversion in voting intentions after leadership changes are not well understood.<sup>9</sup>

The Labor primary vote had an immediate bounce following the 2013 election with another improvement shortly after the first parliamentary sitting in 2013. There was no significant bounce in Labor support from the 2014 Budget; Australian Labor Party (ALP) vote intentions remained unchanged from their position in December 2013. When Turnbull replaced Abbott, there was an immediate 3.8 per cent fall in Labor voting intentions (see Figure 6.2), followed by a further 2 per cent decline in the next two months. From January until the prorogation, Labor gained 4 per cent more vote share, the inverse of the Coalition's loss.

The Greens' primary vote moved reasonably slowly over the life of the parliament. The Greens won 8.65 per cent of House of Representatives first preferences in 2013. Our analysis suggests a slow improvement in the Greens' electoral position over 2014, but especially over 2015—noting that Richard Di Natale became the Greens leader on 6 May 2015. By the time of the Turnbull ascension, we estimate the Greens had 12 per cent of first preferences or nearly a 50 per cent improvement on their 2013 result. After Turnbull became prime minister, Green support fell by about 1 per cent (see Figure 6.2) with roughly another 1 per cent ebbing away through 2016 to the 10.23 per cent Greens first preference result recorded at the 2 July election.

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9 We agree that an update to the literature on leadership effects on Australian public opinion is probably warranted (McAllister 2003; Kefford 2013).



6. THE CAMPAIGN THAT WASN'T

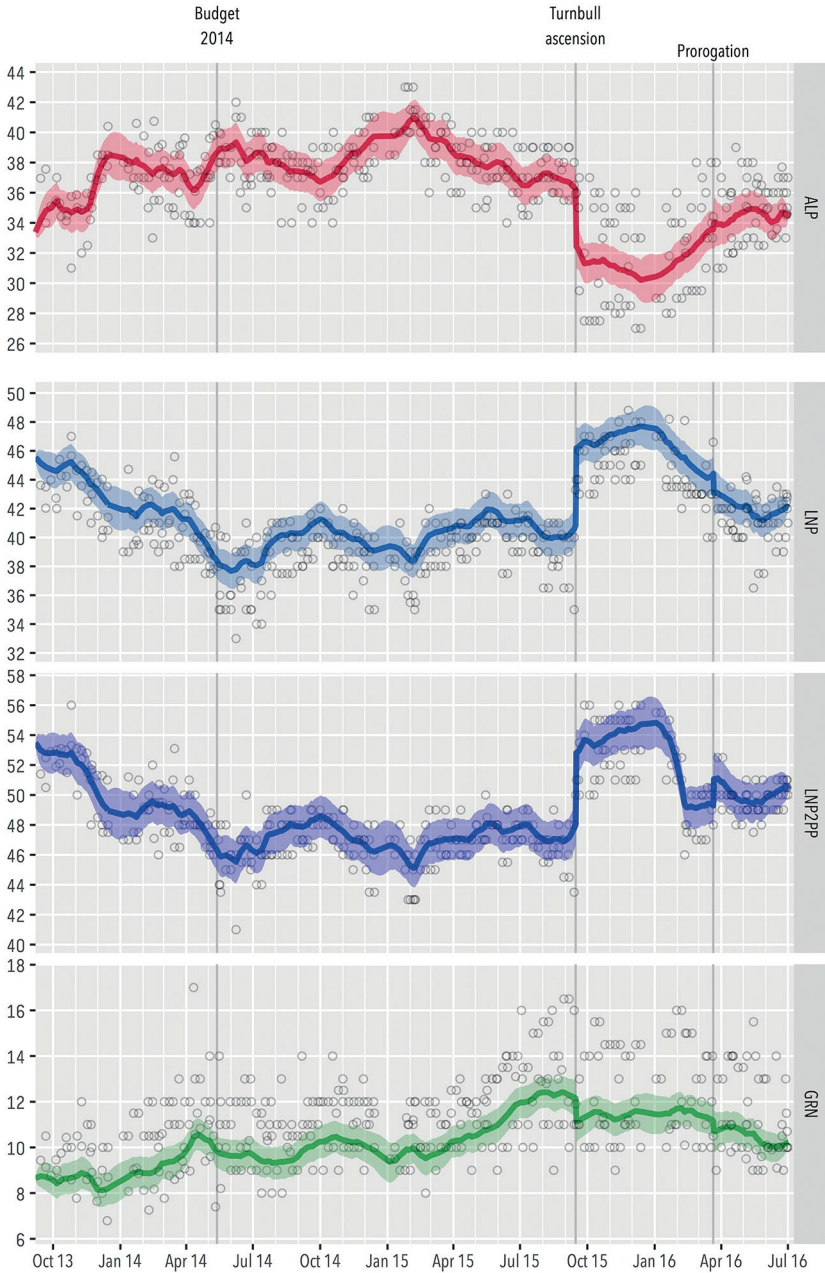


Figure 6.1. Trajectories of support for various parties (voting intentions, per cent), 2013–16

Note. Shaded regions indicate 95 per cent credible intervals, open circles indicate polls.

Source. © Simon Jackman and Luke Mansillo collated these data over the course of the campaign, and created the figure from the estimates produced from their model.

As seen in Figure 6.1, changes in the Coalition’s two-party preferred vote reflect changes in its primary vote, but there are some differences. The Coalition shed 4 per cent of its two-party preferred vote between the 2013 election and the end of year, more than 1 per cent per month. The Coalition’s two-party preferred result remained at 49 per cent until April 2014. A further 3 per cent was lost in April 2014 in the lead-up to the 2014 Budget. From June 2014 to September 2015, there was relative stability in two-party preferred voting intentions until Turnbull became prime minister in September 2015. The Coalition two-party preferred figures peaked at almost 55 per cent in the 2015–16 Christmas/New Year period, but fell dramatically (to 50 per cent) as the 2016 parliamentary sittings commenced.

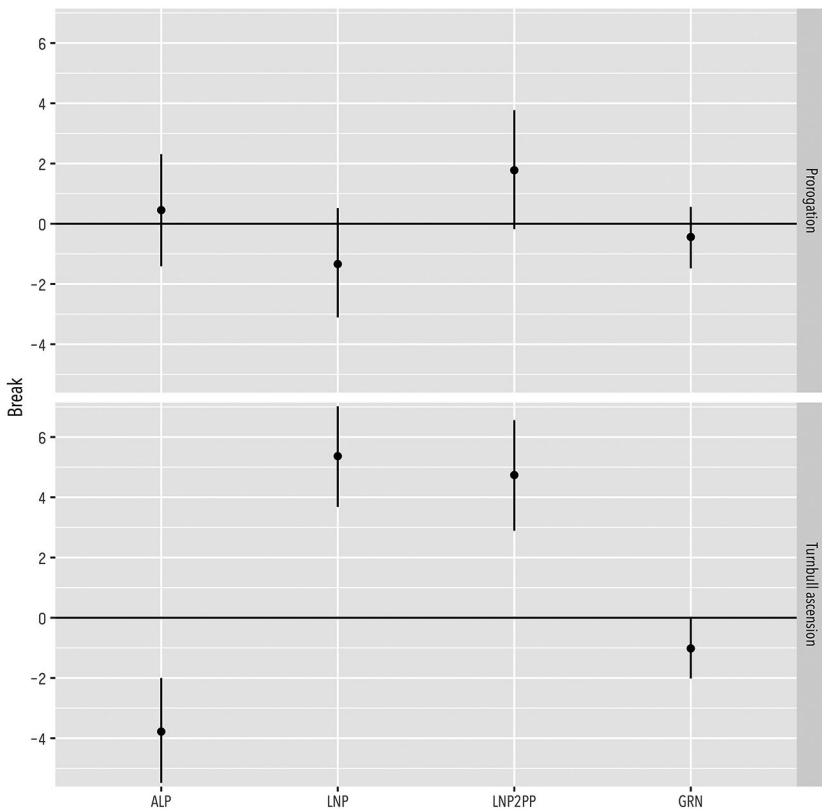


Figure 6.2. Jumps in voting intentions associated with the prorogation of parliament and Turnbull ascension

Note. Vertical lines span 95 per cent credible intervals.

Source. © Simon Jackman and Luke Mansillo collated these data over the course of the campaign, and created the figure from the estimates produced from their model.

## Two campaign myths: 'Mediscare' and the 'Green slide'

We find relatively little movement in voting intentions during the formal campaign period (see Figure 6.3), a point noted by some commentators during the campaign itself (e.g. Hartcher 2016). We define the de facto start of the 2016 election campaign with the proroguing of parliament on 21 March, well ahead of the Budget delivered on 3 May and the issue of writs on 9 May. The public opinion movements we find in the campaign are small in contrast to the previous 31 months.

The closeness of the election was widely attributed to Labor's 'Mediscare' campaign (see e.g. Errington and van Onselen 2016; Gillespie 2016; Williams 2016). We find this to be questionable given the available evidence (see Elliot and Manwaring, Chapter 24, this volume). At prorogation, the Coalition primary vote was 43 per cent. This had fallen to 41 per cent a month out from polling day. The precipitous decline from January was arrested by early June (see Figure 6.3). In the last month of the campaign, it seems that the Coalition primary vote had an almost 1 per cent recovery, but this level of change is too small to be confidently detected by the available data and our model. The most we can say is that there appeared to be very little movement in Coalition primary voting intentions compared to the period before the campaign.

The 'Mediscare' campaign began in earnest with advertisements featuring Bob Hawke first appearing on 11 June. In Errington and van Onselen's (2016: 154) assessment, '[t]he Mediscare attack was designed not just to appeal more to swinging voters (as well as galvanising Labor voters) but to show that Shorten was playing to win', and that a 'pathway to victory' was possibly indicated by 'Labor's tracking polling and focus-group research [which] had picked up an unusual high concern with health funding.' Errington and van Onselen (*ibid.*) assert that 'Labor had tapped into a rich vein of distrust voters had with the government—the trick would be exploiting it to maximum effect'. But once the 'Mediscare' campaign was rolled out, the Coalition primary vote did not deteriorate—and even improved thereafter—suggesting the 'Mediscare' campaign was nowhere near as powerful as many accounts have asserted.<sup>10</sup>

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10 For a more detailed discussion, see Elliot and Manwaring, Chapter 24, this volume.

DOUBLE DISILLUSION

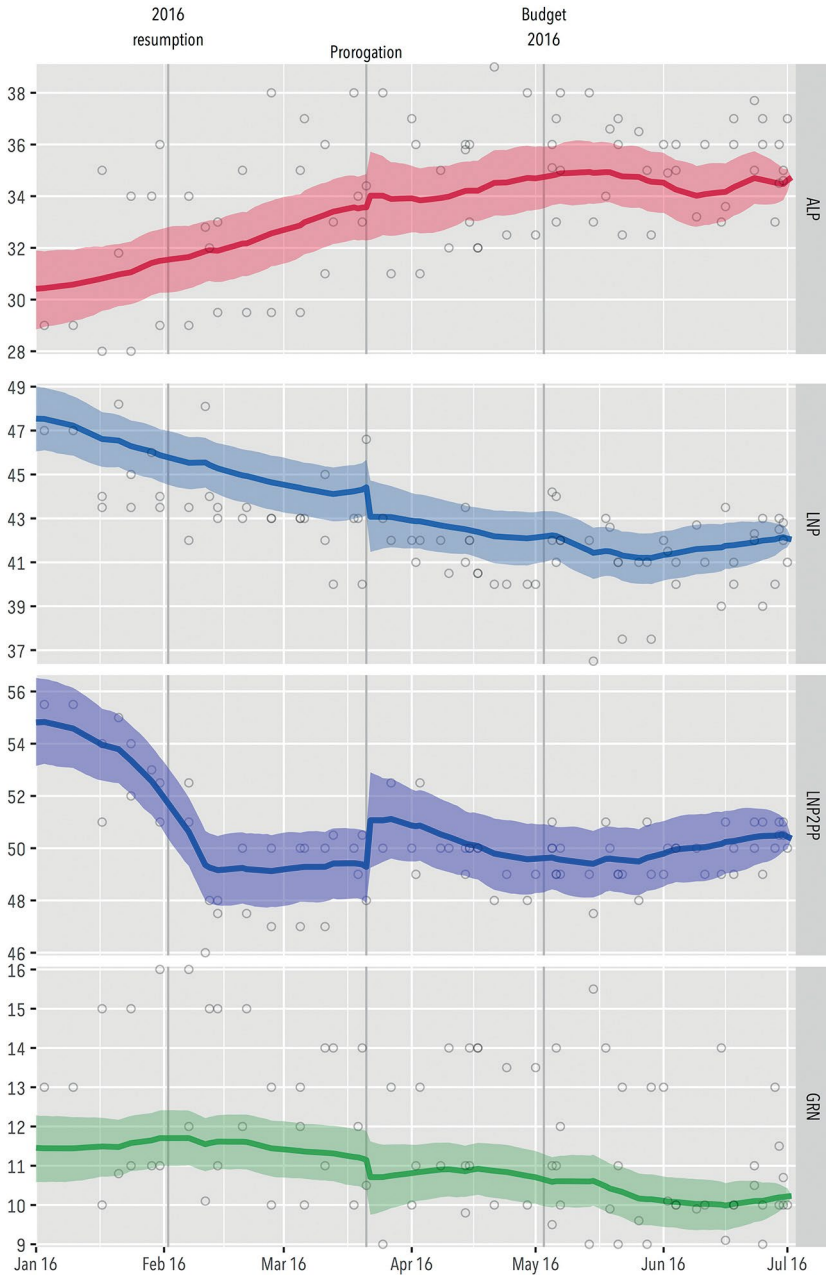


Figure 6.3. Trajectories of support for various parties (voting intentions, per cent), restricted to calendar year 2016

Note. Shaded regions indicate 95 per cent credible intervals, open circles indicate polls.

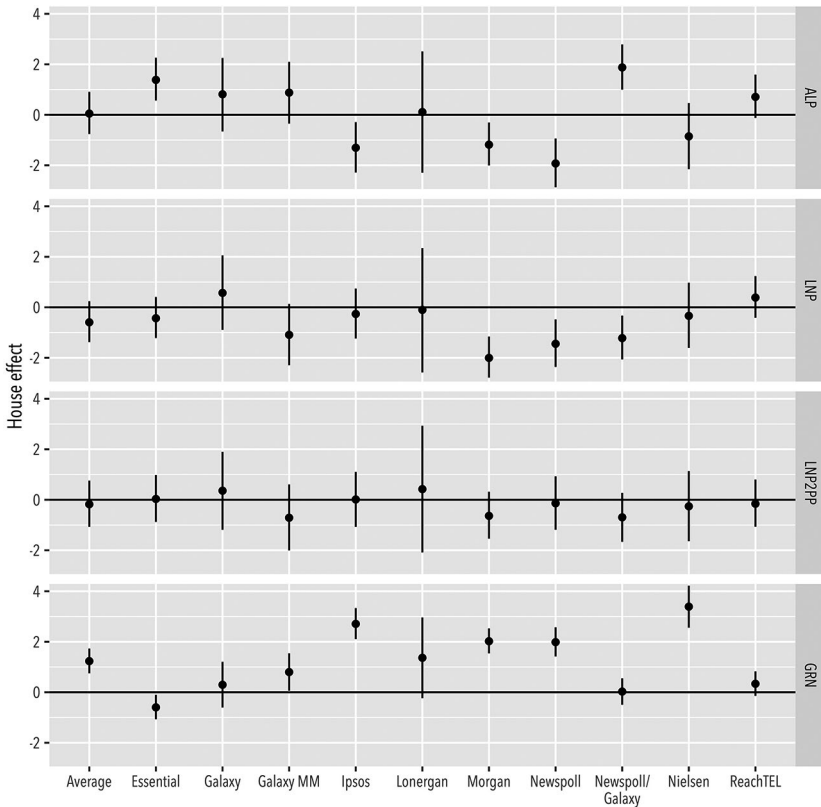
Source. © Simon Jackman and Luke Mansillo collated these data over the course of the campaign, and created the figure from the estimates produced from their model.

This said, Labor too appears to have had a 1 per cent improvement in its primary vote over the campaign period, between the prorogation in March and the 2 July election. Labor lost vote share over the period post-budget to early June—around 1 per cent—but appears to have regained it by election day. But much like the Coalition primary vote, the Labor vote remained stable for the campaign relative to the recent parliamentary period. Again, there is little evidence that the ‘Mediscare’ campaign had a significant impact on public opinion. As Figure 6.3 makes clear, the larger and more consequential movement in Labor’s primary vote share—and the Coalition’s vote share, too—occurred between Christmas 2015 and the start of the formal campaign. Labor’s first preference vote share improved from 30 per cent to 35 per cent in the first five months of 2016, and meandered around that level through the formal campaign period. From when parliament was prorogued until the Budget, the Greens averaged 11 per cent of first preferences; this fell by 1 per cent after the Budget. Once the writs for the 2016 election were issued the Greens and several commentators were bullish on the Greens’ prospects (Chang 2016; Evershed et al. 2016; see also Jackson, Chapter 13, this volume). However, we find that the Greens vote share continued to decline or at best was stagnant. The Coalition’s two-party preferred vote was highly stable for the campaign, much like its primary vote. This was in contrast to movements throughout the parliamentary period. The 1 per cent gain Labor made in the month after the writs were issued was lost in the last month of the campaign.

## Polling organisation bias

Figure 6.4 summarises the biases or ‘house effects’ for each polling organisation, for Coalition, Labor and Greens primary and Coalition two-party preferred voting intentions. Vertical lines indicate the range of 95 per cent credible intervals around each bias estimate. A given house effect estimate can be interpreted as being indistinguishable from zero at conventional levels of statistical significance, if the 95 per cent credible interval overlaps zero. The house effect labelled ‘Average’ is the average of the house effects; in effect, this average house effect enables us to show the extent to which the polling industry displayed a collective bias.

## DOUBLE DISILLUSION



**Figure 6.4. Polling organisation bias estimates**

Note. Vertical lines span 95 per cent credible intervals. The house effect labelled ‘Average’ is the average of the house effects; in effect, this average house effect assesses whether the polling industry displayed a collective bias.

Source. © Simon Jackman and Luke Mansillo collated these data over the course of the campaign, and created the figure from the estimates produced from their model.

For Coalition primary vote estimates, three of the 10 polling organisations had a statistically significant bias. Morgan and both Newspoll regimes underestimated Coalition primary voting intentions. Morgan underestimated the Coalition primary vote more than either Newspoll regime. Five of the 10 polling organisations analysed showed a significant Labor bias in their estimates of the primary vote. Essential and Newspoll, since July 2015, overestimated Labor primary voting intentions, whereas Ipsos, Morgan and Newspoll until June 2015 significantly underestimated

Labor primary voting intentions.<sup>11</sup> Changes to the *Australian's* public opinion research sourcing also changed its underlying methodological procedures. This has implications for Labor primary vote estimates. The old Newspoll underestimated the Labor primary vote by 1.9 per cent, but after the polling organisation changed, the new Newspoll overestimated it by 1.9 per cent; the difference being 3.8 per cent.

In July 2015, political editors and commentators were quick to remark on the shift in Newspoll. Fairfax Media's chief political correspondent Mark Kenny noted, 'primary support for the ALP [was] a relatively healthy 39 per cent, up from 37 per cent a fortnight ago and 5 per cent up from its 34 per cent in mid-June' (Kenny 2015). While the polls present much fodder for journalists to discuss, they appear not to have been terribly mindful of potential poll bias shifts. Averaged over the polling organisations used here, there is no 'industry-wide', collective bias in polling for Labor first preferences or Coalition two-party preferred estimates. There is a small underestimate of Coalition first preferences (about 0.6 per cent), but this estimate is not distinguishable from zero at conventional levels of statistical significance.

Then again, there is an unambiguous tendency for the polling industry to have overestimated Greens first preferences. Four of the 10 polling organisations significantly overestimated the Greens' primary vote: Ipsos, Morgan, Nielsen and Newspoll before July 2015. Essential underestimates the Greens' primary vote, but this is to a much lesser extent than other polling organisations overestimate Greens voting intentions. The industry, on average, overestimated the Greens support by more than 1 per cent. Overestimates of the Greens primary vote have also been observed in New Zealand (Wright, Farrar and Russell 2013). There could be a few reasons for the large Greens primary vote overestimation observed. Some likely causes include incorrect weighting of younger respondents, voter confusion between House of Representatives and Senate voting, survey design issues (question wording and response options), and respondents—who expressed an intention to vote for the Greens—being less likely to turn out.

No significant house biases for national Coalition two-party preferred voting intentions were observed. In this respect, polling organisations performed well. It appears that a small, collective underestimate of the

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11 From July 2014, Nielsen ceased Australian public opinion research operations on voting intentions (Mitchell 2014). Fairfax Media has since sourced its public opinion polling from Ipsos Australia.

Coalition vote was offset by the collective overestimate of the Green vote, yielding an unbiased estimate of the two-party preferred division of the vote.

## Seat-specific polling

We collected estimates of first preference voting intentions from 88 seat-specific polls that were conducted in 48 electoral divisions from January 2016 until election day. These electoral divisions were typically more marginal than the average seat. Sample sizes for these polls ranged from 500 to 1,600, with an average of 626. The sample sizes for these polls are smaller than those in national polls (an average of 1,498 respondents). To measure the error for seat-specific polling, we compared poll estimates to the election results in the corresponding seat. Figure 6.5 displays these comparisons. The orange line is a 45-degree line; all data points would lie on this line if poll results perfectly predicted the election results. The blue line is a regression line, summarising the relationship between poll estimates and actual results.

Table 6.1 presents summaries of the poll errors. Averaged across seats, seat-specific polls overestimated the Greens vote by 0.7 per cent and the Coalition vote by 0.6 per cent, and underestimated the Labor vote by 2.2 per cent and Xenophon candidates by just 0.25 per cent. The bias with respect to Labor vote shares is especially pronounced, with underestimates of Labor's showing in seats like Macarthur (New South Wales (NSW)) and Franklin (Tasmania (TAS)) larger than 10 per cent. The median absolute error (ignoring whether the poll error is an overestimate or an underestimate) is actually slightly larger for the Coalition than for Labor (3.5 per cent versus 3.28 per cent), but both errors are reasonably large. The root mean square error (RMSE) is largest for Labor—on the order of 5 per cent—and 4.3 per cent for the Coalition. This is considerably larger than the RMSE we ought to see from polls with a sample size of roughly 600 respondents.<sup>12</sup> The poll errors for the Greens and Xenophon candidates are smaller in magnitude than those for Labor and the Coalition because the magnitudes involved are smaller quantities (e.g. the median Green vote share in the seats covered by these polls is 8 per cent).

12 Unbiased polls with a sample size of 626 respondents trying to estimate a (known) target of 50 per cent will have a root mean square error of  $\sqrt{(.5 \times .5)/626} \approx .02$  or 2 per cent.



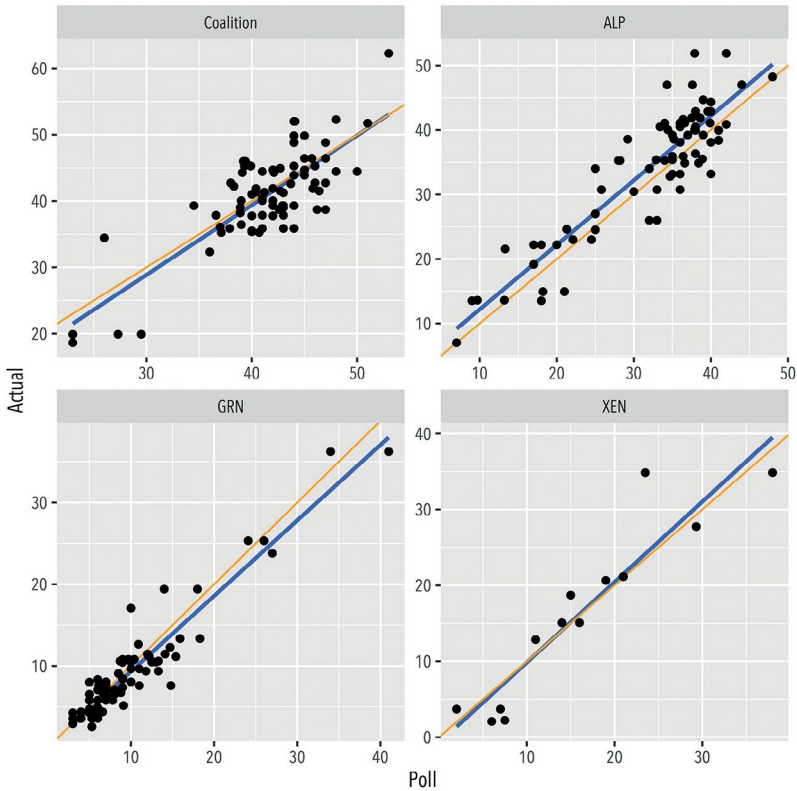


Figure 6.5. Performance of seat-specific polls

Source. © Simon Jackman and Luke Mansillo collated these data over the course of the campaign, and created the figure from the estimates produced from their model.

Table 6.1. Summary of poll errors

	Coalition	ALP	Green	Xenophon
Average	-0.58	2.19	-0.68	0.25
Median absolute	3.50	3.28	1.42	1.69
RMSE	4.32	4.99	2.27	3.83
Effective n	129.91	92.14	142.89	95.49
Coverage rate	57.50	53.16	78.21	60.00
Number of polls	80	79	78	15
Number of seats	46	45	44	10

Note. Effective n is the sample size of a simple random sample that generates the corresponding level of root mean square error (RMSE). The coverage rate is the percentage of times that a 95 per cent confidence interval for each poll estimate includes the corresponding outcome.

Source. © Simon Jackman and Luke Mansillo collated these data over the course of the campaign, and created the figure from the estimates produced from their analysis.

Indeed, it is possible to invert the formula for RMSE to recover the *effective* sample size of the seat-specific polls, generating an estimate of the quality of information in these polls.<sup>13</sup> The total survey error between the poll's predicted result and the observed result is expressed in the same terms as total sampling error. For polls estimating Coalition and Labor vote shares, the effective sample size is around 100, far below the 626 average sample size in these polls; an indication of the unreliability of seat-specific polls. Seat-specific polls are subject to substantial biases, so much so that they contain as much information as an unbiased sample of just *one-sixth* the nominal sample size of the poll.

Similarly, we report the *coverage rate* of the poll estimates in Figure 6.5, the proportion of times that 95 per cent confidence intervals formed around each poll estimate actually lie within the observed election result.<sup>14</sup> This, too, is a useful measure of the performance of the polls. Unbiased polls that utilise simple random sampling ought to have coverage rates equal to their nominal coverage rates given by statistical theory. This means, using 95 per cent confidence intervals, the election results should fall within the 95 per cent confidence interval bounds on 95 per cent of occasions. Table 6.1 shows poor coverage rates for estimates of Coalition, Labor and Xenophon support: just 58 per cent, 53 per cent and 60 per cent, respectively. Poll estimates of Green support in specific seats fare a little better, with a coverage rate of 78 per cent.

Figure 6.6 disaggregates poll errors (measured as absolute values) by pollster and by party. There were some impressive misses. The bulk of polls were produced by ReachTEL, Newspoll and Galaxy, which had median absolute errors (MAE) of 3.5 per cent, 4.3 per cent and 2.6 per cent respectively in their seat-specific estimates of Coalition support. The pollster with the greatest Coalition MAE was MediaReach, with just one poll in Solomon (Northern Territory (NT)), which had an error of 8.4 per cent. This large error—and many others not so large—are well beyond what we might reasonably expect from random sampling with the sample sizes reported here.<sup>15</sup> Patently, other sources of survey error are at work,

13 We do this by rearranging the formula  $RMSE = \sqrt{(p \times (1 - p)) / n}$ , setting  $p$  equal to the median outcome for a given party over the seats covered by those polls, then solving for  $n$ .

14 In computing the coverage rate, we form a 95 per cent confidence interval around the published poll result via a normal approximation to the sampling distribution of each poll result, setting the upper and lower limits of the confidence interval to  $\pm 1.96\hat{\sigma}$ , where  $\hat{\sigma} = \sqrt{(\hat{p} \times (1 - \hat{p})) / n}$ , where  $p$  is the poll result expressed as a proportion and  $n$  is the published sample size of the poll.

15 Recall that in footnote 12 we computed the standard error for a poll-based estimate of a proportion of 0.5 with a random sample of 626 (the average sample size of the seat-specific polls we analyse). The expected median absolute error from unbiased polls with this sample size is 1.34 per cent.

including frame errors (the sampling frame is not representative of the electorate), non-response bias (the set of respondents taking the survey are not representative of the electorate, even after corrections such as weighting), or errors in weighting.

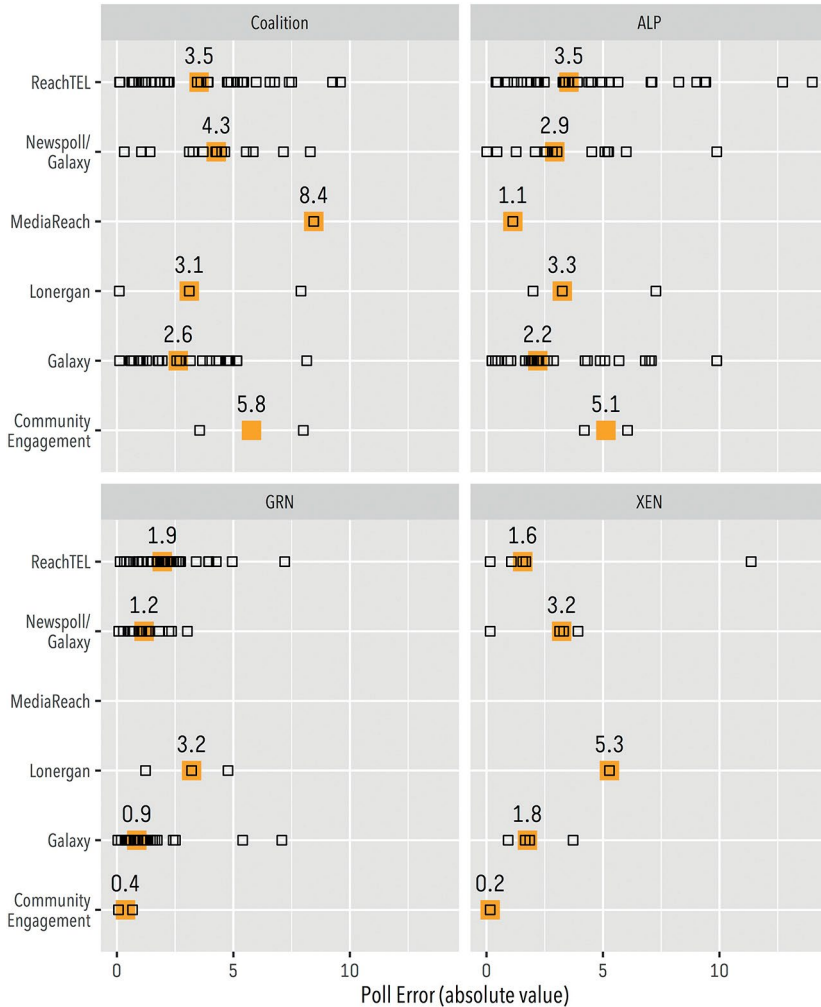


Figure 6.6. Performance of seat-specific polls by party and pollster

Note. Polling errors (absolute values) of estimates distance from the actual election result are plotted, by party and pollster. The orange point marks the median absolute error for a pollster when estimating the indicated party's level of support in an electoral division.

Source. © Simon Jackman and Luke Mansillo collated these data over the course of the campaign, and created the figure from the estimates produced from their analysis.

Errors in seat-specific ALP polling were similar to Coalition polling errors. The best-performing pollster was MediaReach, with their one poll in Solomon (NT), reporting Labor first preferences of 42 per cent (actual 40.87 per cent). Galaxy had an MAE of 2.2 per cent, the lowest error rate of pollsters that regularly fielded during the campaign. Newspoll did not perform much worse with an MAE of 2.9 per cent. The 3.5 per cent ALP ReachTEL MAE and large distribution underscores the variability in quality of seat-specific polling. Greens seat-specific polling produced errors that are generally smaller than those for the major parties but, as noted earlier, this largely stems from the fact that Greens vote shares (both estimated and actual) are so much smaller than those for the major parties. In relative terms, the Green errors are actually much larger. The MAE of seat-specific poll estimates of Labor's support was 3.28 per cent (see Table 6.1); Labor's median vote share across the seats in which we have poll estimates was 35.55 per cent, implying that the MAE is about 9.2 per cent of Labor's median vote share. The Green MAE is 1.42 on a median vote share of just 8.04 per cent, implying that the MAE is 17.7 per cent of the Greens' median vote share, almost double the relative size of Labor's polling error.

A plausible hypothesis is that seat-specific polling fares better when conducted close to election day, and that errors in the polls might be larger when conducted weeks or months earlier, before the campaign has firmed up voters' decisions. We explore this hypothesis with the analysis shown in Figure 6.7, plotting the magnitude of seat-specific poll errors by the field date of the poll. With the exception of seat-specific poll estimates of Labor vote share, there is little evidence that the accuracy of seat-specific polling improved as the election grew closer. The trend lines in Figure 6.7 are horizontal for both Coalition and Green seat-specific polling, and statistically indistinguishable from a horizontal or 'no change' trend for the relatively small number of polls assessing seat-level support for Xenophon candidates. For Labor seat-by-seat outcomes, exceptionally large polling errors (e.g. greater than 10 per cent in magnitude) are concentrated in polls conducted more than six weeks before the election, although poll errors as large as 10 per cent were recorded in polls fielded less than two weeks prior to the election; Macarthur (NSW) was the source of the largest error in ALP seat polling (a 14 per cent miss by a ReachTEL poll on 19 May) and it also supplied 10 per cent misses for Galaxy (twice, 11 May and 22 June) and Newspoll/Galaxy (14 June), underestimating ALP's 51.9 per cent result in every case. Three seat-specific polls fielded very close to

the election—on 29 and 30 June in Adelaide (South Australian (SA)) by Galaxy, Chisholm (Victoria (VIC)) by ReachTEL and in Port Adelaide (SA) by Galaxy—performed very well with respect to Labor vote share, with errors of less than 1 per cent in each case. The same polls missed Coalition vote shares by magnitudes of 2.6 per cent, 5.4 per cent and 4.4 per cent respectively, but performed relatively well with respect to the Greens, with errors with magnitudes of 1.4, 2.4 and 0 per cent (to one decimal place).

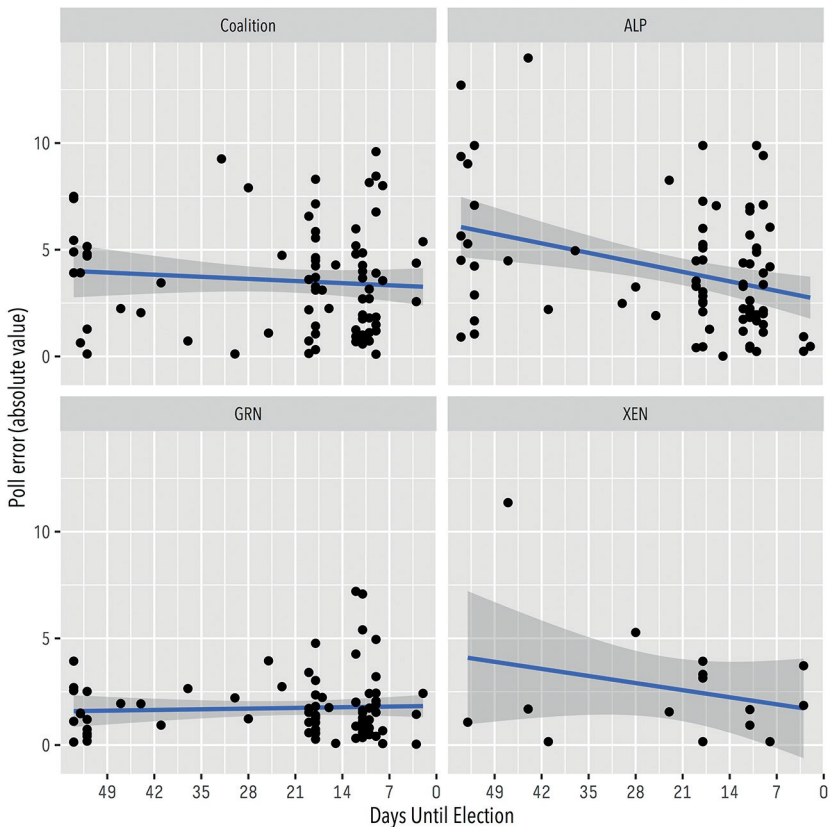


Figure 6.7. Performance of seat-specific polls, by party and over time (days until election)

Note. Each plotted point is the error (absolute value) of a separate poll. The blue line summarises the time trend of the absolute errors.

Source. © Simon Jackman and Luke Mansillo collated these data over the course of the campaign, and created the figure from the estimates produced from their analysis.

All of this evidence suggests interpreting seat-specific polling with great caution. Labor support was systematically underestimated across the polling industry and across seats. Stated confidence intervals for seat-specific estimates are far too small, or, equivalently, the actual statistical power of the polls is far less than the nominal confidence intervals and ‘margins of error’ accompanying media reports of the polls themselves. Published confidence intervals and ‘margins of error’ should be inflated by a factor of 240 per cent for estimates of Coalition support, by 270 per cent for estimates of Labor support and by 185 per cent for estimates of Green support. These are extremely large inflation factors; for instance, a seat-specific poll estimating Labor support that claims to have a margin of error of  $\pm 3$  per cent ought to be considered as having a confidence interval of  $\pm 8.1$  per cent.

## Summary

The 44th Australian Federal Parliament experienced considerable volatility in voting intentions. Turnbull’s ascension produced the largest change in voting intentions in the three-year period between the 2013 and 2016 elections. The 5 per cent fall in Coalition support from Christmas 2015 until prorogation would suggest that Turnbull went to the 2016 election too late. These large movements stand in stark contrast to small, statistically negligible movements in voter sentiment during the campaign period. Since we find very little movement in voting intentions during the formal campaign, it would seem that media narratives about the power of campaign events are best considered with a grain of salt. For instance, it is simply not the case that Labor’s ‘Mediscare’ campaign undermined the Coalition’s electoral position. The evidence available to us indicates that public opinion was stable over the campaign.

We also make several conclusions about the quality of polls. Poll estimates of the two-party preferred vote were generally of high quality. No survey house displays statistically significant bias in their two-party preferred estimates. Estimates of national, first preference vote shares were also largely accurate. Morgan and Newspoll underestimated the Coalition’s first preference vote share by between 1.1 per cent and 1.9 per cent. Essential and Newspoll overestimate the Labor primary between 0.8 per cent and 1.2 per cent, while the active polling organisations Ipsos and Morgan estimated their primary vote between 1.8 per cent and

1.9 per cent. Greens primary vote estimation contained more bias, with overestimations that range between 1.9 per cent and 2.6 per cent across polling organisations.

We find seat-specific polling to be highly unreliable. These polls systematically underestimate the Labor vote and overestimate the Greens vote. The bias in the average seat-specific poll is so great that these polls should be cautiously treated since they have an effective sample size a sixth of that fielded. This is in marked contrast to the performance of national polling, indicating that reliably generating high-quality samples of small areas (Commonwealth electoral divisions) is a challenging task for almost all of the polling organisations we considered here.

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# Part Two. Reporting and Analysing the Results



# 7

## The House of Representatives Results

Ben Raue

At the 2016 Australian federal election, the first-term Liberal–National Coalition government faced a significant swing against it, suffering a net loss of 12 seats. The government managed to win a narrow majority, with just 76 out of 150 seats. This chapter covers the results of the election in the House of Representatives, focusing on key electoral contests, as well as explaining the electoral system used for the House of Representatives, redistributions conducted prior to the elections, by-elections held during the previous term, the number of nominations made for the House of Representatives and the impact of preferences on the election result.

### Electoral system

The House of Representatives is the lower house of Australia's bicameral parliament. Elections are usually held simultaneously with elections for the upper house (Senate), although Senate elections are conducted using a method of proportional representation. House of Representatives elections are due once every three years. Australia's House of Representatives consists of 150 members, each elected to represent a single-member constituency. Members are elected using compulsory preferential voting, with voters required to effectively choose preferences between every candidate on the ballot. If no candidate wins more than half of the vote,

the vote for the lowest-polling candidate is redistributed according to the preferences of that candidate's voters, and this process is repeated until a candidate has a majority of the vote.

Due to this preferential voting system, this chapter will refer to the vote for candidates before and after preferences are distributed. The term 'primary vote' refers to first preference votes that have not been distributed. The term 'two-candidate preferred vote' is the vote for each of the two final candidates standing after the distribution of all other candidates' preferences. The term 'two-party preferred vote' refers to the vote for the Labor candidate and the highest-polling Coalition candidate when all other candidates have been excluded and have had their preferences distributed. Two-candidate preferred and two-party preferred voting figures are the same in most electorates, but in a sizeable minority of seats where the final race was not between a Labor candidate and Coalition candidate, these data points will differ.

## 2013 election

The 2013 election produced a resounding victory for the Coalition. This coalition had been out of power for two terms, since the defeat of the Howard government in 2007. The Coalition had come close to winning in 2010, with the incumbent Labor government losing its majority in the House of Representatives and relying on Independents and a Greens MP to govern. In 2013, the Coalition won 90 seats in the House of Representatives, a gain of 17 seats. The Labor Party's numbers were cut from 72 to 55. The House of Representatives also included one member each from the Greens, the Palmer United Party and Katter's Australian Party, along with two Independent members (Table 7.1).

There was a swing of 1.9 per cent to the Coalition, and a large 5.5 per cent swing to the Palmer United Party, which was a new party formed since the last election. There were large swings against Labor (4.6 per cent) and the Greens (3.1 per cent), with the vote for Other parties increasing marginally. The Coalition polled 53.49 per cent of the two-party preferred vote, with all minor party and Independent votes distributed between Labor and the Coalition. This was a swing of 3.61 per cent compared to the 2010 election.

Table 7.1. Results of the 2013 federal election by party

Party	Votes	Percentage	Swing	Seats	Seat change
Liberal–National Coalition	5,882,818	45.55	1.93	90	17
Australian Labor Party	4,311,365	33.38	–4.61	55	–17
Australian Greens	1,116,918	8.65	–3.11	1	0
Palmer United Party	709,035	5.49	5.49	1	1
Katter’s Australian Party	134,226	1.04	0.73	1	0
Independents	177,217	1.37	–0.84	2	–1
Other	583,348	4.52	0.41	0	0

Source. Compiled by author from Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) data (2013a, 2013b).

## Redistribution of electoral boundaries

Following the 2013 federal election, House of Representatives electoral boundaries were redrawn in the States of New South Wales (NSW) and Western Australia (WA), as well as the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). Redistributions are conducted independently of political parties and partisan officials, and electoral boundaries are drawn with little regard to the political impact of particular boundaries. Australia does not see the partisan decision-making that is present in many States in the United States, or the gerrymandered electoral boundaries those decisions produce.

The number of seats each State is entitled to fill is recalculated after each election based on population data. In November 2014, it was found that NSW had lost its 48th electorate, and WA gained a 16th electorate. This required a redistribution in both States. A redistribution was also required in the ACT, as seven years had passed since the boundaries had been drawn.

The Labor-held electorate of Charlton in the Hunter region of NSW was effectively abolished, with neighbouring seats significantly redrawn to absorb this territory. Three Liberal-held electorates were redrawn to be notionally Labor-held on the new boundaries: Dobell on the NSW Central Coast, Macarthur in south-western Sydney and Barton in southern Sydney. The southern NSW seat of Throsby was renamed Whitlam. The new 16th electorate in WA was created as a notional Liberal seat in the south-east of Perth, named Burt. Changes in the ACT

were minor, with the northern seat of Fraser renamed Fenner. Parts of the Canberra city centre were transferred from Fraser to the neighbouring seat of Canberra.

These changes resulted in a net gain of two seats for Labor. This left the Coalition with 88 seats, and Labor with 57, in the lead-up to the 2016 federal election. A loss of 13 seats would have cost the Coalition its majority, while a gain of 19 seats for Labor would have given them a majority.

## By-elections

By-elections were held in three federal electorates during the 2013–16 parliamentary term. Two were triggered by the resignation of senior political figures, and the third was triggered by the death of the sitting member. None of these by-elections resulted in a shift in the political balance of the House of Representatives.

Kevin Rudd resigned from his seat of Griffith shortly after leading Labor to the 2013 election defeat. Rudd had served as prime minister from 2007 until 2010, and had returned to office shortly before the 2013 election. Rudd had held on to Griffith with 53 per cent of the two-party preferred vote at the 2013 election. After Rudd's resignation, Labor candidate Terri Butler won the subsequent by-election despite a 1.25 per cent swing to the Liberal National Party (LNP) after preferences.

Liberal MP Don Randall died in July 2015, triggering a by-election for his seat of Canning in WA. Liberal candidate Andrew Hastie retained the seat despite a 6.55 per cent swing to his Labor rival. The by-election took place less than a week after Malcolm Turnbull had replaced Tony Abbott as prime minister.

Joe Hockey served as treasurer in the Coalition government from 2013 until 2015, when he moved to the backbench at the same time as Malcolm Turnbull became prime minister. Hockey resigned from parliament not long afterwards. The by-election for his seat of North Sydney was held in December 2015. Labor did not contest the seat, and Liberal candidate Trent Zimmerman comfortably won.



## Candidates running

There were 994 candidates nominated to run for the 150 House of Representative electorates across Australia at the 2016 federal election. This was fewer than the record number of 1,188 candidates who had nominated in 2013, and also fewer than the number who stood at the elections from 1998 until 2007. The number of candidates in 2010 was slightly fewer than in 2016. Labor and the Greens were the only parties to stand in all 150 seats. At least one candidate from a Coalition party stood in each seat, and the Liberal and National parties ran against each other in 11 seats. A total of 108 Independents nominated for the lower house, while smaller parties nominated 375 candidates.

The smaller parties—Family First, Christian Democratic Party, Animal Justice Party, Liberal Democratic Party and Rise Up Australia—all nominated over 30 candidates. The Palmer United Party, which had run in all 150 electorates in 2013, nominated only a single candidate in the House of Representatives (Figure 7.1).

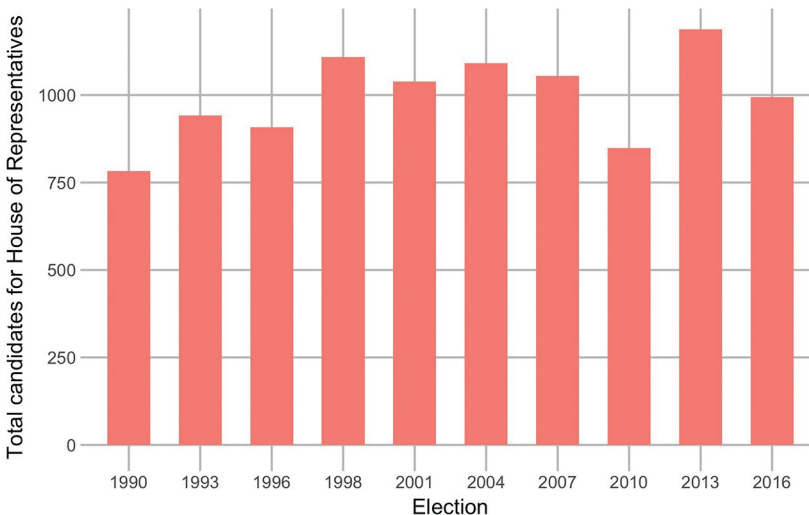


Figure 7.1. Total House of Representatives candidates per election, 1990–2016

Source. Constructed by © Ben Raue from AEC data (2004a, 2007a, 2010a, 2013c, 2016a).

## National result

There was a significant swing against the Coalition. The Coalition vote dropped by 3.5 per cent, and there were swings of 1–2 per cent to Labor, the Greens and the Nick Xenophon Team. There was also a large increase in the vote for Independents and other small parties. The Coalition narrowly avoided losing its majority. It lost 14 seats, but gained two others, for a total of 76 seats. Labor gained 13 seats from the Coalition, but lost the seat of Chisholm to the Liberal Party, giving them a total of 69 seats. The Palmer United Party's sole seat of Fairfax was lost to the LNP without a fight; former MP Clive Palmer retired, and his party did not contest the seat. The Liberal Party lost the South Australian seat of Mayo to the Nick Xenophon Team, and also lost the Victorian seat of Murray to the Nationals.

Table 7.2. Results of the 2016 federal election by party

Party	Votes	Percentage	Swing	Seats	Seat change
Liberal–National Coalition	5,693,605	42.04	-3.51	76	-12
Australian Labor Party	4,702,296	34.73	1.35	69	12
Australian Greens	1,385,650	10.23	1.58	1	0
Nick Xenophon Team	250,333	1.85	1.85	1	1
Katter's Australian Party	72,879	0.54	-0.5	1	0
Palmer United Party	315	0	-5.49	0	-1
Independents	380,712	2.81	1.44	2	0
Other	1,055,311	7.79	3.28	0	0

Source. Compiled by author from AEC data (2016b, 2016c).

The Coalition managed to win 50.36 per cent of the two-party preferred vote, which was 3.13 per cent less than in 2013 (Table 7.2).

## The impact of preferences

There was an overall increase in the vote for parties other than the Coalition and Labor, and the concentration of this vote meant that preferences played a larger role than in recent elections. Labor won 62.2 per cent of preferences, which was a slight increase from 2013, when Labor won 60.3 per cent of preferences. The flow of Greens preferences to Labor dropped slightly from 83 per cent to 81.9 per cent.

Fewer than one third of seats in the House of Representatives were decided without needing to distribute preferences. The winning candidate polled less than a majority of the primary vote in 102 out of 150 races, which is higher than the previous record of 98 seats at the 1998 election (Figure 7.2).

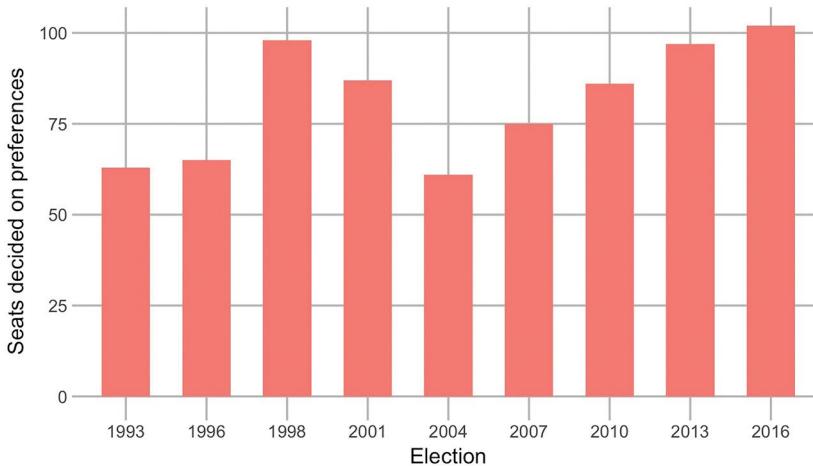


Figure 7.2. Seats decided on preferences, 1993–2016

Source. Constructed by © Ben Raue from AEC data (2004b, 2007b, 2010b, 2013d, 2016d).

The candidates leading on primary votes in most seats maintained their lead and won the seats after the distribution of preferences. There were, however, 16 seats where a candidate, trailing on primary votes, won the seat. Labor candidates overtook the Coalition candidate in 14 seats. Labor’s David Feeney also won the seat of Batman, despite the Greens polling a higher primary vote, and Nick Xenophon Team’s Rebekha Sharkie overtook the Liberal candidate in the seat of Mayo.

## Enrolment, turnout and informal voting

Only 90.86 per cent of those enrolled to vote turned out to vote at the 2016 Australian federal election. This was the lowest turnout for an Australian federal election since compulsory voting was first enforced for the 1925 election (if turnout is calculated as the proportion of those enrolled who turned out to vote).

Table 7.3. Turnout 2013 and 2016 (percentages)

Election	Enrolment	Turnout	Informal votes	Votes/Potential enrolment
2013	92.39	93.29	5.91	86.19
2016	95.11	90.86	5.05	86.41

Source. Compiled by author from AEC data (2013e, 2013f, 2016e, 2016f).

Major efforts by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) over the previous term had significantly increased the size of the roll, from 14.7 million to just under 15.7 million. The AEC estimated that 92.4 per cent of potential voters were enrolled for the 2013 election; this figure increased to 95.1 per cent at the 2016 election. If turnout is calculated as a proportion of the total eligible population, turnout appears to have slightly increased from 86.2 per cent to 86.4 per cent.

Informal voting dropped from 5.91 per cent to 5.05 per cent. Informal voting was highest at 7.35 per cent in the Northern Territory (NT) and 6.17 per cent in NSW, although the rate in NSW was 1.41 per cent lower than in 2013 (Table 7.3).

## Labor–Coalition contests: State by State

Labor gained 13 seats from the Coalition in 2016: four seats in NSW, three in Tasmania (TAS), two in Queensland (QLD), two in WA and one each in South Australia (SA) and NT. The Liberal Party gained one seat from Labor: the seat of Chisholm in Victoria (VIC). There were also three Liberal-held seats in NSW which had been redrawn into notional Labor seats in the preceding redistribution, and were then won by Labor at the election: Barton, Dobell and Paterson (see Table 7.4).

Table 7.4. Seats changing hands at the 2016 federal election

Seat	State	Incumbent	Winner	Margin (%)
Barton*	NSW	Liberal	Labor	8.3
Bass	TAS	Liberal	Labor	6.1
Braddon	TAS	Liberal	Labor	2.2
Burt	WA	Liberal	Labor	7.1
Chisholm	VIC	Labor	Liberal	1.2
Cowan	WA	Liberal	Labor	0.7
Dobell*	NSW	Liberal	Labor	4.8

## 7. THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES RESULTS

Seat	State	Incumbent	Winner	Margin (%)
Eden-Monaro	NSW	Liberal	Labor	2.9
Fairfax	QLD	Palmer United	Liberal National	10.9
Herbert	NSW	Liberal National	Labor	0.02
Hindmarsh	SA	Liberal	Labor	0.6
Lindsay	NSW	Liberal	Labor	1.1
Longman	QLD	Liberal National	Labor	0.8
Lyons	TAS	Liberal	Labor	2.3
Macarthur	NSW	Liberal	Labor	8.3
Macquarie	NSW	Liberal	Labor	2.2
Mayo	SA	Liberal	Nick Xenophon Team	5.0
Murray	VIC	Liberal	National	5.1
Paterson*	NSW	Liberal	Labor	10.7
Solomon	NT	Country Liberal	Labor	6.0

\*Barton, Dobell and Paterson were won by the Liberal Party in 2013, but were redrawn into notional Labor seats at the redistribution prior to the 2016 federal election

Source. Calculated by author from AEC data.

### New South Wales

Labor made more gains in NSW than in any other State, retaining three Liberal seats redrawn into Labor seats in the redistribution and picking up a further four. Labor did particularly well in western Sydney, picking up the three key seats, but they did less well in seats closer to the city centre. The picture for Labor was also varied in the two key regional electorates, Page and Eden-Monaro, with Labor picking up one of those two seats. Pre-election polling suggested that Labor was on track easily to regain the northern NSW seat of Page, where former Labor MP Janelle Saffin was aiming to win her seat back. In reality, Page swung by only 0.8 per cent to Labor, and the Nationals' Kevin Hogan was comfortably re-elected. At the other end of NSW, Labor regained the south-eastern electorate of Eden-Monaro with a 5.8 per cent swing. Former MP Mike Kelly was returned to parliament with 52.9 per cent of the vote after preferences.

There were three marginal seats in play on the NSW Central Coast and in the Hunter region. The Liberal-held electorates of Dobell and Paterson were both redrawn in the redistribution and had become notional Labor seats. Labor managed to win both of these seats with swings of 4.6 per cent in Dobell and 10.5 per cent in Paterson.

The Liberal Party had more luck in the neighbouring seat of Robertson. A swing of 2 per cent was not enough to unseat Liberal MP Lucy Wicks, who was left with 51.1 per cent of the two-candidate preferred vote.

Labor performed quite strongly in a series of marginal seats around western Sydney, gaining three and maintaining a hold on two others. Labor gained the seats of Lindsay, Macquarie and Macarthur on the western and south-western fringes of Sydney, with swings to Labor of 4 per cent, 6.7 per cent and 11.7 per cent, respectively. The swing to Labor in Macarthur was particularly remarkable: multiple polls indicated that the seat was very close, but Labor's Mike Frelander ended up polling 58.3 per cent of the vote after preferences. Swings of 3.6 per cent in Greenway and 6.2 per cent in Parramatta have strengthened Labor's hold on these two marginal seats.

Closer to inner Sydney, there were three other key marginal seats in play. The Liberal-held seat of Barton was significantly redrawn in the recent redistribution, pulling the seat into Labor-friendly areas around Marrickville and away from the Liberal-voting suburbs along the Georges River. The new version of Barton was considered to have a notional Labor margin of 4.4 per cent, after the Liberal Party's Nickolas Varvaris had won with a 0.3 per cent margin at the 2013 election. Labor's Linda Burney defeated Varvaris, with a swing of 3.9 per cent giving her 58.3 per cent of the vote after preferences. Labor was less successful in the nearby seats of Reid and Banks. Both seats lie along major waterways, with expensive waterfront properties along the Parramatta River and the Georges River, respectively. Labor held both seats prior to the 2013 election, when they were lost to the Liberal Party. Overlapping marginal Liberal State seats, won at the 2011 State election, remained in Liberal hands despite much larger swings in other parts of NSW at the 2015 State election. Liberal MP David Coleman held Banks by a slim 2.8 per cent margin, but held on after the swing to Labor was limited to 1.36 per cent. His colleague Craig Laundry held Reid by 3.3 per cent, and likewise suffered a swing of only 1.36 per cent.

## Victoria

Labor's performance in Victoria was quite different in inner Melbourne from the outer fringe of the metropolitan region. In addition to four inner-city electorates where Labor lost ground to the Greens on the two-candidate preferred count, Labor suffered a swing to the Liberal Party in six other inner-suburban electorates: Melbourne Ports, Goldstein,

Kooyong, Deakin, Aston and Chisholm. Labor had high hopes for regaining the electorate of Deakin, but a 2.5 per cent swing to the Liberal Party strengthened Michael Sukkar's hold on the seat. In Bruce and Chisholm, longstanding Labor MPs were retiring, creating a real danger of Labor losing these seats. Labor was able to gain a swing of 2.3 per cent in Bruce, but they were less lucky in Chisholm. Liberal candidate Julia Banks was the only Coalition candidate to win a seat from Labor, thanks to a 2.8 per cent swing to the Liberal Party.

Labor performed more strongly in the outer fringe of Melbourne, but was not able to gain any seats. There were doubts about Labor's ability to hold on to McEwen, covering the northern fringe of Melbourne and nearby rural areas. Labor's Rob Mitchell held the seat by only a 0.2 per cent margin. Controversy around a proposed industrial agreement covering the Country Fire Authority (CFA) was thought to be a factor in this bushfire-affected electorate. In reality, Mitchell gained a large 7.7 per cent swing, winning comfortably. Meanwhile, Labor gained swings in the seats of La Trobe, on the south-eastern outskirts of Melbourne, and Corangamite on the south-western outskirts of Geelong, but not enough to win either seat. Labor's Simon Curtis gained a 2.6 per cent swing in La Trobe, while Labor's Libby Coker gained a swing of only 0.8 per cent in Corangamite.

## Queensland

Queensland is always home to a large number of marginal seats. While Labor gained swings in most of these seats, and came close to winning many, it managed to make only two gains. Labor lost ground in a series of inner-Brisbane electorates. Labor held hopes of gaining the seat of Brisbane upon the retirement of sitting LNP MP Teresa Gambaro, but her successor Trevor Evans strengthened the LNP margin by 1.6 per cent. Labor's Terri Butler faced some trouble in her own seat of Griffith, with the Labor margin cut by 1.5 per cent compared to the last election, when the seat was contested by then prime minister Kevin Rudd.

Labor achieved large swings in a number of seats in outer Brisbane, but only managed to win one seat. Labor gained a 3.75 per cent swing in the outer south seat of Forde, but this was not quite enough to gain the seat. Sitting MP Bert van Manen survived with 50.6 per cent of the vote after preferences. On the northern fringe of Brisbane, three electorates played a key role in the election. Labor won the LNP seat of Longman, defeating two-term MP Wyatt Roy thanks to a 7.7 per cent swing. In the

neighbouring seat of Dickson, a 5.1 per cent swing was not enough to remove senior minister Peter Dutton. The seat of Petrie, which borders both Longman and Dickson, was one of the most marginal Coalition seats prior to the election, held by the LNP's Luke Howarth by a 0.5 per cent margin. A swing of 1.1 per cent to the LNP saw Howarth hold on to his seat.

There are another four key marginal seats on the north coast of QLD. The seat of Herbert is the closest seat in the country. Labor's Cathy O'Toole won the seat by 37 votes, after a recount. Further south, Labor came close to winning Capricornia and Flynn, but fell short in both seats. A 5.5 per cent swing to Labor in Flynn cut the LNP margin back to 1 per cent. Capricornia was already extremely marginal, and Labor managed a swing of only 0.1 per cent to cut the LNP margin to 0.6 per cent. The seat of Dawson, which borders both Herbert and Capricornia, also saw a swing to Labor, but is slightly safer for the LNP than neighbouring seats. The LNP's George Christensen held Dawson by a 7.6 per cent margin; a 4.2 per cent swing to Labor has cut this margin to 3.4 per cent.

## Western Australia

Labor has done very poorly in WA over the last decade. Its State delegation was reduced to three out of 15 seats at the 2010 and 2013 elections, which was the end point of a long, slow decline since Labor had dominated WA's federal representation in the 1980s.

There were four Liberal seats at risk of falling to Labor in WA. Two of these seats did change hands. Labor easily gained the new electorate of Burt on the southern fringe of Perth. Burt was created in the recent redistribution with a notional Liberal margin of 6.1 per cent. Labor candidate Matt Keogh had already run in a large part of the electorate at the 2015 Canning by-election, and did particularly well in those parts of the seat slated to move into Burt. Keogh ended up winning Burt easily, with a 13.2 per cent swing. Labor also narrowly gained the seat of Cowan in northern Perth. Labor's Anne Aly defeated sitting Liberal MP Luke Simpkins with a 5.2 per cent swing, winning the seat by a margin of 1,106 votes. Swings of just under 4 per cent were not enough to win the marginal seats of Hasluck and Swan. Liberal MP Ken Wyatt now holds Hasluck by a 2 per cent margin, while Steve Irons holds Swan by a 3.6 per cent margin (Figure 7.3).



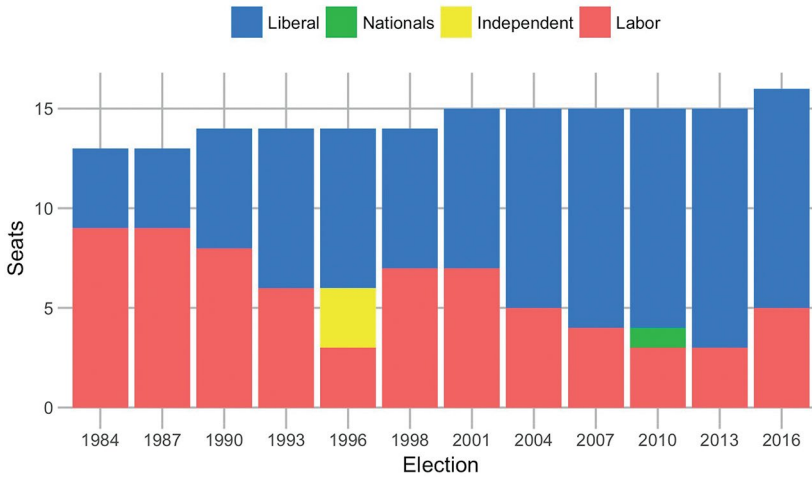


Figure 7.3. Winners of federal seats in Australia, 1984–2016

Source. Constructed by © Ben Raue from Adam Carr (1984, 1987, 1990, 1993, 1996, 1998, 2001) and AEC (2004c, 2007c, 2010c, 2013g, 2016h).

## South Australia

Labor gained only one seat from the Liberal Party in SA. Labor's Steve Georganas narrowly regained the seat of Hindmarsh after losing the seat in 2013 to the Liberal Party's Matt Williams. Williams had held the seat by a 1.9 per cent margin, but Georganas won thanks to a 2.5 per cent swing to Labor. Labor had hopes of gaining the seat of Boothby, after coming close to winning in 2010. Liberal MP Andrew Southcott retired in 2016 after holding the seat for 20 years. There was a 3.6 per cent swing towards Labor, but Liberal candidate Nicolle Flint was able to hold on with a 3.5 per cent margin. Boothby had been the best seat for the Nick Xenophon ticket in the Senate in 2013, so there was speculation that the Nick Xenophon Team could overtake Labor in Boothby, but they fell 3.85 per cent short.

The most marginal Labor seat in SA was the seat of Adelaide, held by Labor's Kate Ellis. Ellis increased her margin to 4.65 per cent, on the back of a 0.7 per cent swing after preferences. Ellis's primary vote was cut by 6.3 per cent, with some Labor voters switching to the Nick Xenophon Team, but she comfortably retained the seat when those preferences were distributed.

## Tasmania

The Liberal Party suffered major setbacks in Tasmania. In 2013, Liberal candidates won three out of five Tasmanian seats. Despite topping the two-party preferred vote, Labor was reduced to only one seat. In 2016, Labor recovered all three seats lost to the Liberal Party in 2013. Liberal MP Andrew Nikolic held the north-eastern Tasmanian seat of Bass by a 4 per cent margin following the last election. He suffered one of the largest swings across Australia, with Labor's vote after preferences increasing by 10.1 per cent. This left Labor's Ross Hart with 56.1 per cent of the two-party preferred vote. Meanwhile, Liberal MP Brett Whiteley held the north-western Tasmanian seat of Braddon by a 2.6 per cent margin. A 4.8 per cent swing to Labor's Justine Keay swept Whiteley away. Fellow Liberal Eric Hutchinson had won Lyons in 2013, ending 20 years of Labor representation in the central Tasmanian electorate. Hutchinson's 1.2 per cent margin was not enough this time, however, with Labor's Brian Mitchell gaining a 3.5 per cent swing.

## Australian Capital Territory

Labor comfortably retained the two seats in the ACT, with 44.3 per cent of the primary vote and 61.1 per cent of the vote after preferences, a swing of 1.34 per cent on the primary vote and 1.2 per cent on the two-party preferred vote. Gai Brodtmann was elected for a third term representing the southern seat of Canberra, while Andrew Leigh won a third term representing the northern seat of Fenner (a new name for the former seat of Fraser). Brodtmann and Leigh both slightly increased their margins of victory, by 0.95 per cent in Canberra and 1.4 per cent in Fenner.

## Northern Territory

The electorate of Solomon was created in 2001, when the NT was divided into two federal electorates. Labor won the seat for the first time in 2007, before the Country Liberal Party's Natasha Griggs won the seat in 2010. Griggs held Solomon by a 1.4 per cent margin after the 2013 election. A 7.4 per cent swing to Labor's Luke Gosling swept her out on this occasion. Labor's Warren Snowdon has held Lingiari since it was created in 2001, and had served four previous terms representing the entire territory. He came close to losing in 2013, holding on by a 0.88 per cent margin. Snowdon built up his margin in 2016 thanks to a 7.5 per cent swing.

## Non-classic contests

The AEC defines a seat as ‘non-classic’ if the final two candidates after the distribution of preferences are not a Labor candidate and a Coalition candidate. So, non-classic seats can include races where an Independent or minor party comes in the top two, or where the final distribution of preferences is between two Coalition candidates. These sorts of outcomes used to be very rare, but have become much more common in the last decade. In particular, the phenomenon of minor parties outpolling one of the major parties in a House of Representatives race, which was once rare, is now commonplace.

Only three non-classic races took place at the 1990, 1993 and 1998 elections, and apart from a brief spike to six races in 1996, the numbers remained low as recently as 2007. In 2007, two Independents and one Green reached the two-candidate preferred count. Since 2007, these numbers have surged. Eight non-classic races took place in 2010. Eleven took place in 2013. At the 2016 federal election, 17 electorates did not end up as a race between Labor and the Coalition; well over 10 per cent of all seats (Figure 7.4).

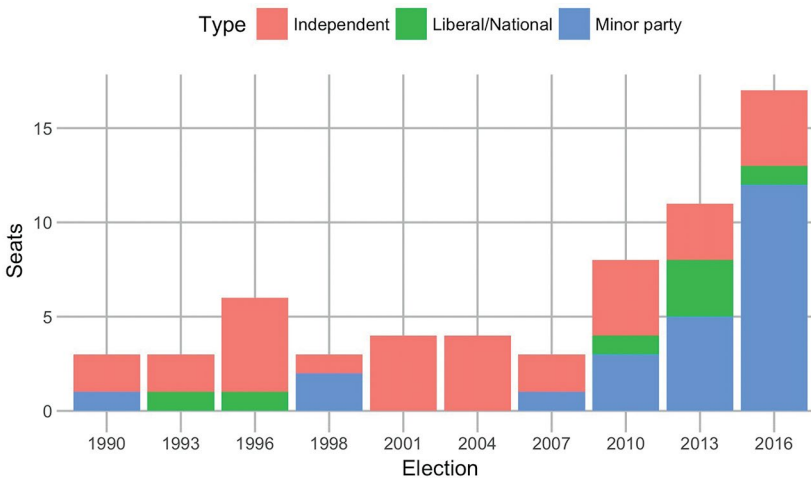


Figure 7.4. Non-classic races in federal elections, 1990–2016

Source. Constructed by © Ben Raue from AEC data (2004d, 2007d, 2010d, 2013h, 2016i).

This growth is almost entirely driven by the rise of minor parties and the Greens (see Jackson, Chapter 13, this volume; Kefford, Chapter 15, this volume). The Greens first broke into the top two in the seat of Melbourne in 2007. In 2016, the Greens reached the two-candidate preferred count in four seats in inner-Melbourne and two seats in inner-Sydney. Other minor parties have now also started to break through in other parts of the country. The Nick Xenophon Team reached the top two in four South Australian seats, while Pauline Hanson's One Nation (PHON) came second in the Queensland seat of Maranoa.

The growth is not driven by an increase in Independents or an increase in Coalition infighting. Independents broke through to the top two in four seats in 2016, well within the normal historical range. While the Western Australian branch of the Nationals has continued to contest Liberal seats, intra-Coalition fights on the east coast are rare, with a Liberal and National candidate both making the final preference count in one seat in 2016.

Minor parties have always played a role in House of Representatives elections, but this role has usually been limited to distributing preferences between the major parties. Minor parties are now in a position to win seats in more parts of the country.

## Contests between the Liberal Party and the Nationals

The Liberal Party and the Nationals ran against each other in 11 seats, but there were three seats in particular where either party had a real chance of winning (see Cockfield and Curtin, Chapter 14, this volume). Outside of WA, contests between the two parties are now rare. The parties have merged in QLD, and such contests are unusual in NSW and VIC.

The only serious contest on the east coast between the parties took place in Murray, where sitting Liberal MP Sharman Stone was retiring. The Country Party and the National Party had held Murray continuously from its creation in 1949 until 1996, when the sitting MP's retirement opened the door for Stone to win the seat as a Liberal. The Liberal Party's Duncan McGauchie and the Nationals' Damian Drum contested Murray in 2016. Drum, formerly a Victorian Football League footballer and coach in the Australian Football League, and more recently a State parliamentarian and minister, outpolled McGauchie on primary votes, 35.3 per cent to 32 per cent. After the distribution of preferences, Drum won Murray with 55.1 per cent of the two-candidate preferred vote.

The Nationals traditionally contest all regional Liberal seats in WA. They are strongest in the two largest seats: Durack and O'Connor. The Nationals came second in each of these seats in 2013, having held O'Connor from 2010 to 2013. Primary vote swings away from the party in 2016 saw both Nationals candidates drop behind their Labor rivals, leaving the sitting Liberal MPs to win each seat easily on Nationals preferences.

## The Nick Xenophon Team in South Australia

The Nick Xenophon Team (NXT) ran for House of Representatives seats for the first time in 2016. The party ran in every seat in SA, and had a major impact. The party's lowest primary vote in SA was 12.3 per cent in Adelaide; the party exceeded 15 per cent in nine out of 11 seats in the State. NXT won one seat—defeating former minister and Liberal MP Jamie Briggs in his seat of Mayo. Rebekha Sharkie polled 34.9 per cent of the primary vote, and won 55 per cent of the vote after preferences.

NXT also reached second place in two other South Australian seats: the large regional Liberal seats of Barker and Grey. In Barker, NXT candidate James Stacey polled 29.1 per cent of the primary vote and 45.3 per cent after preferences. In Grey, NXT candidate Andrea Broadfoot achieved 27.8 per cent of the primary vote and 48 per cent after preferences. NXT also polled over 20 per cent in the urban Liberal seats of Boothby and Sturt, and the semi-urban Labor seat of Wakefield.

## The Greens

The Greens have long held ambitions of expanding their tally of inner-city electorates in Melbourne and Sydney (see Jackson, Chapter 13, this volume). The seat of Melbourne fell to the Greens in 2010, and they managed to retain the seat in 2013 despite the loss of Liberal preferences. The Greens broke through to win State seats in Balmain in 2011, Melbourne and Prahran in 2014, and Newtown and Ballina in 2015. All except Ballina, which is on the north coast of NSW, were inner-city electorates in Sydney or Melbourne.

At the 2016 election, the picture looked very different for the Greens in the inner-city areas of Melbourne and Sydney. In Melbourne, the Greens were not successful in gaining any additional seats beyond the single seat they already held. However, they achieved large swings in a ring

of five neighbouring electorates, putting them in a stronger position to win a number of these seats in the near future. The same cannot be said, however, for the Greens in inner Sydney (Figure 7.5).

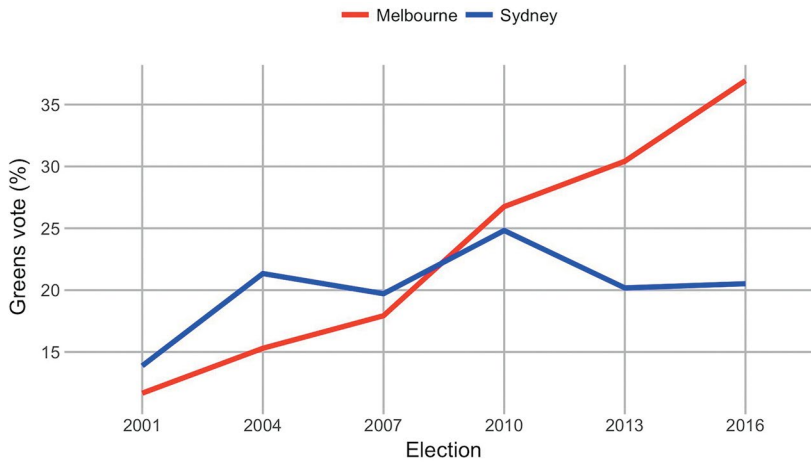


Figure 7.5. Greens vote in inner-city federal electorates in Melbourne and Sydney

Source. Constructed by Ben Raue from AEC data (2001, 2004e, 2007e, 2010e, 2013i, 2016j).

In the three inner-city electorates of Melbourne, Wills and Batman, the average Greens primary vote has steadily climbed, first passing 25 per cent in 2010 and reaching almost 37 per cent in 2016. In contrast, the average Greens vote in the inner-city electorates of Sydney and Grayndler first passed 20 per cent in 2004, and has largely stayed around that level for the last decade.

Greens MP Adam Bandt gained a small swing in Melbourne, winning 43.8 per cent of the primary vote—a record for the Greens in a federal election. A swing of approximately 2 per cent away from Labor and to the Liberal Party pushed the Liberal Party into second place. Thanks to this shift, Bandt polled 68.4 per cent of the two-candidate preferred vote against the Liberal candidate. This makes the seat of Melbourne look much more like a safe Greens seat. The Greens gained larger swings in neighbouring electorates, managing a swing of almost 10 per cent on both primary votes and two-candidate preferred votes in Batman, where the Labor candidate, David Feeney, proved embarrassingly accident-prone,

having failed to declare his ownership of a property in the members' register. The Greens' Alex Bhathal polled 37 per cent of the primary vote, and 49 per cent after preferences.

In the seat of Wills, to the north of Melbourne and to the west of Batman, the Greens ran local mayor Samantha Ratnam, and benefited from the retirement of Labor's Kelvin Thomson after 20 years in the seat. She managed a swing of 8.6 per cent on primary votes to poll 30.6 per cent. After preferences were counted, Ratnam polled 45 per cent, a swing of 10.3 per cent. The Greens also made a concerted push in the inner-city Liberal electorate of Higgins. The Greens' Jason Ball gained a swing of 8.6 per cent, which pushed him ahead of the Labor candidate. The Greens reached 42 per cent of the vote after preferences. The Greens also gained a 3.6 per cent swing in Melbourne Ports, putting the party only 3.2 per cent behind Labor MP Michael Danby. To the west of Melbourne, the Greens also polled over 20 per cent in Gellibrand for the first time.

The picture is very different in the inner-city of Sydney. The Greens vote in Grayndler and Sydney peaked in 2010 at almost 26 per cent in Grayndler and almost 24 per cent in Sydney. The vote dropped in both seats in 2013, and the party managed only very modest swings in 2016. Greens candidate Jim Casey polled 22 per cent in Grayndler, a swing of 0.2 per cent. In Sydney, Greens candidate Sylvie Ellsmore polled 18.7 per cent, a swing of 0.5 per cent. In each case, the Greens candidate faced a strong Labor adversary who was a shadow minister from the Left of the party: Tanya Plibersek in Sydney and Anthony Albanese in Grayndler.

Outside of these typically strong inner-Sydney electorates, the Greens generally gained their biggest swings in their strongest seats in inner-Brisbane, inner-Perth and northern NSW. In Brisbane, the Greens managed swings of 4.3 per cent in Ryan, 5.1 per cent in Brisbane and 6.8 per cent in Griffith. In the west, the Greens gained swings of 5.1 per cent in Perth and 5.9 per cent in Fremantle. In northern NSW, the Greens gained a 5.1 per cent swing in Richmond to poll over 20 per cent for the first time, although antinuclear campaigner Helen Caldicott polled almost a quarter of the vote in 1990, an election in which environmental issues were prominent, delivering the seat to the Labor Party over the Nationals' federal leader Charles Blunt.

## Independents

High-profile Independents ran in five electorates (see Curtin, Chapter 16, this volume for a more detailed discussion of these contests). Two of these candidates were elected, and three fell short—one falling short by a wide margin.

Independent MP Andrew Wilkie was first elected in Denison in 2010, squeaking through with 51.2 per cent of the vote after the allocation of preferences. Wilkie was one of the few candidates ever elected from third place on primary votes. A 16.8 per cent primary vote swing in 2013 solidified Wilkie's hold on Denison, and a further 6 per cent swing in 2016 has put Wilkie in an even stronger position. Wilkie achieved 44 per cent of the primary vote, over 21 percentage points ahead of his closest rival, Labor's Jane Austin. He had 67.8 per cent of the vote after the distribution of preferences.

Fellow Independent MP Cathy McGowan first won Indi at the 2013 election, defeating sitting Liberal MP Sophie Mirabella with over 31 per cent of the primary vote, and 50.25 per cent after preferences. Mirabella returned to contest the seat in 2016, along with a Nationals candidate. McGowan saw off Mirabella's challenge with more ease, increasing her two-candidate preferred vote to 54.8 per cent.

Former Independent MPs Tony Windsor and Rob Oakeshott returned to contest the Nationals' seats of New England and Cowper, without success. Windsor had stepped down as member for New England prior to the 2013 election, and Barnaby Joyce won the seat. Joyce, a former Queensland senator, had become Nationals leader and deputy prime minister in early 2016. Joyce comfortably defeated Windsor, polling 58.5 per cent of the vote after preferences. In comparison, the Nationals candidate had only managed 28.5 per cent in 2010, the last time the seat was contested by Windsor.

Rob Oakeshott made a last-minute announcement that he would contest the National-held seat of Cowper. Oakeshott had previously represented the State electorate of Port Macquarie from 1996 to 2008 and the federal electorate of Lyne from 2008 to 2013. The recent redistribution moved the city of Port Macquarie from Lyne into the neighbouring seat of Cowper, which had previously been centred on Coffs Harbour. Oakeshott had never contested a seat covering Coffs Harbour as well as his base



of Port Macquarie, and he started his campaign quite late. In the end, Oakeshott polled 45.4 per cent of the vote after preferences, losing to Nationals frontbencher Luke Hartsuyker.

The other high-profile Independent campaign took place in Warringah, where former *Australian Idol* host James Mathison launched a centre-left Independent challenge to former prime minister Tony Abbott. Mathison came fourth, polling 11.4 per cent of the primary vote. His preferences helped push the Greens ahead of Labor.

Two other Independent candidates polled over 10 per cent of the vote in an electorate. In the Western Australian seat of Tangney, the sitting MP Dennis Jensen, who had held the seat as a Liberal since 2004, was denied preselection for the 2016 election, and ran for the seat as an Independent. Jensen fell far short of winning, coming fourth behind the Liberal, Labor and Greens candidates with an 11.9 per cent primary vote. Independent candidate Stephen Ruff, an orthopaedic surgeon, contested North Sydney for the second time, after first running in the 2015 by-election. He had polled 18.8 per cent in the by-election, but managed only 12.8 per cent in 2016.

## Other minor parties

Bob Katter was elected for a ninth term as the member for Kennedy. Katter gained a 9 per cent swing, increasing his vote to 61.1 per cent after preferences after his margin had been slashed in 2013. No other Katter's Australian Party candidates polled a significant vote.

Pauline Hanson's One Nation ran in 15 electorates, mostly in QLD, and polled over 10 per cent in nine of these seats. The PHON vote was highest in the electorate of Wright, where the PHON candidate polled 20.9 per cent. PHON also made the final two-candidate preferred count in the vast rural QLD seat of Maranoa. No PHON candidate has achieved this feat since 1998. In Maranoa, PHON's Lynette Keehn came third on the primary vote, but overtook the Labor candidate on minor party preferences, and polled 34.1 per cent of the vote after preferences.

## Conclusion

The 2016 federal election saw a swing back to Labor across most of the country, but the picture varied between States. The opposition won a number of seats in NSW and TAS, but was otherwise unable to advance very far, winning no more than two additional seats anywhere else. Victoria, which has been a relatively strong State for Labor in recent years, proved tougher this election: the party lost the seat of Chisholm, and failed to take any other Victorian marginal seat from the government.

The most notable development in the 2016 House of Representatives results is the increased prominence of minor parties. In the past, minor parties were mostly a secondary force in the lower house. While their preferences could help decide seats, they were rarely in a position to threaten seriously the major party hold on a seat. This has been gradually changing over the last decade, but with a notable jump in minor party impact in 2016. Seventeen seats produced results where the top two candidates were not from Labor and the Coalition, with the Greens, Nick Xenophon Team, Katter's Australian Party and PHON all polling in the top two finishers in at least one seat, along with a number of Independents.

These trends may well be in play at the next federal election: a strengthened Labor opposition looking to make electoral gains in Victoria, and a plethora of minor parties seriously threatening Labor and Liberal seats across Australia.

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# 8

## The Senate Results

Antony Green

Of Australia's 45 House of Representatives elections, 39, including the 2016 election, have been conducted in conjunction with an election for the Senate.<sup>1</sup> The battle for government in the House of Representatives (the House) defines the party contest for both elections, though surveys (McAllister 2011) and election results reveal a small but growing incidence of split-ticket voting. That similar party vote shares produce different party representation in each chamber is due to members being elected by different electoral systems.

The major party contest in the House of Representatives and the growth of minor parties in both chambers is dealt with elsewhere in this book (see Raue, Chapter 7, this volume; Kefford, Chapter 15, this volume). This chapter deals with the impact of two important features of the Senate's electoral system in 2016. The first was the decision of the government to engineer a double dissolution rather than hold a normal House and half-Senate election. The second concerns the major changes to the Senate's electoral system introduced ahead of the election. What impact did these changes have on the result, and how did voters react to the new methods of voting?

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1 There have been 31 joint House and half-Senate elections, eight for the House and the whole Senate including seven following double dissolutions, six House-only elections and four separate half-Senate elections. All 17 elections since 1974 have been joint elections, including five that followed double dissolutions.

## Senate structure and election timing

The Australian Constitution sets out a system of national government based on Westminster principles with government responsible to the popularly elected lower house of parliament. The Constitution also created a powerful and popularly elected upper house, reflecting the compromises required to achieve federation in 1901. Seats in the House of Representatives are allocated to States based on their population, but, in the Senate, States have equal representation. Together, these features created the possibility of strong bicameralism in Australian government, but it took a change to elect the Senate by proportional representation in 1949 to turn possibility into reality.

The House of Representatives is elected for flexible three-year terms while the terms of State Senators are fixed at six years, half of each State's Senators facing election every three years.<sup>2</sup> Senate election dates are not fixed but are restricted to being held in the 12 months before Senate terms expire. The interaction of the House's variable term and the Senate's fixed term has always created timing difficulties for governments trying to avoid separate elections.

The Constitution provides little guidance on the Senate's electoral system. State Senators are to be elected by the people voting as one electorate until the parliament otherwise provides. There has been no attempt by parliament to move away from State-wide Senate elections. Any electoral system must be uniform for all States and the franchise must be the same for both chambers.

A deadlock provision was included to resolve disputes between the houses. Bills meeting certain requirements for failing to pass the Senate can be used to break the fixed terms of the Senate and produce a 'double dissolution' and subsequent election for the House and the whole Senate. If after an election the Senate persists in preventing passage of trigger bills, the government can call a joint sitting of both houses as an alternative legislative path.<sup>3</sup> Double dissolutions complicate future election timing by backdating the terms of new Senators.

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2 Since 1975, there have been two Senators elected for each of Australia's two Territories. Terms of Territory Senators are not staggered and are tied to the terms of the House of Representatives.

3 Of the seven double dissolutions, two saw the government defeated (1914, 1983) and the 1975 double-dissolution election was a special case following the dismissal of the Whitlam government. Of the four won by the initiating government, in 1951 the Menzies government won a Senate



In 2016, the restrictions on holding half-Senate elections prevented the Turnbull government calling a House and half-Senate election before August, and the term of the House made December 2016 the last practical time for a joint election.<sup>4</sup> A House-only election before August was possible but required a separate half-Senate election by May 2017. A double dissolution in late 2015 or early 2016 based on existing triggers would have backdated Senate terms to July 2015 and created an effective two-year term by requiring a new half-Senate election by May 2018. The last date on which the Constitution permitted a double dissolution of parliament to take place was 10 May 2016, and a longer-than-normal campaign permitted the election to be held in early July, pushing the next half-Senate election out by 12 months to May 2019.

Parliament rose for the autumn break on 18 March 2016, having passed changes to the Senate's electoral system but without resolving one of the bills the government hoped to use in calling a double dissolution. On 21 March 2016, the Prime Minister announced he had requested the Governor-General to prorogue and recall parliament for 18 April 2016 to consider the disputed bills, stating his intent to request a double dissolution and election for 2 July 2016 if the bills were not passed. The government also announced the annual Budget would be brought forward to 3 May 2016 to avoid a clash with the last date for the dissolution of both Houses.

The recalled Senate defeated the government's bills on 18 April and the parliament adjourned until the Budget. There was no time to pass the Budget before the election, so with election day in the new financial year, an interim supply bill was passed to cover government services until the new parliament met. The dissolution of both houses took place on 8 May, with writs issued on 16 May 2016 for an election on 2 July 2016.

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majority, 1974 and 1987 saw the government returned without a Senate majority but with a joint sitting majority, while the Turnbull government was re-elected in 2016 with neither a Senate nor a joint-sitting majority. The only double dissolution to be followed by a joint sitting was 1974.

<sup>4</sup> A half-Senate election had to be held between 6 August 2016 and mid-May 2017. The last possible date for a House election was Saturday 14 January 2017, but practically had to be held by early December 2016.

## The development of the Senate's electoral system

While Senators have continued to be elected from State-wide electorates, the ballot paper structure, method of marking and counting system have changed substantially. This history is explored fully elsewhere (Farrell and McAllister 2006), but the most significant change took place in 1949 with a switch from a majoritarian counting system to proportional representation by single transferrable vote (PR-STV). Proportional representation changed the Senate from a chamber that had previously usually been dominated by government into a more effective house of review where governments had only small majorities or were forced to negotiate with minor parties and Independents.

The form of the ballot paper and method of voting have undergone more regular change than the counting method. Numbering preferences was introduced in 1919 to align with the preferential voting for House elections and became full preferential voting in 1934.<sup>5</sup> Candidates were first grouped by party in 1922, with a horizontal ballot paper and party determination of candidate order adopted in 1940. The switch in counting method in 1949 involved no change to the ballot paper.

While Australia's persistent high rate of informal or spoiled ballots has been due in part to compulsory voting, full preferential voting has also played a role, especially at Senate elections. Figure 8.1 plots the rate of informal voting at Senate elections since the adoption of numbered ballot papers in 1919 and shows the impact of changes to the ballot paper structure and method of voting in 1984. Between 1919 and 1983, the rate of informal voting averaged 9.1 per cent per election. This decreased to an average of 3.5 per cent after the new ballot paper was introduced in 1984. Avoiding a return to high rates of informal voting played a role in the changes to the Senate's electoral system for the 2016 election.

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5 From 1919 to 1931, Senate contests required  $2*(n+1)$  preferences where  $n$  was the number of vacancies.

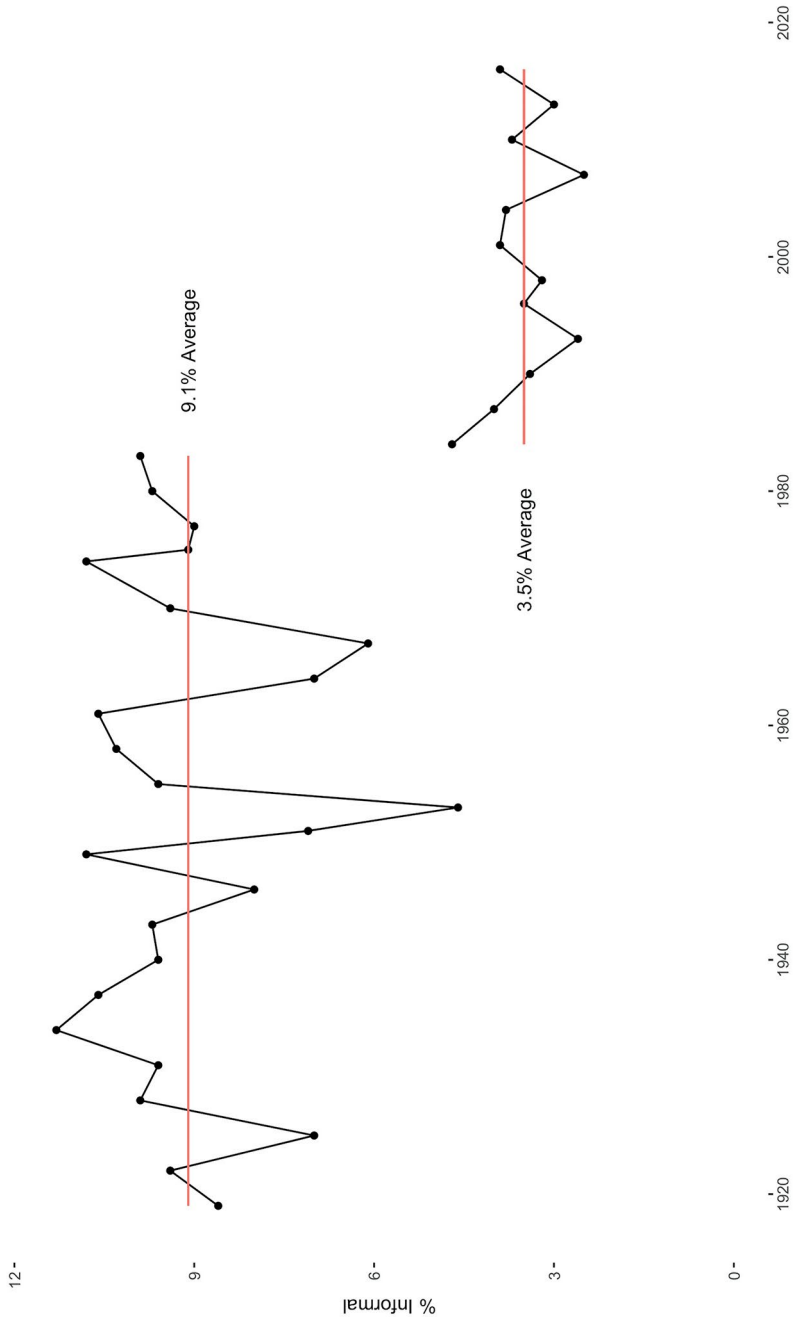


Figure 8.1. Informal vote at Senate elections, 1919–2016  
Source. Constructed by author from data in Barber (2017).

The 1984 change split the ballot paper horizontally, a thick black line dividing the ballot paper into an area for party votes ‘above the line’ and votes for candidates ‘below the line’ (see Figure 8.2). Full preferential voting was retained for ‘below-the-line’ votes; however, voters were required to select only one party ‘above the line’, which was imputed to mean the voter adopted the chosen party’s list of preferences for all candidates. To have a voting square above the line, groups/parties were required to lodge group-voting tickets that gave initial preferences in order for the group’s candidates ‘below the line’, followed by preferences for every other candidate on the ballot paper.<sup>6</sup>

Around 98 per cent of major party voters and 90 per cent of minor party voters voted above the line. The asymmetry in effort between the two voting methods herded voters into accepting the party tickets, a problem made worse as the number of candidates and parties contesting election increased.<sup>7</sup> Printing technology restricting the Senate ballot paper to 1.04 metres wide required the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) to shrink font size in response to the increasing number of groups. In 2013, the AEC began issuing magnifying sheets with ballot papers.

The division of the ballot paper was clearly an effective solution to informal voting, but there were political consequences. Before group-voting tickets, parties distributed how-to-vote material outside the polling place to show voters how to complete a formal vote and to influence preferences.<sup>8</sup> Group-voting tickets granted parties control over the distribution of preferences for all votes completed using an above-the-line square, resulting in parties recommending only an ‘above-the-line’ vote. For the first time, minor and even micro parties could achieve control over preferences, opening a new market for trading preference, inducing talk of the system being ‘gamed’.

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6 Groups were permitted to lodge up to three group-voting tickets. If multiple tickets were lodged, a party’s total vote was split, with equal numbers allocated to follow the preferences of each ticket. Preference tickets could be inspected in a booklet available in each polling place or, in later years, could be viewed on the internet.

7 Comparing the 1987 and 2016 double dissolutions, the average number of candidates per State was 39 and the average number of groups 10 in 1987 compared to an average of 98 candidates and 32 groups in 2016 (Territories not included).

8 Active campaigning is permitted outside polling places in Australia, with candidates and parties distributing how-to-vote material as a guide to ensure voters cast formal votes and to influence their preferences.



Comparative PR-STV literature draws a distinction between intraparty and interparty preference transfers. Intraparty transfers are rarely relevant in Australia due to ballot paper grouping and the use of full preferential voting.<sup>9</sup> The use of ‘above-the-line’ voting has further minimised the number of non-transfers within a group while also allowing parties to lock the order in which its candidates are elected. Group-voting tickets significantly increased party control of interparty preference transfers and created a distortion of the proportionality of Senators elected compared to party vote share. A preference flow based entirely on a voters’ original choice of first preference reflects ‘the preferences of the party originally supported rather than the preferences of the voter’ (Farrell and Katz 2014: 19).

The tighter party control imposed by group-voting tickets turned aspects of the Senate’s electoral system into a form of closed-list proportional representation (Farrell and McAllister 2006). However, the tight control of interparty transfers distorted results compared to a list system based on simple highest remainder methods of allocating final seats. To assess the impact of interparty transfers, Table 8.1 compares outcomes at Senate elections since 1984 to outcomes for the same vote shares under a list PR system using a Droop quota and highest remainder method of allocating final seats. To explain the columns in the table:

- Filled quotas: the number of Senators elected through quotas filled on the total of first preference votes by party.
- Highest remainder: the number of Senators elected after having the highest remainder or partial quota on first preference votes.
- Trailing wins: the number of Senators elected after having trailed the party with the highest remainder on the initial counts.
- Parties passed: the number of higher polling party candidates passed by trailing winners.

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9 At Australian subnational elections in Tasmania (TAS) and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), candidates are grouped by party but without an above-the-line option. Intraparty transfers remain high because of a requirement for as many preferences as there are vacancies to fill.

**Table 8.1. Senate results compared to list-PR with highest remainder allocation**

Election (Seats)	Filled quotas	Highest remainder	Trailing wins	Parties passed
1977 (30)	24	5	1	1
1980 (30)	25	4	1	1
1983 (60)	54	3	3	2
1984 (42)	33	7	2	2
1987 (72)	62	6	4	6
1990 (36)	28	6	2	2
1993 (36)	30	4	2	3
1996 (36)	28	7	1	1
1998 (36)	24	7	5	5
2001 (36)	25	6	5	6
2004 (36)	29	6	1	3
2007 (36)	27	8	1	2
2010 (36)	27	7	2	4
2013 (36)	21	6	9	33
2016 (72)	52	18	2	7

Source. Calculations by author based on election results published by the AEC, excludes Territory Senate races.

A quarter of the Senators elected in 2013 were from trailing positions, and the ratio of parties passed to trailing wins was much higher than at any previous election. In Western Australia (WA), Wayne Dropulich of the Australian Sports Party was elected despite the party polling just 0.23 per cent or 0.016 quotas. The Sports Party was ordered 21st of 27 parties on first preference votes, but received preferences from 20 different parties to achieve a quota, 15 of those parties having polled a higher first preference vote.<sup>10</sup> Preferences allowed Dropulich to leapfrog parties and defeat a Labor candidate who began the count with a remainder of 0.86 quotas (Green 2013). In Victoria (VIC), Ricky Muir and the Australian Motoring Enthusiasts Party began the count with 0.51 per cent or 0.035 quotas, receiving preferences from 22 other parties, including nine with more votes, and passed a Liberal candidate with a remainder of 0.81 quotas (Green 2014b).

<sup>10</sup> Dropulich was elected at a recount, but it was discovered that 1,370 ballot papers had gone missing since the first count. The Court of Disputed Returns ruled the correct result could not be determined and the WA Senate election was rerun in April 2014 at which Dropulich was not elected.

Over three decades, candidates and parties had learnt the rules of the game. A so-called micro-party alliance used the tactic of ‘preference harvesting’, where minor and ‘micro’ parties chose to ignore ideology, instead strategically directing preferences to each other ahead of all larger parties. With preferences accumulated into the pool by group-voting tickets, victories for candidates such as Muir and Dropulich became possible. Comparing tickets to below-the-line votes for the same party often revealed very different preference flows (Green 2014a).

## Electoral changes for the 2016 election

Immediately after the 2013 election, the federal parliament’s Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM) launched an inquiry into the Senate’s electoral system. The Coalition, Labor and Green members came to a unanimous conclusion on reform (JSCEM 2014). The proposals languished until early 2016, when they were revived as part of the Turnbull government’s options for calling a double dissolution. On 22 February 2016, the prime minister announced the government’s intent to move on reform. After negotiations, the final legislation included the following changes:

- The divided Senate ballot paper was retained but group-voting tickets were abolished.
- JSCEM’s recommendation for fully optional preferential voting above the line was replaced by instructions that voters should complete at least six squares.
- After first proposing to retain full preferential voting below the line, JSCEM’s original optional preferential voting proposal was adopted with instructions that voters should number at least 12 squares.
- Generous savings provisions were included. Any above-the-line vote with at least a valid first preference was to be formal, while a below-the-line vote required at least six valid preferences.
- JSCEM’s proposals to toughen party registration were not pursued, but a proposal to print party logos on ballot papers was adopted.

Having supported the original JSCEM recommendations, the Labor Party opposed the legislation. In the House, former JSCEM member and Labor’s spokesperson on electoral reform, Gary Gray, spoke in support of the changes before voting against the bill with his party. In the Senate,



the Greens would not permit the government to use ‘guillotine’ procedures to close debate, allowing Labor to engage in an overnight filibuster before the bill was finally passed.

Criticism of the bill centred on the number of exhausted preferences that the reforms would produce and how this would disadvantage smaller parties. It was argued—erroneously, in view of Labor’s opposition to the changes—that the legislation was an example of cartel party behaviour, incumbent parties combining to disadvantage new entrants, and that ‘vote exhaustion will be the new way electors could be disenfranchised’ (Economou 2016). Leading Labor’s opposition to the bill, Senator Penny Wong spoke of 3 million votes being exhausted, based on an assumption that most voters would continue with the ‘1’ only option in use for three decades. A constitutional challenge against the changes was launched, but the High Court dismissed the case ruling none of the presented arguments had ‘any merit’.<sup>11</sup>

The changes created substantial logistical difficulties for the AEC. The new system required all ballot papers to be optically scanned or data entered manually to create electronic versions, and the preference distribution software was upgraded to cope with a 20-fold increase in records. Confusion arose over the difference between the ballot paper instructions for six preferences above the line against the savings provision allowing a single ‘1’ to count. The AEC engaged in an extensive publicity campaign on the new rules and ballot paper—issuing officers were trained to state the new instructions. The only negative was reports of longer queues at polling places caused by voters taking longer to complete their Senate ballot papers (AEC 2016: para. 7.11).

## The impact of calling a double dissolution

Double dissolutions are a significant constitutional event, but the election that follows is little different from a normal election. The appearance, rules for completion and method of counting House and Senate ballot papers are unchanged. Only the number of State Senators to be elected changes, reducing the quota from 14.3 per cent to 7.7 per cent. The decrease in effective threshold for election increases the proportionality of the result.

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11 *Day v Australian Electoral Officer for the State of South Australia; Madden v Australian Electoral Officer for the State of Tasmania* [2016] HCA 20 (13 May 2016), para. 37.

The quota change had a significant impact on the Turnbull government's prospects of defending its Senate position. To win half of a State's six half-Senate seats, a party needs 42.9 per cent of the vote. Winning half of a State's 12 seats at a double dissolution requires a higher 46.2 per cent of the vote. A party with 40 per cent of the vote at a double-dissolution election has 5.2 quotas and is likely to elect five Senators. The same vote at a half-Senate election corresponds to 2.8 quotas and would deliver six Senators to a party if achieved at successive elections. This provided a significant dilemma for the Turnbull government in the three States where the Coalition was defending six Senate seats, as shown in Table 8.2.

Table 8.2. Senate results in 2016 in States with six Coalition Senators

State	2016 % vote	Half-Senate quotas	Double-dissolution quotas
NSW	35.85	2.51	4.66
QLD	35.27	2.47	4.59
WA	38.49	2.69	5.00

Source. Calculations by author from AEC results website.

The Coalition elected five Senators in each State. In the AEC's recount of the same votes to model a half-Senate election, the Coalition returned three Senators in each State. The Coalition's loss of three Senate seats at the double dissolution was a consequence of the change in quota, not a change in party support. Votes that elected Pauline Hanson's One Nation (PHON) and the Liberal Democrats to the final seats in these three States at a double dissolution would have been distributed as preferences to elect a third Coalition Senator at a half-Senate election.

## The results

The lower quota at a double dissolution was an incentive for minor parties to contest the election, even though the electoral system changes made it harder for smaller parties to be elected. A total of 631 candidates contested the 76 vacancies compared to 529 for 40 vacancies in 2013, the number of ballot paper groups falling from 227 to 206. The increase in candidates was due to the major parties standing more candidates because of the double dissolution, and an increase from 11 to 79 in single candidates appearing in the 'Ungrouped' column. Table 8.3 summarises the overall results of the election. The final two columns show the post-election allocation of Senators to three- or six-year terms.

Table 8.3. Senate election results, 2016

Party	Votes		Senators			Terms*	
	Pct	Change	Elected	Pct	Change	6-year	3-year
Coalition	35.18	-2.52	30	39.5	-3	16	12
Labor	29.79	-0.32	26	34.2	+1	13	11
Greens	8.65	0	9	11.8	-1	3	6
Pauline Hanson's One Nation	4.29	+3.76	4	5.3	+4	1	3
Nick Xenophon Team	3.30	+1.37	3	3.9	+2	2	1
Liberal Democrats	2.16	-1.75	1	1.3			1
Family First	1.38	+0.27	1	1.3			1
Jacqui Lambie Network	0.50	+0.50	1	1.3	+1	1	
Derryn Hinch's Justice Party	1.93	+1.93	1	1.3	+1		1
Christian Democrats	1.17	+0.63					
Palmer United Party	0.19	-4.72			-3		
Others	11.46	+0.85			-2		

\* Excludes two Coalition and two Labor Territory Senators who were elected for terms tied to the next House election

Source. 2016 AEC Election results compared to original 2013 party votes but using 2014 WA re-election Senators elected.

Major features of the results were:

- The Coalition declined from 33 to 30 seats owing to the quota changes discussed above. The Liberal Party gained a seat to five in VIC but lost one to four in South Australia (SA) with the continued strong support for the Nick Xenophon Team.
- Labor won 26 seats, gaining a seat to four in WA after its bad result at the 2014 re-election. Labor remained on a historically low three seats in SA. Tasmania (TAS) was the only State where Labor elected five Senators, though, as explained later, not the five Senators it expected to elect.
- The Greens were reduced from 10 to nine seats. The double-dissolution quota allowed the party to retain two seats in its strongest States, VIC, WA and TAS, and retain one seat in the other States with the loss of its second Senator in SA.
- Pauline Hanson's One Nation returned to the parliament with four seats, winning two seats in Queensland (QLD) and one each in New South Wales (NSW) and WA. The party polled 9.2 per cent in QLD and just over 4 per cent in NSW and WA.

- The Nick Xenophon Team won three seats in SA where its vote fell 3.1 percentage points to 21.7 per cent. The party polled only 1.8 per cent in the other five States.
- Having elected three Senators in 2016, the Palmer United Party recorded just 0.19 per cent and its remaining Senator Dio Wang was defeated in WA. Ex-Palmer United Senator Jacqui Lambie was re-elected for the Jacqui Lambie Network in TAS, polling 8.3 per cent in the State but just 0.4 per cent elsewhere. Fellow Palmer United refugee Glenn Lazarus also formed his own party, but was defeated polling just 1.7 per cent in QLD.
- David Leyonhjelm (Liberal Democrat) was re-elected to the final seat in NSW. The party had polled 9.5 per cent in NSW with a favourable ballot position in 2013 but slipped to 3.1 per cent in 2016. The party polled 2.8 per cent in QLD but was passed in the race for the final vacancy by the second PHON candidate.
- Bob Day (Family First) won the final seat in SA. He was the beneficiary of Liberal preferences, the only contest where major party preferences had a significant impact on the result.
- Two Victorian Senators elected previously by preference harvesting were defeated. Ricky Muir of the Australian Motoring Enthusiasts Party increased his vote to 0.9 per cent but was defeated, as was ex-DLP Senator John Madigan, who formed his own John Madigan's Manufacturing and Farming Party. In their place, high-profile media personality Derryn Hinch was elected, drawing the first column on the ballot paper for the Derryn Hinch Justice Party, polling 6.0 per cent in VIC but only 0.6 per cent elsewhere.

The allocation of Senators to three- and six-year terms was determined by a vote of the new Senate on resumption. Citing past practice, the Coalition and Labor combined to allocate the first six elected Senators in each State to six-year terms expiring in 2022, the balance receiving three-year terms expiring in 2019. Compared to the alternative allocation based on a six-vacancy recount by the AEC, Labor and the Coalition gained an extra six-year Senator each at the expense of the Greens and Derryn Hinch.

As the results in Table 8.3 show, only seven of the 20 crossbench members were allocated six-year terms against 13 receiving three-year terms and facing the next election. The true test for the new electoral system, and the challenge for minor parties, is the 2018–19 election when it is likely there will be a winnowing of their numbers. Electoral change and a double

dissolution did not prove a huge success for the Turnbull government, but the legacy of short terms allocated to minor parties will combine with the new electoral system to improve the Senate position of whichever party wins the 2018–19 election.

## Comparing House and Senate results

As outlined by Kefford (Chapter 15, this volume), the 2016 election set another record in support for minor parties, both inclusive and exclusive of the Greens. It also created a new record in the gap between minor party support in the two chambers. For the fourth election in a row, the gap in support widened between the two Houses, as shown in Figure 8.3.

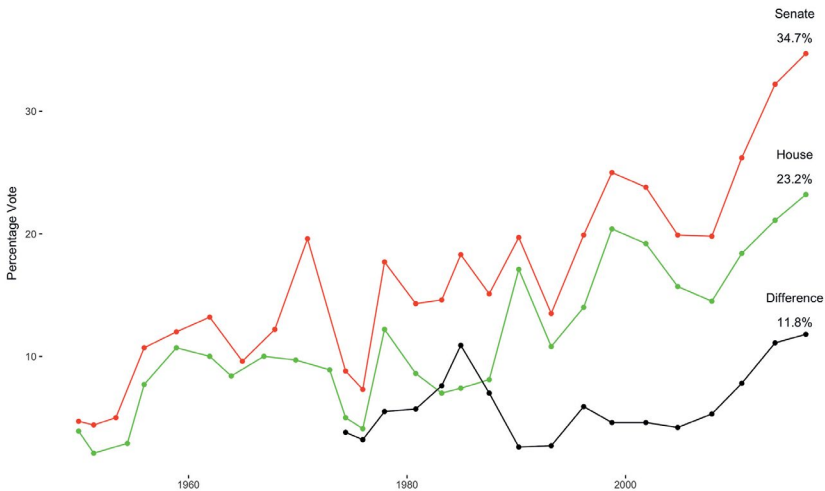


Figure 8.3. Minor party vote at federal elections, 1949–2016

Source. Derived from Barber (2017). Minor Parties defined as Independents and all parties other than the Labor, Liberal and National (Country) Parties

Surveys and past election results have shown that split-ticket voting between the two chambers generally represents major-party lower-house voters deserting to one of the numerous minor parties contesting the Senate. Parties with few lower house candidates that did better in the Senate in 2016 included Pauline Hanson's One Nation (+3.0 percentage points), Derryn Hinch's Justice Party (+1.8), Nick Xenophon Team (+1.5), the Liberal Democrats (+1.7) and Shooters, Fishers and Farmers (+1.3).

A consistent pattern over the last four decades has been for the Greens, and previously the Australian Democrats, to record a higher vote in the Senate. The 2016 election was the first election to break this pattern, with the Greens recording a lower vote in the Senate. Table 8.4 broadly categorises the difference in party shares between the two chambers over the last four elections.

Table 8.4. Difference in party support

Party	2007	2010	2013	2016
Labor	-3.1	-2.9	-3.3	-4.9
Coalition	-2.2	-5.0	-7.9	-6.9
Greens	+1.3	+1.4	0	-1.6
Others	+4.0	+6.5	+12.2	+13.4

Note. Senate % – House %.

Source. Derived by author from Barber (2017), though 2013 figures adjusted to include 2013 WA Senate election rather than the 2014 WA Senate re-election.

In 2016, the Greens committed more resources to targeted House seats at the expense of a general Senate campaign. Several new parties, including the Australia Sex Party and the Animal Justice Party, have emerged at recent elections to compete with the Greens, and small left parties polled around 3 percentage points higher in the Senate. Given Green support for the government's Senate reforms, there may also have been some backlash against the Greens.

## Translating votes into seats

As noted earlier, the Senate's electoral system resembles proportional representation with the resolution of final seats a mix of highest remainders and preferences. The 2016 electoral changes effectively weighted the system in favour of highest remainders, first by weakening interparty transfers as the number of ballot papers exhausting preferences increased, and second by the abolition of group-voting tickets, ending party control over interparty transfers.

Table 8.5 breaks down the State results into Senators elected from filled or partial quotas. The number of Senators by party elected on initial filled quotas is shown in the first columns, Senators by party elected from initial partial quotas in the central columns, and parties with significant

partial quotas but not elected are in the right-hand column. The table includes all parties elected, passed in the count or beginning the count with at least 0.30 of a quota. Territory Senators are excluded.

Table 8.5. Senators elected by initial quota status

State	Filled quotas elected		Partial quotas elected		Partial quotas not elected	
	Quotas	Party	Quotas	Party	Quotas	Party
NSW	4	Liberal/ National	0.96	Greens	0.35	Christian Dems
	4	Labor	0.66	Coalition		
			0.53	PHON		
			0.40	Liberal Democrats		
VIC	4	Liberal/ National	0.99	Labor		
	3	Labor	0.79	Derryn Hinch		
	1	Green	0.41	Greens		
			0.30	Liberal/National		
QLD	4	Liberal National	0.90	Greens	<b>0.37</b>	Liberal Democrats
	3	Labor	0.59	Liberal National	<b>0.27</b>	Nick Xenophon Team
	1	PHON	0.42	Labor	<b>0.25</b>	Family First
			<b>0.19</b>	PHON	<b>0.23</b>	Katter's Australia
					<b>0.22</b>	Glenn Lazarus Team
WA	5	Liberal	0.67	Labor	0.33	National
	3	Labor	0.52	PHON		
	1	Greens	0.37	Greens		
SA	4	Liberal	0.83	Xenophon Team	<b>0.55</b>	Labor
	3	Labor	0.76	Greens	<b>0.39</b>	PHON
	2	Xenophon Team	<b>0.37</b>	Family First		
TAS	4	Labor	0.45	Greens	0.33	PHON
	4	Liberal	0.37	Labor		
	1	Greens				
	1	Lambie Network				

Note. **Bold** indicates where preferences changed the ordering of the highest remainders  
Source. Calculations by author based on AEC 2016 election results.

The candidates elected from the lowest partial quotas were the fifth Coalition candidate in VIC, Liberal Jane Hume (0.30), and the second PHON candidate in QLD, Malcolm Roberts (0.19). The election of Roberts received most attention, having recorded just 77 first preference votes but benefiting from the surplus of party leader Pauline Hanson, as well as her name recognition attracting a consistent flow of above-the-line preferences as parties were excluded.

With interparty preferences now entirely for voters themselves to determine, there are two trends that can be observed in the 2016 results from the distribution of preference reports and by analysing ballot paper data. The first is that on the exclusion of every party from the count, there was a drift of preferences to the major parties. This choice by voters had previously been blocked by group-voting tickets. Except for SA, discussed below, the Coalition, Labor and the Greens turned partial quotas above 0.30 into an extra Senate seat.

The second preference trend can be seen amongst smaller parties, most clearly in the election of Malcolm Roberts in QLD. Having received Pauline Hanson's surplus, the exclusion of groups began with him holding 0.19 quotas, behind five other parties with the Liberal Democrat candidate on twice the vote at 0.37 quotas (see Table 8.5). While Roberts was behind in the count, PHON's original party vote was three times that of the Liberal Democrats. In catching and passing the Liberal Democrats, Roberts and PHON attracted four times as many preferences (Green 2016a). It seems that minor parties tend to attract preferences relative to other parties in a ratio similar to that of the first preferences each party receives. Pauline Hanson's One Nation was better known than other small right-wing parties, received more first preferences than other right-wing parties, and also received more preferences.

Where parties had an ideological affinity, preference flows between them were evident. Labor and Green voters exchanged preferences, as did the Coalition parties and small Christian parties. There were relatively strong flows between various Christian parties. In NSW, where the race for the final three seats was between four right-wing parties, the rate of exhausted preferences was much higher amongst votes for Labor, the Greens and various left-wing parties.



Labor's failure to win a fourth seat in SA, despite a partial quota of 0.55, requires explanation. The Liberal Party polled 4.23 quotas, and its 0.23 quota surplus was the largest major party above-the-line vote surplus to be distributed. Analysing ballot papers, 43 per cent of Liberal above-the-line votes had a second preference for Family First, as recommended on the Liberal how-to-vote card. That flow allowed Family First to pass PHON and win a further boost of preferences to pass Labor in the race for the final seat.

## How voters reacted to the new system

Following the election, the AEC released an electronic dataset of all formal ballot papers. Table 8.6 categorises this data based on whether ballot papers were completed above or below the line, and based on how many valid above-the-line preferences were completed.

Table 8.6. Formal ballot papers categorised by method of completion and preferences

State	Number of above-the-line preferences					Below the line
	1	2–5	6	7–12	>12	
NSW	4.3	4.1	81.3	4.3	0.6	5.4
VIC	1.9	3.5	83.9	4.5	0.8	5.3
QLD	1.6	3.3	83.6	4.6	0.8	6.1
WA	1.9	3.4	83.7	4.2	1.2	5.5
SA	2.0	2.9	79.5	5.3	1.8	8.5
TAS	0.9	2.1	61.3	5.0	2.7	28.1
ACT	1.2	1.7	70.7	11.1		15.2
NT	2.1	2.4	51.3	35.6		8.6
National	2.6	3.5	81.6	4.9	0.8	6.5

Source. Calculated by author from data released by AEC (2017a: Tables 2 and 3). The number of groups was substantially smaller in the two Territories: 10 groups in the ACT and seven in the NT.

By party, Labor at 81.8 per cent and the Coalition at 86.4 per cent had a higher rate of 1–6 above-the-line voting compared to 75.6 per cent for others. The reverse was true for below-the-line voting: 5.3, 4.1 and 10.1 per cent, respectively. The standout entries in Table 8.6 are for TAS and the ACT, where familiarity with the Hare–Clark variant of PR-STV

to elect local parliaments encouraged more voters to delve below the line. That both jurisdictions are considerably smaller meant that voters had more knowledge of the individual candidates.

The rate of informal voting rose from 3.1 per cent to 3.9 per cent. Of the informal votes, 64.1 per cent were blank ballots, 17.4 per cent were informal for having multiple first preferences above the line, and another 13.5 per cent informal for not having at least six formal preferences below the line (AEC 2016). A total of 908,305 ballot papers were marked above the line with fewer than six preferences. Were it not for the generous savings provisions, the rate of informal voting would have reached the high levels seen before the 1984 ballot paper reforms.

Figure 8.4 plots the rate of above-the-line voting in Tasmania compared to the five mainland States at elections since the divided ballot paper was introduced in 1984. Experience with Hare–Clark at State elections has always encouraged a higher proportion of Tasmanian voters to vote below the line. With the 2016 reforms removing the requirement to number every square below the line, many more Tasmanians decided to pick and choose candidates.

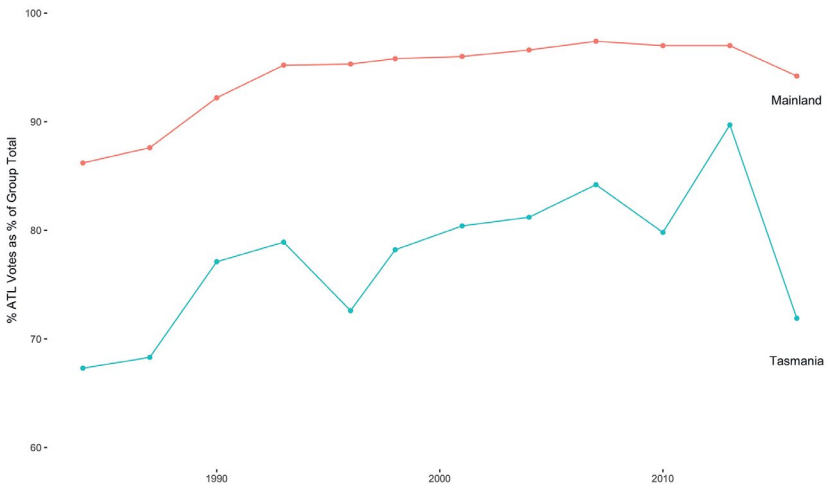


Figure 8.4. Use of above-the-line group voting squares, 1984–2016

Source. Calculations by author from AEC statistical returns for each election.

While intraparty preference flows remained strong in TAS, both Labor and Liberal voters below the line were discerning in their choice of candidate. Both parties had chosen to demote sitting Senators, and voters responded by rearranging the party tickets. Twelve per cent of Liberal voters first preferenced the demoted Richard Colbeck, and 18 per cent of Labor voters did the same for the demoted Lisa Singh. Colbeck was unable to overcome the advantage received by higher-placed Liberal candidates from ticket preferences, but Singh was re-elected.

Lisa Singh had been demoted to the unwinnable sixth spot, but attracted 0.795 of a quota in her own right. She not only defeated her replacement in fifth position, but was elected before the fourth-ranked Labor candidate. In an example of friends and neighbours voting, Singh polled 32.2 per cent of the Labor vote in her former State seat of Denison and 24.1 per cent in neighbouring Franklin. For the first time in half a century, voters elected a Senator out of order from the party ticket, a warning to party powerbrokers to pay more attention to the views of voters in the smaller States.

## Exhausted preferences

Despite warnings that 3 million voters would be disenfranchised by exhaustion, the number of exhausted preferences was considerably lower. Table 8.7 displays two tallies of exhausted votes. The first was published by the AEC and is derived from the totals at the end of the count. However, this includes exhaustions that took place during distributions designed to determine the order of election rather than who was elected. An alternate measure is shown as 'At Last Exclusion', which is the number of exhausted preferences at the point where 12 elected candidates had been determined. The estimates of the likely exhaustion figures, had the election been conducted with the higher half-Senate election quota, did not indicate a significantly higher rate of exhaustion (Green 2016b).

The concern with exhausted preferences overlooks that under full preferential voting, the use of a Droop quota means that a proportion of ballot papers finish with a candidate who is not elected. The PR-STV counting system resulted in exhausted preferences migrating into the non-elected quota during the distribution of preferences. At the end of

the 2016 count, the number of votes ‘wasted’ by exhaustion was little higher than the number that had previously been ‘wasted’ by not electing a Senator.

Table 8.7. Exhausted preferences by State

State	Formal votes	At end of count		At last exclusion	
		Exhausted	%	Exhausted	%
NSW	4,492,197	414,656	9.2	326,849	7.3
VIC	3,500,237	300,283	8.6	180,896	5.2
QLD	2,723,166	208,964	7.7	115,685	4.2
WA	1,366,182	85,766	6.3	49,043	3.6
SA	1,061,165	21,556	2.0	21,556	2.0
TAS	339,159	9,531	2.8	9,531	2.8
ACT	254,767	109	0.0	109	0.0
NT	102,027	0	0.0	0	0.0
Australia	13,838,900	1,040,865	7.5	703,669	5.1

Source. AEC (2017b: Table 6).

## Were Senate reform and the double dissolution worth the effort?

The result of the 2013 Senate election committed the Coalition, Labor, Greens and Nick Xenophon to changing the Senate’s electoral system. Whether the 2016 election was to be a House and half-Senate election or a double-dissolution election, some electoral change was required and the agreed method, as published by JSCEM, was to end party control over preferences by abolishing group-ticket voting.

Assessing the effectiveness of the Turnbull government’s decision to engage in Senate reform and hold a double dissolution in 2016 first requires the clock to be wound back two years and, second, discerns why the Abbott government did not move earlier on Senate reform. The JSCEM report was published in May 2014, before the large crossbench elected in 2013 took its place. Adopting the JSCEM recommendations quickly would have presented the crossbench with a *fait accompli*. It could hardly have worsened the Abbott government’s difficult time in managing the passage of legislation through the Senate.

Had Senate electoral reform been in place earlier in the term, Prime Minister Turnbull could have called a double dissolution in the second half of 2015 when his poll ratings were high. A double dissolution without Senate reform would have been practically impossible, and even a half-Senate election would have been difficult. The lack of earlier Senate electoral reform forced the Turnbull government to wait, spend time legislating for Senate reform, and then effectively launching a three-and-a-half-month election campaign. By election day, the Prime Minister's electoral gloss had faded.

The double-dissolution ploy can be classed a failure as, for the first time, a government re-elected after a double dissolution achieved neither a Senate majority nor a joint-sitting majority. As outlined in this chapter, the double dissolution caused the government to lose three seats, and the size of the non-Green crossbench increased from eight to 11.

Separate from the double dissolution, Senate reform should be judged as a success. By removing party control over preferences, by moving to optional preferences and allowing voters to make their own choices, the result was more proportional to first preference vote share and undistorted by exotic preference swaps. In TAS, voters were even free to rearrange the order candidates were presented to them.

The true test of reform will be the next half-Senate election. The 2016 allocation of so many minor party members to short terms, combined with the higher quota at the next half-Senate election, has the potential to deliver, whoever wins government in the lower house, a Senate that is more manageable and more representative than has been the case since 2014.

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# 9

## The States and Territories

Ferran Martinez i Coma and Rodney Smith

In November 2015, Bill Shorten declared that, if elected, his government would provide \$100 million towards the construction of a new Townsville football stadium. The Queensland Labor government would match the funding. The stadium would primarily serve as the home ground for the newly crowned NRL Premiership winners, the North Queensland Cowboys (Australian Labor Party (ALP) 2015). In the months leading up to the 2016 federal election, Shorten continued to promote his stadium proposal, challenging the Coalition to equal his commitment (Peel 2016). Business analysts criticised Labor's plan, while the Coalition remained uncommitted (Ludlow 2016). During the fourth week of the election campaign, after the Queensland government announced it would increase its funding to \$140 million, Malcolm Turnbull matched Shorten's stadium promise as part of a broader 'City Deal' for Townsville. The State's Assistant Minister for North Queensland welcomed this new bipartisanship, while criticising the time it took Turnbull to make his promise (Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) 2016; Liberal Party of Australia (LPA) 2016b).

Townsville's football stadium illustrates some of the ways in which federalism and party competition interact in Australian federal elections. The fact that Labor controlled the State government gave federal Labor the possibility of an initiative that created policy and electoral dilemmas for the federal Coalition. As events transpired, the Queensland government was able to leverage State infrastructure funding from both federal major

parties. Had the Queensland government been in Liberal–National Party (LNP) hands, as was the case until early 2015, the dynamics of the stadium decision would have been quite different.

While the interplay between Australian federal and State governments influences the behaviour of political parties in federal elections, the results of this interplay on voters should not be assumed to be defined by State borders.<sup>1</sup> Any positive effects of the Townsville stadium deal, for example, may have been limited to voters in the Townsville region and not spread across Queensland (QLD) (supporters of the Brisbane Broncos and Gold Coast Titans may have been indifferent or even hostile to the attention given to the Cowboys). Alternatively, the positive effects may have extended across the border to rugby league–loving voters in New South Wales (NSW).

These may seem obvious points; however, election commentary in Australia often implicitly assumes that political events that occur within a particular State affect patterns of voting only of that State, that the effects stop at the borders, and that the resulting State by State outcomes matter for the results of House of Representative elections. These assumptions are, for example, found in the commentaries on individual States in previous edited collections on federal elections since the late 1990s. There is little evidence for or against these assumptions. No systematic comparative testing of the impact of State voting patterns on federal elections has been conducted during the last two decades.

This chapter attempts to re-open the question of whether States matter for Australian federal elections, by focusing on the 2016 election. Since Senate elections are covered elsewhere in this book (Green, Chapter 8), this chapter focuses on the contest for House of Representative seats. The chapter also primarily focuses on the contest for the Treasury benches between Labor and the Coalition, with some attention paid to the Greens, the only other party to stand candidates in all 150 House of Representative seats in 2016. We begin by reviewing the development of debates in Australian political science over the impact of State voting on federal elections. The chapter then outlines four potential factors that could produce State voting variations. We use three of these factors to

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1 For stylistic reasons, we propose to avoid the expressions ‘State and Territory’ and ‘States and Territories’. Unless otherwise indicated, references to States in this chapter should be taken to include the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and the Northern Territory (NT).

identify the States that should have been expected to produce better and worse results for the Coalition and Labor. The chapter presents the results of a detailed analysis of State-by-State voting patterns in the 2013 and 2016 House of Representative elections. These results suggest that the States had a modest impact on the outcome of the election, but that electorate level effects were stronger. None of the possible explanations for State differences in 2016 works particularly well. The chapter concludes with some reflections on the need for future research in this area.

## One election or eight? The Australian debate

Until the 1970s, Australian federal elections were overwhelmingly seen as national events. The view that the States might have an effect on federal election outcomes was largely ignored or dismissed (Sharman 1975: 16–18). This view became much more contentious from the late 1970s to the late 1990s. Debate over the impact of the States was sparked by a broader discussion of the concepts and methods of analysis employed by Malcolm Mackerras, then Australia's leading psephologist (see Goot 2016). Reviewing two-party preferred results for the 1977 federal election, Mackerras (1978a: 135) concluded that 'one must be impressed by the similarity of response regardless of which part of Australia the voter inhabited. State differences seem to me to be negligible, not important'. Australia, he argued earlier in the same article, 'is pretty much one nation electorally', a phrase he repeated in response his critics later in the same year (*ibid.*: 133; 1978b: 335).

In a rejoinder, Campbell Sharman criticised Mackerras's focus on the two-party preferred vote, arguing that once the magnitude and direction of State variations in first preference votes were taken into account, the States clearly did matter (1978: 338–39). It was a matter of 'perception and judgement' as to whether the effects of the States constituted a 'glass ... half empty or half full'. Several years later, Owen Hughes sought greater precision on the issue of State variation versus national uniformity via a series of tests comparing standard deviations in the vote. The result, he claimed, was that the national uniformity glass was 'shown to be empty' (1984: 116).

Clive Bean and David Butler weighed into the debate in 1991. Using two-party preferred figures, they reviewed variations in results and swings for all federal elections from 1961 to 1990, concluding that these elections

demonstrated a ‘broad [national] uniformity’ (1991: 135). Sharman’s rejoinder accused Bean and Butler of ‘trivialising the analysis of voting patterns’, ‘detering further research on an important topic and masking a host of issues that deserve analysis’ (Sharman 1991: 346).

One researcher was not deterred. In 1997, Christian Leithner produced the most extensive and sophisticated research on the topic, drawing on analysis of variance techniques applied to American elections (see Kawato 1987). Leithner separated national-, State- and electorate-level variance components in federal elections from 1900 to 1990, grouped by decade. On the impact of States, he concluded that ‘[a]t no time—not even in the 1930s and 1940s, when state effects were strongest—could House of Representative elections be regarded as “state-based” events’ (1997: 219). Equally, voting patterns in federal elections were not the result of nationwide effects. Local electorates were most important: ‘[T]he constituency component of variance has, throughout the twentieth century and as much today as in the past, dwarfed the state and national components’ (*ibid.*).

Just when Leithner seemed to have settled the debate—there have been no more recent systematic attempts to assess the impact of the States on voting in federal elections—the edited federal election book series began to include chapters on individual States, a practice that persisted until the volume on the 2013 federal election (Bean et al. 1998; Jaensch with Miragliotta and Wear 2015). While these chapters contain interesting contextual material, they assume an importance for the States that Leithner had effectively debunked. Moreover, the practice of various authors focusing on different individual States ran the risk of ad hoc and post hoc explanations of apparent variations in voting across the States. Events in a particular State appeared important only because voters in that State later voted in a particular way, while similar events in other States were implicitly deemed unimportant because voters had voted in a different way.

To avoid these traps, the rest of this chapter will identify some general explanations of possible inter-State variations in voting at the 2016 federal election, and then critically test these using systematic electorate-level data.

## Why might the States have mattered in 2016?

International comparative findings on regional voting, along with previous Australian studies, suggest four factors that may have caused the States to have an impact on voting in the 2016 federal election: socioeconomic and/or ethnolinguistic diversity across States; differences in State economic performance; the partisan complexion and popularity of State governments; and direct campaign appeals to voters in specific States.

Socioeconomic and/or ethnolinguistic diversity is unlikely to have been a factor in 2016. Compared with other federations and countries with strong regional identities, Australia is demographically uniform. While the States have some minor peculiarities (see Aroney, Prasser and Taylor 2012), they lack the strong differences associated with regional impacts on national elections. In addition, there is little evidence that any State-based demographic variations that do exist translate into the lasting communal commitments to particular political parties that are found in some other parts of the world (Johnston and Pattie 2006: 83–84). Instead, support for different parties across the Australian States tends to cluster around a national mean (Sharman and Moon 2003: 241–43; Smith 2001: 284–87). As Table 9.1 shows, the average Labor vote at State elections over the past 20 years has varied by just 5.5 per cent, from a low in NSW (36.7 per cent) to a high in Victoria (VIC) (42.2 per cent). The Coalition parties (in their various State guises) have registered a larger 11.5 per cent range; however, if the small Territories are excluded, this is reduced to 5.7 per cent, from Tasmania's (TAS) low (37.5 per cent) to VIC's high (43.2 per cent). Table 9.1 also demonstrates that the average differences between the major parties in each State are equally small. There is little indication that voters in any of the States think 'We are a Labor State' or 'We vote Coalition here'.

The second possible explanation for State effects is economic. Given the centrality of economic management to Australian federal elections (Bean and McAllister 2015: 418–21), and the variable economic performance of different Australian States, we might expect voters in States with weaker economic performance to be more likely to vote against the party in government than voters in States experiencing a strong economy (Painter 1993: 136; Johnston and Pattie 2006: 86). This explanation rests

on the assumption that significant numbers of voters in each State vote according to their retrospective judgements of the government of the day's economic performance (Fiorina 1981).

Table 9.1. Average Coalition and Labor first preference votes in lower house State and Territory elections, July 1996 – June 2016 (percentages)

	Coalition	Labor
QLD	38.0	41.2
NSW	40.4	36.7
VIC	43.2	42.2
TAS	37.5	42.0
SA	40.1	38.0
WA	43.1	36.8
NT	46.4	42.1
ACT	34.9	38.6
Range	11.5	5.5

Source. Calculated by authors from University of Western Australia n.d.

A third explanation has to do with the impact of State governments. One version of this explanation is that some voters vote in federal elections to gain some protection against the party in government in their State (Painter 1993: 137). Examining the first five elections of the Hawke–Keating era, Martin Painter found that ‘support for a party [at a federal election] is higher where that party is in opposition in the state, and lower where it is in government’ (1993: 135). A variation in this explanation factors in the popularity of State governments. Examining the 1990 federal election, Bean and Butler (1991: 128) observed pro-Labor swings in the three States with popular Labor or unpopular Coalition State governments and anti-Labor swings in the three States with unpopular Labor governments.

Both versions of the State government explanation take the fortunes of the parties contesting federal elections out of their own hands. The same cannot be said for the fourth explanation. The federal parties determine their own policy emphases and choose whether to target specific policies aimed at voters in particular States and regions. Targeted campaigning may reinforce existing patterns of State support; however, comparative experience suggests that parties can also strategically craft their campaign messages to make gains in territory held by their opponents (Johnston and Pattie 2006: 87).

What would each of the last three explanations predict about the pattern of votes across States in the 2016 federal election? Table 9.2 provides some relevant data about economic performance and government characteristics for each of the States. The economic data include State per capita domestic product, economic growth and unemployment. Taken together, these economic indicators suggest that Coalition support was likely to suffer most in TAS, SA and QLD, where gross state product and economic growth were relatively low, and unemployment relatively high. The strength of the NSW, NT and ACT economies would suggest comparatively good results for the Coalition in those jurisdictions. WA and VIC presented more mixed cases. The Western Australian economy was rapidly slowing following the end of the decade-long resources boom, although its gross state product and unemployment rates were still relatively good. The Victorian economy, by contrast, was picking up after a period of relatively poor economic performance. If voters in those States were aware of the economic trends, VIC should have produced a stronger result for the Coalition than WA.

The State government indicators presented a somewhat different set of predictions. On Painter's incumbency measure, voters in QLD, VIC, SA and the ACT may have wanted to balance their Labor governments with a Coalition vote at the 2016 federal election, while federal Labor would have benefited from the Coalition governments in NSW, TAS, WA and the NT. The final four columns of Table 9.2 allow comparison of the support for State governments in the first half of 2016 against the votes they gained at their most recent election victories. Taking popularity into account confirms the expectation that the Coalition would suffer greater-than-average vote losses in WA and TAS, where the respective governments of Colin Barnett and Will Hodgman were unpopular. By contrast, Mike Baird's Coalition government in NSW continued to hold a commanding lead over the Opposition in the first half of 2016, indicating that Baird's incumbency may not affect the federal Coalition vote. QLD and VIC, the two States with the most recent changes of government, retained much the same even balance of party support as at the time of their previous elections, suggesting no moderation either way of the disadvantage that federal Labor might have accrued due to the incumbency of the governments of Annastacia Palaszczuk and Daniel Andrews.

Table 9.2. The States and Territories in 2016

	State economic factors			State government factors				2016 LNP/ Lib intended State primary vote (%)***	2016 ALP intended State primary vote (%)***
	GSP per capita 2014-15 (\$000)*	Change in GSP per capita 2015-16 (%)*	Unemployment rate, June 2016 (%)**	Party in office	Length of party incumbency	LNP/Lib primary vote at most recent State or Territory election (%)	ALP primary vote at most recent State or Territory election (%)		
QLD	65.4	2.0	6.5	ALP	1 year 5 months	41.3	37.5	40	36
NSW	69.3	3.5	5.3	LNP	5 years 3 months	45.6	34.1	46	28
VIC	62.3	3.3	5.7	ALP	1 year 7 months	42.0	38.1	40	40
TAS	50.3	1.3	6.6	Lib	2 years 2 months	51.2	27.3	40	34
SA	59.4	1.9	7.0	ALP	14 years 3 months	44.9	35.8	30	26
WA	98.0	1.9	5.7	LNP	7 years 9 months	53.1	33.1	42	35
NT	96.9	2.7	3.7	City Lib	3 years 10 months	50.6	36.5	N/A	N/A
ACT	92.2	3.4	3.6	ALP	14 years 7 months	38.9	38.9	N/A	N/A

Source. Created by authors. Sources of specific data are as follows:

\* GSP = gross state product (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2016a)

\*\* Seasonally adjusted figures (ABS 2016b)

\*\*\* Average of two State by State Morgan Polls conducted 25-28 March and 20-22 May 2016 (Roy Morgan Research 2016a, 2016b)



The popularity of Jay Weatherill's South Australian government in the first half of 2016 is difficult to gauge. On the one hand, Labor surprisingly won a 2014 by-election in a former Liberal-cum-Independent seat that took the government from minority to majority status. On the other hand, by 2016 both Labor and the Liberals had lost significant ground at State level, particularly to the Nick Xenophon Team. No published polls were conducted in the first half of 2016 for the NT, governed by the Country Liberal Party, or the ACT, governed by Labor with the support of the Greens. Labor had a landslide victory in the NT election in August, and retained minority government at the ACT election in October, suggesting contrasting levels of support for the territory governments in the first half of 2016 that might both have made the federal competition more difficult for the Coalition.

The final explanation of State differences concerns the parties' campaign appeals to particular States. The parties are not the only organisations to campaign in particular electorates or States in federal elections (see Halpin and Fraussen, Chapter 17, this volume; Vromen, Chapter 18, this volume); however, they are the most prominent and ubiquitous campaign organisations. If campaigns have an effect on State-by-State voting patterns, we would expect the effects of party campaigns to be visible. To our knowledge, the possible influence of party appeals has not previously been systematically explored in Australia. The approach we take here is twofold: first, to look at how much time the major party leaders spent in different States during the election campaign; and second, to compare the campaign policies directed at particular States. Our rules of thumb are that, other things being equal, leaders who spend more time in a State, and parties that address more specific campaign promises towards a State, are likely to gain an advantage in that State. They may not win the most votes or seats in that State, but they are likely to do better in those States than in States that they neglect.

On the first measure, Turnbull and Shorten spent roughly as much time in four States—QLD, SA, TAS and the ACT—as their proportions of House of Representative seats would dictate (see Table 9.3). They both visited VIC less often than might have been expected, given the number of seats at stake there. Perhaps this reflected VIC's electoral geography, which meant that very few seats were realistically up for grabs across the State. Equally, they both visited the NT more than its two seats might have deserved. The main differences between the two leaders occurred

in Shorten's relatively high presence in NSW electorates and relatively low presence in WA. This suggests that Labor was hoping to win seats in NSW, but had less optimism about picking up WA seats.

Table 9.3. The major party leaders' campaign visits to States and Territories

		Turnbull	Shorten
	Seats (%)	Visits (%)	Visits (%)
NSW	31	29	36
VIC	25	18	18
QLD	20	22	20
WA	11	13	7
SA	7	10	8
TAS	3	4	5
NT	1	3	4
ACT	1	1	2
Total	100	100	100

Source. Compiled by authors from data in Doran and Liddy (2016).

Examination of the policy announcements made during the campaign by the Coalition, Labor and the Greens indicates that, while States have a place in the party's strategic campaigning, they do not occupy a central place. We categorised all policy announcements of the three parties posted on their federal election websites as either national or regional. Policies were categorised as having a national focus if they were addressed generically to Australian voters, or described initiatives targeted at the country as a whole, such as the Coalition's general 'jobs and growth' policies or Labor's 'save Medicare' policies. We included policies as national rather than regional, even if they included specific locations simply to indicate where wider policies would apply. Thus, for example, the Coalition's 'funding for facilities to support children needing palliative care, such as Hummingbird House in Queensland, Bear Cottage in New South Wales, and Very Special Kids in Victoria' (LPA 2016c) and the Greens' commitment to 'stop runaway tree-clearing across Australia, including in Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia' (Australian Greens 2016b) were all classified as national policy initiatives. In some cases, such as Labor's commitment to fast-track 'national infrastructure projects', these indicative lists seemed carefully crafted to include an example from every State (ALP 2016c).

Policies were classified as regional only if they included commitments exclusively targeted at particular subnational locations. This included policies that had a national focus, but also explicit regional elements, such as the Coalition's policy on the Great Barrier Reef, which referred to the Reef's value for 'millions of Australians' and the 'Australian economy', but also included promises of specific projects in local north Queensland communities (LPA 2016d).

The majority of policy announcements in the 2016 federal election were geographically generic. Of 36 Coalition policy statements during the campaign, 26 were national and 10 regionally specific (LPA 2016a). Roughly the same proportion of Labor's '100 Positive Policies'—25 out of the 100—included a specific regional focus (ALP 2016a). The regional targets of the Australian Greens' policies were more difficult to quantify; however, Greens' policies addressing specific regions seemed to be even less common than those of the major parties (Australian Greens 2016a).

The targets of regional policy announcements in 2016 were rarely individual States. In some cases, the targets covered wider regions, as in Labor's 'Northern Australia—A Tourism Powerhouse', which promised initiatives for parts of QLD, the NT and WA (ALP 2016b). More commonly, regional policies concerned infrastructure or environmental projects targeted at specific locations within States, such as the Coalition's 'City Deal for Western Sydney' (LPA 2016e). To the extent that the parties addressed voters as citizens who had State-wide loyalties and interests, they mostly did so via tailored versions of their national policy announcements. These documents were based on generic templates, but included claims about the impact of national policies on the particular State to which they were targeted, using State-based data on economic indicators, education participation and the like (see e.g. ALP 2016c).

In numerical terms, the Coalition paid particular policy attention to QLD, which was the target of five of its 10 regional policy announcements. Labor also paid more attention to QLD than the other States, including it in nine of 25 announcements. Both parties spread their remaining State policy appeals relatively evenly among the States. Unlike the Coalition, Labor released policies aimed directly at NT and ACT voters. Counting policy announcements says something about the emphases of the competing parties; however, it ignores the content and significance of particular announcements. In SA, for example, the Coalition and Labor presented quite similar plans for new defence-related

shipbuilding, transport improvements and steel manufacture (LPA 2016f; ALP 2016c). Given the State's precarious economic position, these plans were likely to be more salient to SA voters than any number of other regionally based policies. By the same token, the fact that the two major parties closely matched each other's policies for SA probably effectively neutralised any electoral advantage either might have gained.

The points made above about campaigning and the States suggest great caution about predicting their likely effects on voting patterns. Specific appeals to voters as members of one State or another were relatively rare. National policy appeals with differential State effects, along with policy appeals to cross-State regions such as 'northern Australia' and sub-State regions within States such as 'western Sydney' were all likely to muddy the effects of the State policy appeals made by parties. Labor possibly gained some advantage in NSW from Shorten's greater campaign presence in that State. Labor's more visible policies for the ACT and the NT relative to the Coalition might also have helped its cause. On the other hand, Shorten's relative absence from WA may have cost Labor votes.

Table 9.4. Potential State effects on Coalition voting at the 2016 federal election

	Economy	State government party	State government popularity	Federal party campaigning
NSW	+	-	+	-
VIC	=	+	=	=
QLD	-	+	=	=
WA	=	-	-	+
SA	-	+	=	=
TAS	-	-	-	=
NT	+	-	-	=
ACT	+	+	=	=

Note. '+' likely to be positive for the Coalition; '-' likely to be negative for the Coalition; '=' likely to be neutral for the Coalition.

Source. Authors.

The potential effects of State-based factors on voting in the 2016 federal election are summarised in Table 9.4. It is immediately clear that economic strength, State politics and federal campaigning pointed in inconsistent directions for each State. TAS is the State in which the factors pointed most consistently in one direction—trouble for the federal Coalition.

The other States were more mixed. New South Wales voters, for example, may have been pulled in one direction by the State's economic strength and the popularity of the State government, but in another by the State government being Coalition and by the Labor leader's campaign presence. These inconsistencies point to the dangers of focusing on individual States for explanations of federal election results. Factors that appear important in producing a particular set of election results in one State are likely to be similar to those in another State in which the result was different.

## State voting patterns at the 2016 federal election

Arguments about whether or not federal election results and swings are uniform or vary between States are often intertwined with arguments about whether to use two-party preferred votes or first preference votes as the relevant measure (see Goot 2016). As Sharman pointed out almost four decades ago (1978: 337), the two measures may give very different impressions of the election result. In this section, we present both two-party preferred and first preference results, first comparing the mean results for each State and then augmenting these with some measures of the dispersion of the vote across electorates within each State. The results discussed in the following paragraphs have been calculated using official Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) results (AEC 2016).

Table 9.5. House of Representatives two-party preferred vote by State and Territory, 2016

	LNP	ALP	LNP swing
NSW	50.5	49.5	-3.8
VIC	48.2	51.8	-1.6
QLD	54.1	45.9	-2.9
WA	54.7	45.3	-3.6
SA	47.7	52.3	-4.6
TAS	42.6	57.4	-6.1
NT	42.9	57.1	-7.4
ACT	38.9	61.1	-1.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>50.4</b>	<b>49.6</b>	<b>-3.1</b>

Source. Compiled by authors using data from AEC (2016).

Table 9.5 shows that, on a two-party preferred basis, the Coalition achieved its best results in WA (54.7 per cent) and QLD (54.1 per cent), and its worst results in the ACT (38.9 per cent), TAS (42.6 per cent) and the NT (42.9 per cent), a range of 15.8 per cent (WA to the ACT). If the ACT's two seats are ignored for the moment, the range falls to 12.1 per cent (WA to TAS).

The two-party preferred swings in every State were towards Labor; however, they also varied considerably, from 1.2 per cent in the ACT to 7.4 per cent in the NT. Excluding the small Territories for the moment, the swing ranged between 6.1 per cent in TAS to 1.6 per cent in VIC. In three States (NSW, QLD and WA), the result of the swing was to reduce the Coalition's majority across the State, while the results in VIC, TAS and the NT increased slim two-party preferred majorities achieved by Labor at the 2013 federal election. The ACT swing built on an already strong Labor base from 2013. Thus, the only State to move from having a notional Coalition majority in 2013 to a notional Labor majority in 2016 was SA.

As Table 9.6 shows, however, the two-party preferred result in SA hides a rather startling loss of votes by all three of the parties that contested all House of Representative seats across Australia. Calculating the size of the swings as a proportion of their 2013 primary votes in SA, the Coalition lost 21.1 per cent of its primary vote, Labor lost 11.8 per cent and the Greens 25.3 per cent. Without good survey research, it is hard to know exactly where all of these votes went, but many of them appear to have transferred to the Nick Xenophon Team, which ran candidates in every SA seat at its first House of Representative election and secured 21.3 per cent of the primary vote in that State (see also Raue, Chapter 7, this volume; Kefford, Chapter 15, this volume).

In all the other States, the first preference swings involve losses for the Coalition and increased support for both Labor and the Greens. Labor's gains ranged from a modest 0.8 per cent in VIC to 3.7 per cent in WA, while the Greens' gains varied from 1.0 per cent in NSW up to 2.6 per cent in QLD. Even the rejuvenation of the Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party as a federal political force in 2016—particularly in QLD, where it achieved 5.5 per cent of the State-wide first preference vote—did not disrupt this basic pattern of a leftward shift in first preference votes from the Coalition towards Labor and the Greens. This was possibly because the entry of the Palmer United Party had already shaken voters away from the

Coalition and Labor at the 2013 federal election in States such as QLD. With Palmer's party not contesting the 2016 federal election, many of those voters may simply have switched to Pauline Hanson's One Nation.

Table 9.6. House of Representatives first preference vote by State and Territory, 2016

	LNP vote	LNP swing	ALP vote	ALP swing	Green vote	Green swing
NSW	42.3	-5.0	36.9	2.4	8.9	1.0
VIC	41.8	-0.9	35.6	0.8	13.1	2.3
QLD	43.2	-2.5	30.9	1.1	8.8	2.6
WA	48.7	-2.5	32.4	3.7	12.1	2.3
SA	35.1	-9.4	31.5	-4.2	6.2	-2.1
TAS	35.4	-4.8	37.9	3.1	10.2	1.9
NT	33.2	-8.4	40.4	3.0	9.1	1.2
ACT	34.6	-0.1	44.3	1.3	15.1	1.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>42.0</b>	<b>-4.1</b>	<b>34.7</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>1.6</b>

Source. Compiled by authors using data from AEC (2016).

A party's electoral competitiveness in any State relies not just on its total State vote, but also on how its vote is distributed across the State's electorates. Figures 9.1 and 9.2 provide data on the distribution of first preference votes for the Coalition, Labor and the Greens in each electorate in the different States in 2013 and 2016. The data are presented as Tukey box plots. They summarise four pieces of information for each party in each State. First, the horizontal lines within the shaded boxes represent the median electorate percentage vote for the relevant party in each State. The higher the line, the better a party has done overall in a State. Second, the boxes themselves show the party's middle results in a State—the quartile immediately above and below the median. Third, the vertical whisker lines show the ranges of the party's remaining electorate results above and below the middle quartiles, up to a statistically determined range (1.5 times the height of the box). Taller boxes and longer whiskers indicate more uneven results for a party within a State, while shorter boxes and whiskers, indicate a party's vote is relatively evenly spread across electorates in a State. Finally, the dots indicate outlier electorates; that is, electorates in which a party did much better or worse than its middle results suggest.

DOUBLE DISILLUSION

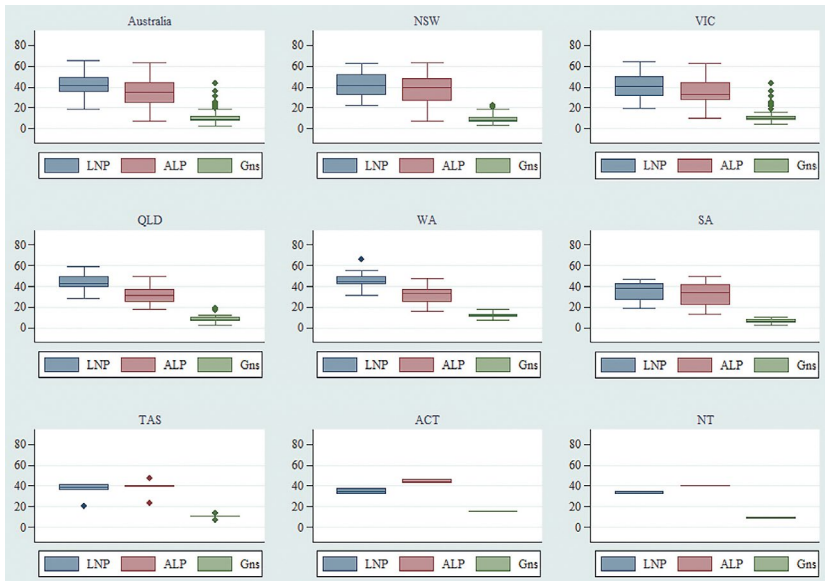


Figure 9.1. Distribution of first preference votes, 2016 federal election (Tukey box plots)

Source. Constructed by authors using data from AEC (2016).

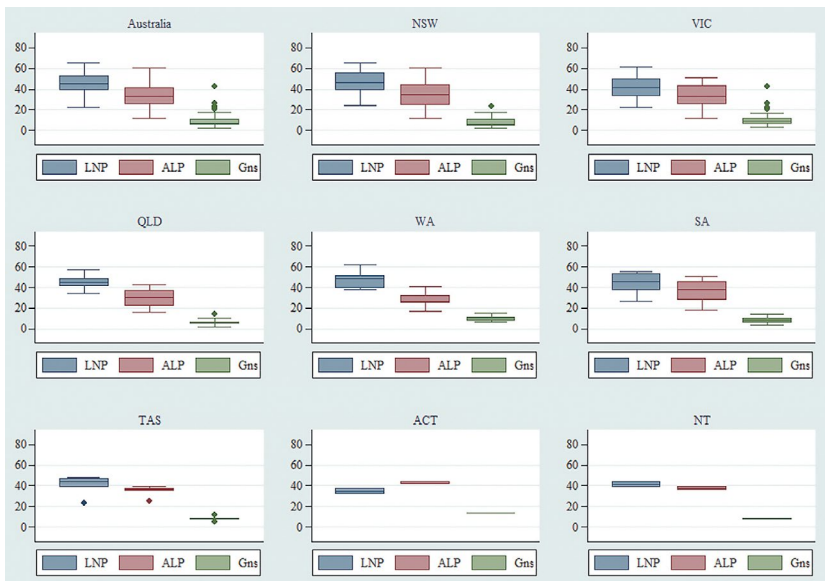


Figure 9.2. Distribution of first preference votes, 2013 federal election (Tukey box plots)

Source. Constructed by authors using data from AEC (2016).



What do these plots suggest about the electoral competition between parties in the 2016 election and how this competition changed from 2013? The two Territories and TAS contain too few seats for detailed analysis, although the plots for all three indicate a degree of homogeneity in party support in 2013 and 2016. The remaining five plots reflect Labor's generally improved position across all States in 2016 compared with 2013. Labor's median vote is higher and its boxes and whiskers extend higher than in 2013.

There are clear differences in the voting patterns for WA and QLD, on the one hand, and NSW, VIC and SA, on the other. In WA and QLD, the range of votes across electorates in both 2013 and 2016 was relatively small compared with the more dispersed pattern in the other three States. Not only do the Coalition parties in WA and QLD enjoy higher median electorate votes than their counterparts in the other States, their votes in particular electorates are reasonably tightly clustered around those higher medians. The top three quarters of all Coalition electorate results in WA and QLD in 2013 and 2016 were better than all but the top quarter of Labor's results in the same States. In the other States, Labor's results were more competitive compared with the Coalition's, particularly in 2016. These patterns suggest that the same improvements in Labor's State-wide votes will produce different results in WA and QLD and in the other States. In the latter States, every small improvement in Labor's vote is likely to reap some rewards, whereas, in WA and QLD, large swings need to be achieved for Labor to hope to gain any seats.

A final point worth noting from Figures 9.1 and 9.2 concerns the Greens. Comparison of the boxes and whiskers between 2013 and 2016 suggests that the Greens did not manage to improve their general electoral competitiveness at the 2016 federal election. Their votes generally remained clustered in the same bands as in 2013. Nonetheless, they managed to achieve more positive outlier results—results in which their vote was much better than the expected range—in 2016 than they did in 2013, particularly in VIC. While the party has found it difficult to create broad momentum across any State, the 2016 federal election results identified specific electorates in which the party could perform well above expectations (see also Raue, Chapter 7, this volume).

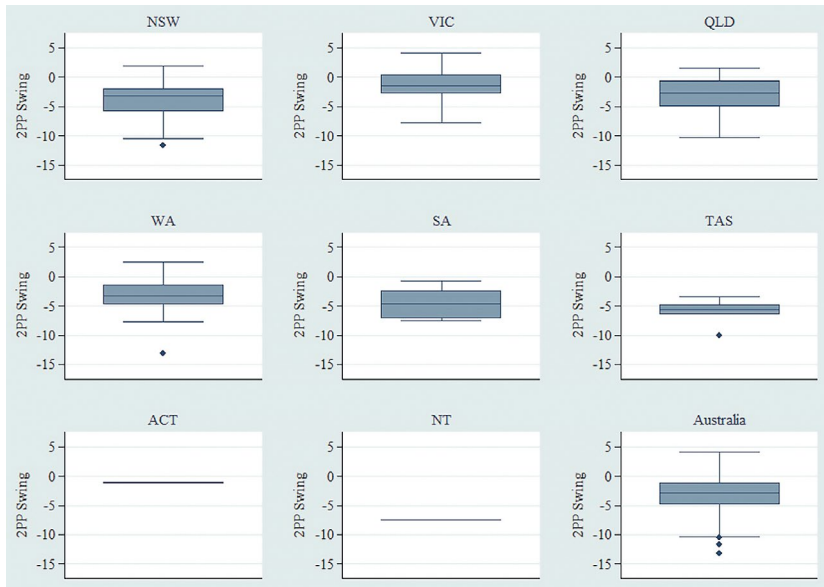


Figure 9.3. Distribution of two-party preferred swing, 2013–16 (Tukey box plots)

Source. Constructed by authors using data from AEC (2016).

How uniform was the swing within and between States in 2016? Figure 9.3 presents more box plots for each State, this time summarising variation in the two-party preferred swing. It shows two patterns. In TAS, SA, the NT and the ACT, the swings in every seat were against the Coalition, albeit to varying degrees. In the remaining States, most seats swung to Labor, but at least some recorded shifts to the Coalition. In VIC, one quarter of seats did so.

Consideration of the interplay between individual electorates and overall State results raises the fundamental and much discussed question of the relative contribution of electorate-level factors and State-wide forces to variations in federal election results. In order to gain an approximate measure of the relative importance of States versus electorates, we conducted a principal components analysis on different aspects of the vote. Because we were focused on the 2016 election results, rather than long-term trends, we did not attempt to replicate Leithner's (1997) approach of grouping elections by decade in order to test for national-level effects. Thus, our results are concerned only with the 150 electorates, and eight States and Territories.

**Table 9.7. Results of principal components analysis of State- and electorate-level contribution to variations in the vote, 2013 and 2016**

	2013	2016
<b>Labor</b>		
State	13.6	9.6
Electorate	86.4	90.4
<b>Coalition</b>		
State	12.0	8.3
Electorate	88.0	91.7
<b>Greens</b>		
State	21.2	25.6
Electorate	78.8	74.4
<b>Two-party preferred swing, 2013–16</b>		
State		29.5
Electorate		70.5

Source. Compiled by authors using data from AEC (2016).

The results in Table 9.7 suggest that electorate-level variations are more important than State variations for both the results of particular elections and for swings between them. State variations explained less than 10 per cent of the major parties' first preference votes in 2016. State variations accounted for a little more of the variation in votes in 2013 but, in both elections, they were dwarfed by electorate variations. Interestingly, while electorate variations were also most important for the Greens, State variations had a stronger impact than for the major parties. Perhaps the explanation is that the Greens are primarily associated with the Senate rather than the House of Representatives, so that the Greens' House of Representative vote is influenced by the varying profiles and performance of the Green Senators from different States. State variations also lay behind some of the two-party preferred swing recorded between 2013 and 2016, although once again electorate variations seemed a stronger influence by some margin. These results suggest that, at the very least, State differences should not be dismissed out of hand as a factor in the 2016 federal election.

## Conclusion

At the 2016 federal election, all the States registered two-party preferred swings against the Coalition. This apparent homogeneity masks a range of variations between them. These included the different sizes of the swing between States, the uniformity of the swing within them, the peculiarity of SA's first preference swings, and inter-State differences in both the two-party preferred and first preference outcomes once the dust had settled.

These differences are difficult to explain in a coherent and parsimonious way. This is partly because Australian political science has not paid attention in recent decades to systematic State-based differences in federal election results and their possible causes. The potential causes of variation outlined earlier in this chapter can only be applied in a loose way to the results. The comparatively large swing against the Coalition in TAS could be seen as resulting from a combination of the State's economic woes and its unpopular State Coalition government. The much smaller Victorian swing might be seen as a result of that State's improving economy and the presence of a State Labor government. The other, less consistent State cases are impossible to fit into such a framework. None of the suggested factors—State economic fortunes, State politics or federal campaigning—appears to provide sufficient explanation on its own. Eight outcomes from one election is too small a number to develop a solid understanding of how the factors might interact, or which other factors might be missing from the analysis. More analysis needs to be done to explain the sorts of similarities and differences between States that this chapter has identified.

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# 10

## Changing Leaders, ‘Mediscare’ and Business as Usual: Electoral Behaviour

Clive Bean

In some respects, the 2016 Australian federal election had much in common with its recent predecessors. A leadership coup saw the sitting prime minister, Tony Abbott, ousted from office, by Malcolm Turnbull, months prior to the election. A bitter campaign between the major political parties, and with prominent participation by minor parties and Independents, culminated in a knife-edge result before the government was finally returned with the barest of majorities in the House of Representatives and without coming close to a majority in the Senate.

For much of the campaign, the Liberal–National Party Coalition government appeared to have an edge over the Labor Party opposition, but this advantage dissolved nearer to the election, as the campaign intensified and Labor adopted methods such as the so-called ‘Mediscare’ tactic. On the eve of the election, voters were targeted through their mobile telephones with text messages warning of the demise of the government health scheme, Medicare, under a re-elected coalition government, that appeared to come from Medicare itself (see e.g. Gillespie 2016). The government had made itself vulnerable to this claim by announcing during the campaign that it was contemplating outsourcing aspects of the administration of Medicare, and in so doing opened the door to claims

by the Labor Party that the government would privatise the popular scheme. Labor introduced Medicare, a revamp of the original Medibank, in 1984 (Boxall and Gillespie 2013) and has always promoted itself as the champion of the scheme. Although the government argued very strongly that it had no plans to privatise Medicare, the damage done by loosely worded policy plans could not be reversed sufficiently to neutralise the opportunity that had been presented to the opposition.

This chapter explores sample survey data from the 2016 Australian Election Study (AES) to assess the impact of voter perceptions of the Medicare factor, leadership change and other issues pertinent to the 2016 federal election. The 2016 AES was conducted by Ian McAllister, Clive Bean, Juliet Pietsch, Rachel Gibson and Toni Makkai (McAllister et al. 2016; see also AES n.d.), using a grant from the Australian Research Council. The AES is a national post-election survey of voting and electoral behaviour, using a self-completion questionnaire that, in 2016, could be filled out either in hard copy and mailed back, or online. The sample comprised a combination of a systematic random sample of enrolled voters throughout Australia, drawn by the Australian Electoral Commission, and a sample drawn from the Geo-Coded National Address File. Non-respondents were sent several follow-up mailings and the final sample size was 2,818, representing a response rate of 23 per cent. The data were weighted to reflect population parameters for gender, age, State and vote, giving a final weighted sample size for electoral analysis of 2,711.

## The voter and the campaign

Evidence across time has shown that many electoral trends are cyclical rather than secular, with indicators rising and falling according to how closely fought the particular election in question may be (see e.g. McAllister 2011). In the recent past, for example, the 2007 federal election, when the Labor Party under Kevin Rudd ousted the long-time Coalition government led by John Howard, was an election that captured the attention of voters in the way those either side of it did not (Bean and McAllister 2009, 2012). Yet, there has also been a sense that since that watershed, voter attitudes towards politics in Australia have been displaying greater levels of disaffection and disconnection than ever before (Cameron and McAllister 2016; McAllister 2011).

Table 10.1 displays an array of AES data focusing on voter orientations towards the election campaign in 2016. To provide appropriate context, it also shows the equivalent figures dating back five federal elections, to 2004 (for details of these earlier surveys, see Cameron and McAllister 2016). The table shows in the first line that 30 per cent of election study respondents reported taking a good deal of interest in the 2016 election campaign, which is well down on the level at the aforementioned 2007 election, but only slightly down on the 2010 and 2013 elections, and indeed the same as that recorded in 2004. However, fewer people cared about which party won the election in 2016 than in any of the previous four elections and the numbers paying attention to the election campaign through the traditional media were as low, or lower. By contrast, attention to politics through the new media continues to rise so that in 2016, for the first time in Australia, slightly more people indicated that they followed the election campaign through the internet than through radio. It is quite conceivable that, by the time of the next federal election, the internet may have become more heavily used for these purposes than print newspapers and second only to television. Table 10.1 also shows that viewing of the major debate between the party leaders was well down in 2016 and, interestingly, barely a fifth of the sample thought that the prime minister, Turnbull, performed better in the debate than his Labor Party rival, Bill Shorten.

Table 10.1. Voter engagement with the election campaign, 2004–16 (percentages)

	2004	2007	2010	2013	2017
Took 'a good deal' of interest in the election campaign overall	30	40	34	33	30
Cared 'a good deal' which party won	72	76	68	68	65
Paid 'a good deal' or 'some' attention to the campaign					
– in newspapers	57	61	62	50	50
– on television	69	77	77	70	68
– on radio	44	50	48	45	45
– on the internet	-	16	29	34	46
Watched the televised leaders' debate	35	46	47	32	21
Thought prime minister performed better in the debate	25	13	37	30	21

Source. Constructed by author from data in AES 2004 (n=1,769), 2007 (n=1,873), 2010 (n=2,061), 2013 (n=3,955) and 2016 (n=2,711).

Further measures of voter orientations towards the election are contained in Table 10.2. The 50 per cent of 2016 AES respondents saying that it was only from around the start of the election campaign, or later, that they definitely decided how they would vote is easily the highest in more than a decade. However, it is a figure that has previously been equalled, or even surpassed, for example in the late 1990s (Bean and McAllister 2000). Similarly, over a third of the electorate said that they seriously thought of giving their first preference vote to another party and only 40 per cent said that before this election they had always voted for the same party. These latter two figures represent a new high and low for these respective measures in Australia since relevant data first started to be collected.

Table 10.2. Volatility and partisanship, 2004–16 (percentages)

	2004	2007	2010	2013	2016
Decided definitely how to vote during campaign period	39	29	47	41	50
Seriously thought of giving first preference to another party in the House of Representatives during election campaign	25	23	29	30	34
Always voted for same party	50	45	52	46	40
Identifier with one of the major parties	77	77	78	73	67
Not a party identifier	16	16	14	17	20
Very strong party identifier	21	25	19	21	21

Source. Constructed by author from data in AES 2004 (n=1,769), 2007 (n=1,873), 2010 (n=2,061), 2013 (n=3,955) and 2016 (n=2,711).

Probably the most interesting data in Table 10.2, however, are to be found in the last three lines in the table, relating to party identification. The notion that most members of the electorate align themselves on an ongoing basis with one or other of the major political parties has long been a cornerstone of Australian politics (Aitkin 1982; McAllister 2011), even more so than for other comparable democracies. While patterns of decline in partisanship have been clear elsewhere (Dalton 2008; Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Webb, Farrell and Holliday 2003), the expectation of similar trends in Australia has received little support from the evidence. Although assessments that such a decline had started or was imminent began to appear many years ago (Chaples 1993; Charnock 1997; Smith 1998), it is only in very recent times that sound supporting evidence has emerged. In 2013, the proportion of electors identifying with one of the major parties dipped to below three quarters of the electorate; in 2016,

it had fallen another 6 percentage points to two thirds of the voting public. Based on the AES, major party identification has thus declined by more than 10 per cent over the last two Australian federal elections. At the same time, the number of citizens who claim to have no political party identification has now risen to a fifth of the electorate. Although the proportion of strong identifiers among those who still align with a party remains steady at 21 per cent, the complexion of the Australian electorate is now significantly different from the days when party identification stood at around 90 per cent (Aitkin 1982).

## Social background and the vote

Now we turn to examine the impact of sociodemographic factors on the vote at the 2016 federal election. Social structure as an electoral influence has been less prominent in recent decades, although sometimes variable (McAllister 2011). The first variable in Table 10.3, gender, is a case in point. Over time, the so-called gender gap had virtually disappeared, but in 2010, when Australia's first female prime minister, Julia Gillard, contested the election, it reappeared, albeit with its direction reversed (Bean and McAllister 2012). In 2013, the gender gap closed up again (Bean and McAllister 2015), but in 2016 we see a pattern similar to that of 2010 in which women are more likely to support Labor than men (by 7 per cent) and also more likely to vote for the Greens than men (by 4 per cent). One result of the gender pattern in 2016 is that women were equally likely to support the Coalition or Labor, whereas men were much more likely to support Labor than the Coalition.

Table 10.3. Vote by sociodemographic indicators in 2016 (percentages)

	Lib.–Nat.	Labor	Greens	Other	(N)
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	47	31	8	14	(1,187)
Female	38	38	12	12	(1,223)
<b>Age Group</b>					
Under 25	33	37	22	8	(235)
25–44	36	35	15	14	(794)
45–64	41	38	7	15	(799)
65 and over	57	28	3	12	(556)

DOUBLE DISILLUSION

	Lib.–Nat.	Labor	Greens	Other	(N)
<b>Birthplace</b>					
Australia	41	34	11	14	(1,890)
British Isles	42	33	10	14	(175)
Europe	54	34	6	6	(86)
Asia	41	46	6	7	(139)
Other	50	33	14	3	(111)
<b>Region</b>					
Rural	45	31	7	17	(633)
Urban	41	36	12	12	(1,755)
<b>Religious denomination</b>					
Catholic	45	39	5	11	(557)
Anglican	49	31	6	14	(437)
Uniting	54	30	3	13	(229)
Other	42	31	6	21	(347)
No religion	33	36	20	11	(835)
<b>Church attendance</b>					
At least once a month	45	29	4	22	(378)
At least once a year	46	36	9	10	(409)
Never	38	37	12	13	(1,146)

Source. Constructed by author from data in AES 2016 (n=2,711).

The age variable reaffirms the Coalition's electoral advantage among the most senior members of the electorate. Some 57 per cent of those aged 65 and over voted for the Coalition parties, compared to only 33 per cent of those aged under 25. The Labor Party, on the other hand, could garner barely more than a quarter of the votes of the over 65s. But rather than being the beneficiaries of the Coalition's weakness among the young, Labor saw many of those votes go to the Greens, who secured over 20 per cent support from the under 25s. The young, however, are somewhat disinclined to support the 'Other' minor parties. In Tables 10.3 and 10.4, the age group data also show that the level of support for the Liberal–National parties from the over 65s is greater than for any other sociodemographic group.

The immigrant vote has and continues to gain a good deal of attention in research that focuses on Australian politics (e.g. Jiang 2016; see also Jupp and Pietsch, Chapter 29, this volume). Patterns of party support

by birthplace have changed over the decades since the main wave of immigrants to Australia in the middle of the twentieth century (McAllister 2011). Of particular interest in the twenty-first century are the partisan leanings of the increasing number of voters from Asia within the Australian electorate. The third section of Table 10.3 shows that in 2016 voters born in the British Isles largely mirrored the distribution of party support displayed by the Australian-born, while those from continental Europe disproportionately supported the Liberal–National parties. The Asian-born, by contrast, were more inclined to vote Labor, while both European and Asian voters tended to steer away from the minor parties. Rural voters favoured the Liberal–National parties over Labor in 2016, as they typically do, although the differences are relatively mild. The pattern of differences among the minor parties observed in 2013 (Bean and McAllister 2015) persisted in 2016, with rural voters less likely to vote for the Greens and more likely to vote for ‘Other’ minor parties and candidates.

It can no longer be said that the Labor Party is the bastion of Catholic support since, for the third election in a row, more Catholics voted Liberal–National than Labor. It remains the case, nonetheless, that Labor receives more support from Catholics than from any other denominational grouping, while the Coalition is most favoured by Protestants. For the Greens, its ‘religious’ champions are voters disavowing any religious adherence, while it is those who belong to ‘other’, nonmainstream, religious groups who most favour the Other minor parties. Church attenders support the Coalition and disproportionate numbers of frequent attenders also vote for Other minor parties, whereas the vote for Labor and especially the Greens tends to sag amongst such voters. Those who never attend places of religious observance are more evenly distributed between the major parties.

Turning now to Table 10.4, we see that the most noteworthy effect for education lies in the strong support for the Greens conferred by those with a university degree compared to those who do not have this level of education. This, of course, is one of the enduring features of the Greens’ support profile (Bean and McAllister 2002, 2009, 2012, 2015). Occupation is no longer the cornerstone of party support in Australia it once was. In 2016, the index of class voting (calculated as the Labor vote among manual voters minus the Labor vote among nonmanual voters) comes in at 8 per cent. While by no means high, this figure is not as low as at some previous elections in the last quarter of a century (McAllister 2011) and is slightly greater than the 6 per cent registered at the last

election (Bean and McAllister 2015). So the traditional class/party divide, which sees Labor favoured by blue-collar workers and the Coalition by white-collar workers, continues in Australia into the twenty-first century, although only in muted form compared to half a century ago.

Table 10.4. Vote by socioeconomic indicators in 2016 (percentages)

	Lib.–Nat.	Labor	Greens	Other	(N)
<b>Education</b>					
No postschool qualifications	43	38	8	11	(577)
Nondegree qualifications	43	33	7	16	(910)
University degree	40	34	15	11	(892)
<b>Occupation</b>					
Manual	37	40	8	15	(681)
Nonmanual	44	32	12	12	(1,454)
<b>Employment</b>					
Self-employed	56	22	6	16	(331)
Government employee	38	39	11	11	(519)
<b>Trade union membership</b>					
Union member	23	54	11	12	(420)
Not a union member	46	31	10	13	(1,948)

Source. Constructed by author from data in AES 2016 (n=2,711).

Clearer patterns of political division are evident by employment status: the self-employed were much more likely to give their vote to the Liberal–Nationals; Labor, at least in relative terms, fared well among public sector employees. Trade unionists are traditional supporters of the Australian Labor Party and the 2016 data reinforce this alignment. After an apparent dip in union support in 2013 (Bean and McAllister 2015), Labor again received more than half the votes of union members this time while the Coalition gained less than a quarter.

## Perceptions of parties and leaders

Closer to the forefront of voters' electoral decisions are their views about the political parties and their leaders. Given some of the evidence we have already seen concerning voter detachment from the political parties, it is not surprising that the data in Table 10.5 paint a fairly negative picture of the parties and leaders generally. On a scale where 10 represents an extreme



like of a party or leader, zero represents an extreme dislike and 5 is a neutral or middle score, none of the parties or leaders managed to register a score on the positive side of the mid-point, a similar scenario to 2013 (Bean and McAllister 2015). The Labor Party had a slightly better mean rating than the Liberal Party (4.9 versus 4.8). There is a different story for the leaders, however. Prime Minister Turnbull scored slightly better than his party and substantially better than the leader of the opposition, Shorten, who, on a score of 4.2, was well behind his party. While clearly more popular than his rival, however, even Turnbull had a mean rating of less than 5 (4.9). At most previous elections since relevant data began to be collected, one or other or both of the major party leaders has recorded a score on the positive side of the ledger, in other words greater than 5 (McAllister 2011), but this has changed in the last three elections. Returning to the data for 2016 in Table 10.5, the National Party, at 4.4, was a little more popular than its leader, Barnaby Joyce (4.1), while Richard Di Natale, the Greens leader, rated slightly above his party: Di Natale scored just above 4 while the Greens Party scored just below 4.

Table 10.5. Party and leader evaluations in 2016 (means on 0–10 scale)

Party	Mean	Std Dev.	Leader	Mean	Std Dev.
Liberal	4.8	3.1	Malcolm Turnbull	4.9	2.8
Labor	4.9	2.9	Bill Shorten	4.2	2.8
National	4.4	2.7	Barnaby Joyce	4.1	2.7
Greens	3.9	3.0	Richard Di Natale	4.1	2.4
			Tony Abbott	3.6	3.1

Source. Constructed by author from data in AES 2016 (n=2,711).

Probably the most interesting figure in Table 10.5 is the score for former prime minister Tony Abbott, which at 3.6 is low by any standards (and, importantly, much lower than that for Turnbull) and provides some vindication of the decision of the Liberal Party parliamentary party to replace him in September 2015. Interestingly, a question in the AES about whether voters approved or disapproved of the move to replace Abbott revealed that a narrow majority disapproved (51 per cent, to 49 approved). This finding stands in contrast to when the Labor Party replaced Rudd with Gillard before the 2010 election, after which some three quarters of the AES sample disapproved (Bean and McAllister 2012).

Table 10.6 looks in more detail at the images of the two main leadership rivals, Turnbull and Shorten. When the AES respondents were asked how well a set of nine attributes described each leader, Turnbull outscored Shorten on most, as the sitting prime minister tends to. Thus, 84 per cent said that the term ‘intelligent’ described Turnbull extremely or quite well, 78 per cent rated him as knowledgeable, 67 per cent as competent and 64 per cent as sensible. These attributes were also perceived to be among Shorten’s best, although his scores were substantially lower on each. In fact, the only characteristic on which Shorten did better than Turnbull was on the quality of compassion, for which 55 per cent said that described Shorten extremely or quite well, compared to only 44 per cent for Turnbull. Of more concern would be that neither leader was rated strongly for being trustworthy, inspiring or honest. Shorten’s scores on each of these, however, were clearly lower than Turnbull’s and, in particular, not even a quarter of the sample saw Shorten as inspiring. These assessments of the major party leaders’ personal qualities serve to reinforce the summary ratings in Table 10.5, showing Turnbull to be more well regarded by the electorate—or, more accurately, less poorly regarded—than Shorten.

Table 10.6. Perceived leadership attributes of Malcolm Turnbull and Bill Shorten in 2016 (percentage saying attribute describes leader extremely well or quite well)

Quality	Malcolm Turnbull	Bill Shorten
Intelligent	84	70
Compassionate	44	55
Competent	67	54
Sensible	64	56
Provides strong leadership	52	48
Honest	45	37
Knowledgeable	78	64
Inspiring	38	24
Trustworthy	39	33

Source. Constructed by author from data in AES 2016 (n=2,711).

## Issue agendas

While the issue agendas of the political parties tend to dominate the election campaign, it is increasingly becoming apparent that voters have their own issue agendas (Bean and McAllister 2015; Goot and Watson 2007; McAllister, Bean and Pietsch 2012). For example, voters repeatedly emphasise their concerns about policies relating to health, education, taxation and the economy in general, irrespective of the extent to which the major parties focus their campaigns on these issues. Interestingly, the first two of these, health and education, consistently tend to work in favour of the Labor Party, while taxation and the economy generally favour the Coalition.

The data in Table 10.7 suggest that not too much was different in 2016. On the surface, taxation appeared to be the exception, for it did not feature strongly as a concern for voters, nor did it generate a clear distinction between the major parties. But health, education and management of the economy all featured strongly in importance and in differentiating Labor from the Coalition. As it so often is, health and Medicare were the number one concern for voters, with 70 per cent of the AES sample describing them as extremely important when they were deciding how to vote. Education came next, with 60 per cent saying it was extremely important, and management of the economy was close behind in third place, with 57 per cent calling it extremely important. None of the other issues in the list presented to the respondents had half the sample saying it was extremely important, with the next in line being the related issues of immigration and refugees and asylum seekers, on 46 and 45 per cent respectively. The environment, government debt, superannuation, and only then taxation, came next, with global warming coming last on the list of concerns to voters, attracting only 34 per cent of respondents saying it was extremely important.

When we look at which issues mattered more or less to which party supporters, we see that health and education were of considerably greater concern to Labor voters than to Liberal–National voters, while management of the economy was of much greater concern to the latter than the former. Other issues that divided the major party voters were government debt, which concerned more than twice as many Coalition voters as Labor, the environment, which concerned more than twice as many Labor voters as Coalition, and global warming, which fewer than a fifth of Liberal–National

voters regarded as extremely important compared to over two fifths of Labor voters. Nearly three quarters of Greens supporters, expressed concern about global warming, and even more did about the environment, naturally enough. Greens voters were also concerned about health, education and asylum seekers, while being relatively unconcerned about the economy, government debt, superannuation and in particular taxation. Supporters of ‘Other’ minor parties largely mirrored the overall sample in their concerns, with the biggest discrepancies being the greater level of concern they expressed on immigration and refugees and asylum seekers.

Table 10.7. Importance rating of election issues (percentage describing issue as extremely important) and party differential (percentage saying Liberal–National closer on issue minus percentage saying Labor closer) in 2016

Issue	Importance					
	All voters	Lib.–Nat. voters	Labor voters	Green voters	Other voters	Party differential
Taxation	37	41	39	16	38	+2
Immigration	46	50	43	40	52	+12
Education	60	50	73	65	61	–18
The environment	42	26	54	77	42	–14
Government debt	38	58	25	19	37	+28
Health and Medicare	70	60	84	68	73	–18
Refugees and asylum seekers	45	42	45	62	50	+15
Global warming	34	18	43	74	35	–12
Superannuation	38	42	38	18	38	+1
Management of the economy	57	76	48	20	57	+27

Source. Constructed by author from data in AES 2016 (n=2,711).

Immediately following the question on the importance of issues, the AES respondents were asked which of the major parties’ policies came closest to their own views on each of the issues. The far right column of Table 10.7 shows the calculation of the difference in the percentages opting for each party. As can be seen, the largest differentials favoured the Coalition, with 28 per cent more voters favouring it than Labor on government debt and 27 per cent more favouring it on management of the economy. The government parties also had an advantage on refugees and asylum seekers and immigration. The Labor Party was clearly favoured on health and Medicare, education, the environment and global warming.

Having a larger percentage of the electorate favouring one party over the other on a particular issue does not, however, necessarily translate into that issue influencing the overall vote in that party's favour. The issue of government debt, for example, is a case in point. While the weight of voter opinion clearly favoured the Coalition on the issue, the level of concern expressed by voters was quite low. It is thus quite possible that this issue did not significantly affect the way people voted, meaning that the apparent advantage to the Coalition would come to nothing. In order to test the effect of this and other issues on voting decisions, we turn to multivariate analysis in the final stage of the investigation in the next section.

## Which factors mattered most?

Multivariate analysis allows us to see which of the factors examined earlier in the chapter significantly influenced the vote in the 2016 Australian federal election, taking account of all the other potential influences. Particulars of the method employed are given in the Appendix, but in essence the multivariate procedure reveals which of the sociodemographic factors, party identification, leadership ratings and issue variables assessed above had a statistically significant influence on voting behaviour. Table 10.8 displays the results, with only those variables registering statistically significant effects at the .01 level being shown.

Table 10.8. Factors influencing the vote in 2016 (multiple regression)

	Unstandardised regression coefficient		Standardised regression coefficient
Age	.001		.05
Party identification	.57		.53
Malcolm Turnbull	.15		.09
Bill Shorten	.11		.07
Taxation	.13		.10
Education	.09		.07
Health and Medicare	.08		.07
R-squared		.69	

Note. Entries in the table are statistically significant at  $p < .01$  or better. Further methodological details can be found in the Appendix.

Source. Constructed by author from data in AES 2016 ( $n=2,711$ ).

Of the 29 variables included in the multivariate equation, only seven proved to have a significant impact according to the criteria used. With all the other variables controlled, age was the only sociodemographic factor to record a significant effect. As the data in Table 10.3 suggested, older voters are more likely to give their electoral preference to the Liberal–National parties than to Labor. Turning to the next variable in the table, we see that even amid the signs of declining partisan affiliation with the major Australian political parties that was revealed earlier in the chapter, party identification nonetheless continues to dominate the electoral landscape in Australia. The unstandardised regression coefficient for party identification in Table 10.8 shows that, net of all other factors, Liberal–National identifiers were 57 per cent more likely to vote for the Coalition than Labor identifiers. This is by far the biggest influence in the model.

As evidence from previous elections would predict, the two major party leaders both recorded significant effects on the vote in 2016. Research has shown that the leaders of the two main party groupings repeatedly feature as influences on Australian electoral behaviour (Senior and van Onselen 2008), albeit with the size of their effects varying depending on the individual personalities involved. In 2016, the leader effects were reduced compared to recent elections (Bean and McAllister 2012, 2015), but were still far from trivial. For Turnbull, those who most liked him were 15 per cent more likely to vote for the Coalition than those who most disliked him, while for Shorten, voters who regarded him most positively were 11 per cent more likely to vote Labor than those who regarded him most negatively.

Three issues recorded statistically significant effects—namely taxation, education and health and Medicare. While the latter two will come as no surprise, the appearance of taxation is more intriguing. The bivariate evidence in Table 10.7 suggested that voters were not terribly concerned about taxation in this election. On the basis of the multivariate evidence, however, it would appear that for those who did regard it as an important issue it really did matter, to the extent that those who said taxation was extremely important and that the Liberal–National Coalition’s policies were closer than Labor’s policies to their own views were 13 per cent more likely to vote for the Coalition. While, of the four consistent policy influences listed earlier, economic management did not record a significant effect on this occasion, once again, taxation, health and education did. In this instance, the effect for taxation is presumably attributable to the ongoing debate about options for tax reform being considered by the government during the latter part of the electoral cycle (see e.g. Barnes 2015).

To work out how much these issues, and the party leaders, really mattered for the outcome of the election, we need to examine the impact of each one on the balance of party support. While none of these effects is very large, we saw in Table 10.7, for example, that the balance of opinion towards health and education favoured Labor in both instances and this could make a difference to the election outcome at the margin. If the effect of each variable on individual voters (the regression coefficient) is combined with the net balance of voter opinion (derived from the mean of the variable), the overall effect of each variable on the balance of the two-party vote can be estimated. Details of how these calculations are made are contained in the Appendix.

As we saw in Table 10.5, neither major party leader was popular with the electorate, but Shorten was markedly less so than Turnbull. The relevant calculations show that Turnbull was a small drag on the Coalition vote, to the extent of around 0.15 per cent, while Shorten dragged the Labor Party vote down by nearly 0.9 per cent. The net effect for the leaders was thus about three quarters of 1 per cent in favour of the Coalition. Perhaps more intriguingly, it is possible to make a hypothetical assessment of the impact of replacing Abbott with Turnbull. Assuming the same level of effect on individual voting decisions if Abbott had remained, and taking account of Abbott's much lower rating in Table 10.5 (3.6 compared to Turnbull's 4.9), the benefit to the Coalition vote of replacing Abbott with Turnbull was just under 2 per cent. Given the closeness of the final result (a two-party preferred margin of only 0.72 per cent), one clear implication of this calculation is that if Abbott had remained prime minister, the Coalition would have lost the election, all other things being equal.

Turning to the policy issues, taxation narrowly favoured the Coalition while education and health both favoured Labor to a considerable degree. Because the balance of opinion on taxation was not divided strongly, this issue resulted in only a small benefit to the Coalition, of around 0.25 per cent. By contrast, education and health each swung the electoral balance towards Labor by around 0.8 per cent. When these are added together, even with the counteracting effect of the taxation issue, the net electoral benefit from campaign issues in the 2016 Australian federal election amounted to over 1.3 per cent of the vote in Labor's favour. Considering how close the election was in the end, the benefit from these issues could be argued to be what allowed Labor to push the Coalition to the brink of defeat.

## Conclusion

The evidence that the issue of health and Medicare played a significant role in bringing Labor so close to taking office away from the Coalition brings us back to the introductory discussion about the so-called ‘Medicare’ campaign tactic employed by Labor. Unfortunately, however, the results of this analysis do not allow us to say whether it was the ‘Medicare’ strategy that caused the health issue to have the electoral impact it did. Previous research showing that the issue of health has had similar effects in other recent Australian elections (Bean and McAllister 2009, 2015) means that it is entirely possible that the health effect in 2016 had more to do with the issue agendas of the electorate than the campaign tactics of one of the major political parties. Whatever the basis, the issue of health mattered in the 2016 election, as did the change of leadership in the Liberal Party. But there was also a strong sense of ‘business as usual’, with an intensely fought contest leading to a very narrow victory, as has become a feature of recent Australian federal elections.

## Appendix

The equation in Table 10.8 was estimated by ordinary least squares regression analysis with pairwise deletion of missing data. The dependent variable, first preference vote for the House of Representatives in the 2016 federal election, was scored 0 for Labor, 0.5 for minor parties and 1 for Liberal–National. Party identification was likewise scored 0 for Labor, 0.5 for minor parties or no party identification and 1 for Liberal–National. Apart from age, scored in years, all other independent variables were either 0–1 dummy variables or scaled to run from a low score of 0 to a high score of 1.

The issue variables were computed by combining the importance ratings with the party closer to the respondent, so that at one end those who rated the issue as extremely important and felt closer to the Labor Party on the issue were scored 0 and at the other end of the scale those who rated the issue as extremely important and felt closer to the Coalition on the issue were scored 1.



For both the issue and leader variables, the calculations showing the impact of these factors on the party balance were made by multiplying the unstandardised regression coefficient from the first column in Table 10.8 by the amount by which the mean of the variable deviated from the neutral point of 0.5. For taxation, the deviation was +0.02, for education it was -0.09 and for health and Medicare it was -0.10. In the case of the leadership variables, the deviation for Turnbull was -0.01, for Shorten it was -0.08 and for Abbott it was -0.14.

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# Part Three. Actors and Arenas



# 11

## The Australian Labor Party's Campaign

Rob Manwaring

The Australian Labor Party (ALP) was widely expected to lose the 2016 federal election, and, true to the predictions, it did. However, the party greatly exceeded expectations and came tantalisingly close to securing office, after one term in opposition following the 2013 defeat. After a number of recounts in marginal seats, the Liberal–National Coalition secured just a single-seat victory. This chapter offers a critical overview of the ALP's campaign during the election. It sets out the broad contours of the party's campaign strategy, its policy agenda and its State-level campaign performance. The chapter concludes by locating the position of the ALP in a comparative context, especially with the wider decline and issues facing many centre-left parties in similar advanced industrial societies.

To evaluate Labor's performance in 2016, this chapter locates the ALP's results in the wider 'opposition' literature. There is a wide range of academic literature that seeks to explain the role and performance of opposition parties in different political regimes (Dahl 1966; Jaensch 1994; Jaensch, Brent and Bowden 2004; McAllister 2002; Schlesinger 1994). This literature offers insights into how oppositions can win office (e.g. Downs 1957: 137). Recent work by Tim Bale (2010), drawing upon the work of Stuart Ball (2005: 4–5), offers a sound framework for applying this to the case of the ALP in 2016. Bale (and Ball's) work focuses on the key factors

that can help explain why opposition parties can get elected. Using the case of the British Conservative Party, they identify five key factors that have a strong explanatory power for when the Tories win office. Briefly, these are (cited in Bale 2010: 4):

- *fresh faces*: a new leadership team
- *cohesion*: a sense of party discipline and unity
- *visibility*: a new agenda or distinctive policy program (and distancing from past unpopular policies)
- *efficiency*: an improved party organisation, and can respond with speed and authority
- *adaptability*: a hunger for office, coupled to a pragmatism that enables room to manoeuvre.

The utility of this approach is that it provides a broad framework that enables a critical evaluation of the ALP's campaign performance. It is also worth noting some limitations with this framework. There are clearly other factors that can shape electoral results—not least, incumbency. Yet, despite the current more 'accelerated' state of Australian democracy and its churn of prime ministers, most major parties will sit out at least two terms in opposition before getting re-elected (although there are notable recent State-level exceptions in Victoria (VIC) and Queensland (QLD)). Overall, the framework adapted by Bale and Ball can give us a useful critical prism through which to view how well the ALP campaigned under Bill Shorten in 2016.

## The challenge and the results

In recent years, the high-water mark of Labor's electoral achievement was the 2007 election with Kevin Rudd as party leader. In 2007, after 11 years of opposition, Labor secured a resounding result, winning 43.38 per cent of first preferences and 83 seats. In terms of first preferences, this was Labor's strongest result since the 1993 federal election. Since the high-water mark of Rudd's 2007 win, the ALP's electoral performance has been a story of decline, and a well-documented one at that (Ferguson and Drum 2016; Kelly 2014). The Rudd–Gillard governments remain the key point of comparison for understanding Shorten's efforts to rebuild the party after the 2013 defeat. In 2013, the ALP was handsomely beaten and secured one of its lowest-ever first preference performances,



gaining just 33.38 per cent of the vote. It secured just 55 seats compared to the Coalition's 90. Labor lost 17 seats in the election, although there is solid evidence that Rudd's late instalment as leader stemmed an even more dramatic loss (Grattan 2013). Whatever the significant policy achievements of the Rudd–Gillard era, the party was widely perceived as shambolic and fatally divided (Garrett and Dick 2013).

Within three years, however, Shorten had emerged as a solid, if uncharismatic, leader. Moreover, he had largely unified the party (or at least been able to ensure the divisions were no longer played out in public), and he had built a solid policy agenda that largely built upon the Rudd–Gillard years. To win office, Labor needed to gain at least 21 seats. Realistically, most Labor insiders were hoping to regain 10–15 seats (Bramston 2016). As one senior Labor figure commented to the author, Labor's campaign in 2016 was largely an 'opposition' campaign.<sup>1</sup> Labor's focus was on shoring up its 'core vote', especially in marginal suburban areas like western Sydney. As outlined below, this meant that much of Labor's strategy was framed in terms of rebuilding traditional support bases, rather than offering a comprehensive program as a government-in-waiting.

Despite Labor's strong 2016 election performance, it is worth noting two key aspects to its campaign. First, despite the seat gains, the ALP's first preference count was just 34.73 per cent, which was a modest 1.35 per cent swing from the 2013 result. Crucially, the trend data for Labor's first preference vote is clearly tracking downward (see Figure 11.1). This weakened support did fuel some speculation that Anthony Albanese might rerun the leadership contest (Norington 2016).

A second, related issue was the unevenness of Labor's performance. Labor performed strongly in Tasmania (TAS) and crucial bellweather seats in Sydney's west, along with a solid showing in South Australia (SA). Yet, in VIC and QLD, the showing was less impressive and, indeed, there was some suggestion that VIC State Labor issues damaged Shorten's chance of winning office. Figure 11.2 outlines the variability in Labor's performance as indicated by first preferences across the States and Territories. The variability in performance is discussed in more detail below.

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1 Some of the background information on the ALP's campaign comes from a series of anonymous informal interviews with a number of key, senior Labor figures, which took place from October–November 2016. I am grateful for their input, and any inaccuracies belong to the author.

## DOUBLE DISILLUSION

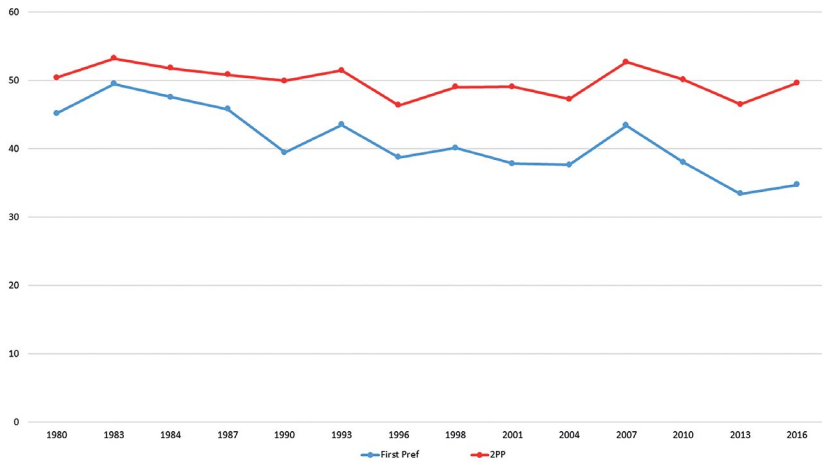


Figure 11.1. ALP first preferences and two-party preferred vote, 1980–2016  
Source. Constructed by author from Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) website.

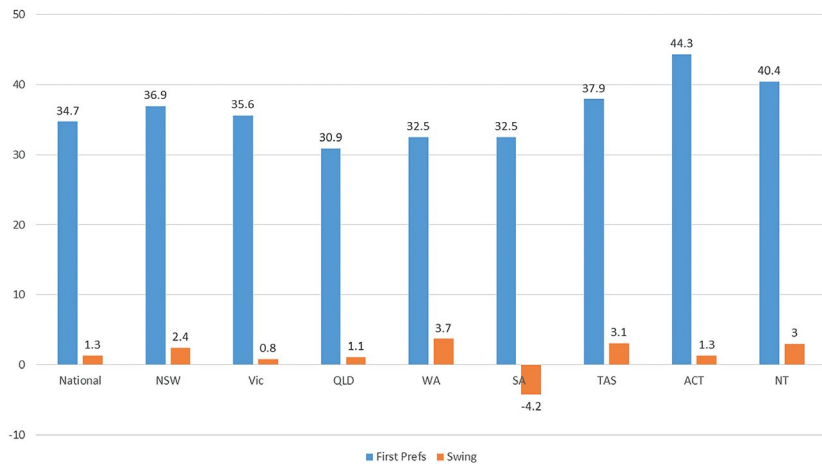


Figure 11.2. ALP first preferences and swing, national and States, 2016  
Source. Constructed by author from AEC website.

## Labor's campaign

Political campaigning is a composite of different elements (Burton and Shea 2010; Mills 1986, 2014; Ross 2015). We might broadly categorise them into four dimensions: the policy debates, and the 'ground', 'air' and 'digital' campaigns.

Labor's election campaign was led by National Secretary George Wright, who had been in the post since 2011, and had overseen the previous campaign in 2013. Wright was candid in his appraisal of the previous campaign (2015: 206). Interestingly, he notes that the ALP is now shifting to a 'third generation' of campaigning, and aspects of this played out in 2016. Political campaigns are shifting away from blanket mass advertising (first generation) and demographic targeting (second generation) to a more granulated approach. As one interviewee reported, this was Labor's third campaign cycle with a strong 'data-driven' approach to targeting potential voters. As per previous campaigns, key seats were targeted, both those that Labor needed to 'hold', as well those it needed to gain. The campaign was driven by the central office, but each candidate in target seats had a campaign organiser to recruit and deliver 'on the ground'. At best, this worked well when there were clear links between the centre and the periphery. Generally speaking, the logistics of the campaigns in the key target seats were shaped by three key factors: the national policy settings, candidate factors and local context. Labor made gains and inroads when these three dimensions linked well. So, in Tasmania, the results reflected the prominence of the 'Mediscare' campaign, coupled with a backlash against the incumbent Liberal candidate(s), supplemented by local concerns about the state of medical services, including Launceston hospital (Ford 2016a).

Given the secretive nature of campaigning, it is difficult to gauge accurately the scale of the logistics of the parties' campaigns. Katherine Murphy (2016) provides some useful data, and notes that Labor recruited 15,000 volunteers—many of them at least a year beforehand. Moreover, the scale of the campaign was significant. Murphy suggests that eight weeks before the election there were 1.6 million voter contacts made. These comprised of 1 million phone calls, 560,000 door knocks and 450,000 conversations logged. In the 48 hours before the election, 62,000 phone calls were made in target seats.

This data-driven approach had been trialled in the Queensland and Victorian State elections, and in the 2015 Canning by-election (Reece 2014). It is worth noting that whilst the metrics are impressive, they conceal certain dynamics of Labor's campaign. For example, as one senior figure reported, whilst the national office would pass on the details of potential new recruits, there was a relatively high attrition rate. However, to counter this, Labor could rely on one of its key assets—the dynamism of Young Labor, the party's youth wing. Most often university

undergraduates, these volunteers were crucial in providing reliable and coordinated activist support. The data-driven approach itself remains closely guarded; however, broadly speaking, target voters were drawn from census data, the electoral roll, the party's own surveys, other sources and triangulated with the calls logged. As one senior figure acknowledged, one of the key strategies in targeting voters was for the party to ignore electoral boundaries and focus on key communities and demographic groups and areas.

Labor's campaign, it should also be noted, was supplemented and assisted by both the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and specific trade unions' campaigns. Murphy (2016) suggests that the ACTU claimed at least 50,000 people were contacted by them. The unions also targeted key seats, and whilst there was overlap with Labor's seats, there were differences. The suggestion was that in terms of targeting, the party's campaign was arguably more granulated. There appears to be loose coordination between the two, although this seems localised. For example, both groups were wary of door knocking the same streets at the same time. Another factor in Labor's strong Tasmanian performance was also the on-the-ground campaigning done by GetUp! (see Vromen, Chapter 18, this volume).

At the target-seat level, a key part of Labor's campaign was to neutralise the threat posed by Malcolm Turnbull's charisma. As one interviewee put it, the ALP did not want the campaign (in a key, marginally held Labor seat) as 'Malcolm Turnbull vs. [Our candidate]'. So the ALP campaign targeted the local Liberal challenger, who also conveniently handed the ALP a gaffe, which was used in both media and leaflet material—again in a key, marginally held metropolitan seat. Here, the ALP would play up the strength of the ALP candidate as either a 'safe pair of hands' or a 'fresh face' accordingly. In the final week of the 'ground campaign' Labor saw little value in blanket leafleting marginal suburbs, but through targeted contacts tried to secure 'values' conversations with potential Labor voters. Volunteers were strongly encouraged to rely on their own personal narratives, rather than 'cold call' on specific policies. This latter approach was seen to be a turn-off. Crucially, it was estimated by the party that approximately one in four target voters made up their minds only in the final 72 hours before election—and this was the crucial period for the ubiquitous 'robocalls'.

Arguably, whilst Labor's campaigning (like the Liberals') is growing more sophisticated, it still lags behind the US and the UK. To some extent, this is partly explained by the influence of compulsory voting, with overseas sister parties having a greater focus on 'getting out the vote'. Moreover, there was some scepticism evinced by some of these methods. As one interviewee who had been involved in a Democrat campaign in the US explained, they once wasted an afternoon trying to reach just nine houses in a swing US State and, in the event, no one was home in each case. Whilst the degree of data triangulation is granulated, Labor's ground campaign had a stronger mass impact.

It remains unclear how much was spent by Labor on its campaign, given the general lack of transparency surrounding campaign finance in Australia (Orr and Ward 2013). The 2013 election delivered just over \$20 million to Labor compared to the Coalition's \$23 million in public funding. The bulk of the campaign financing was spent on TV advertising. Clare Blumer and Dan Conifer (2016) suggest that by June, the Coalition had spent just over \$6 million to the ALP's \$4.7 million on TV advertising. The authors claim that Labor disproportionately spent more on 'negative' rather than 'positive' ads, with greater funds for the Medicare ads over its '100 positive policies' message. This reinforces the overall 'messaging' of the ALP campaign and reflects the two key decisions that shaped the ALP campaign. First was the decision (taken very early) to set Labor's '100 positive policies'. To avoid the disruption of previous campaigns, the party wanted a more coherent and embedded policy agenda. In addition, the focus on policy was to lift the gaze from the leaders—and the threat of Turnbull's own personal charisma. Second, and perhaps more influential on the eventual campaign, was the relatively late decision by Wright to amplify the 'Medicare' message (Farr 2016). Near the end of May, Wright showed some health policy experts the video of Bob Hawke accusing the Liberals of privatising Medicare. This was a 'catalyst' that Labor could use to demarcate itself from the government and, according to Malcolm Farr (2016), the strategy clearly 'unsettled' the Liberals.

Overall, despite the outcome, Labor's campaign seemed to have a fine balance of long-term planning, shrewd messaging and also fortunate short-term decision-making. Yet the campaign was not without its critics. Troy Bramston (2016) offered some stinging critique in the *Australian*. Bramston articulated a range of limitations in the campaign, but most notable was the decision to base the campaign headquarters not in NSW but in VIC, where only one of the 15 most marginal seats was located.

In addition, the major news outlets are based in Sydney, hereby ‘missing a trick’. On its media strategy, Bramston suggested that Labor did not do enough to localise issues and make better use of regional media outlets. He also suggested that the social media strategy was not smart enough at data mining. Further, there were criticisms that the party did not do enough to elicit donations from ‘new’ supporters. Other concerns included the unreliability of Labor’s own internal polling, the national office not doing enough ‘due diligence’ on its candidates, more funding needing to go to target seat campaigns and a lack of seasoned operatives. What seems clear is that, even if some of these criticisms may not be valid, the unevenness of Labor’s campaign was striking, despite its generally positive results.

## Labor’s policy agenda

Underpinning Labor’s ‘ground’, ‘air’ and ‘digital’ campaigns was its policy agenda. A useful way to understand the ALP’s policy narrative is through David Bartlett and Jennifer Rayner’s (2014: 54–57) six campaign narratives. Despite new campaign innovations, the authors argue that the major parties tend to organise their campaign stories around either one (or a mix) of the following types:

- *new hope*: a narrative that seeks to foster hope and defeat voter cynicism. Voters are offered a vision of the future, or one of the past
- *time’s up*: commonly used by opposition parties, a story to ‘harness public dissatisfaction and whip it into a wave of antigovernment sentiment’
- *job isn’t done*: a plea by incumbents to remain in office to build upon policy achievements
- *experience vs. inexperience*: a story that emphasises the virtues of solid stable governance over unpredictable opponents
- *we’ve listened and learned*: this approach ‘primarily aims to rebuild political capital by a promising a break with ... unpopular policies’
- *fear*: a negative story designed to encourage a feeling of harm (if the opponent party is (re)elected).

By and large, the ALP’s campaign fused a number of these elements, but to varying degrees. To a very limited extent, there was some narrative espoused by Shorten that Labor would be a ‘new hope’, and the strategic

use of its '100 positive policies' agenda to suggest it had something like a 'vision' for the country. The ALP's mantra was 'Putting People First', which lacked the 'cut through' of the Liberals' 'Jobs and Growth' slogan. Shorten managed to win and secure three relatively high-risk policy debates. The first was the commitment to return the Budget to surplus in the same time frame as the Liberals, *but*, in the interim, Labor pledged they would run deeper deficits (Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) 2016). The second was the ALP's policy to restrict negative gearing to new housing from 1 July 2017. The third was to not match the Liberals cuts to company tax—in effect, enabling Labor to make \$50 billion in savings.

As outlined by Carol Johnson (Chapter 3, this volume), there was a return to the more ideological language of class that suffused Labor's campaign (Kelly 2016). In its 10-year plan, Labor explicitly evoked the language of social class (ALP 2016). Shorten, much more than Rudd, was fulsome in his praise of the role of the trade unions. This class-based approach had been slowly building under Shorten, and it was underpinned by an earlier report on inequality led by veteran Jenny Macklin (ALP 2015). Two issues are worth noting here. First, it reinforces the view that Labor's election campaign was built on earlier foundations. Second, this class agenda pushed the ALP back within a 'labourist' tradition (Johnson 2011), which also reinforced the view of the party's 'core vote' strategy.

At other points, and in more limited ways, the Labor campaign also spoke to other dimensions on the Bartlett and Rayner typology. There was a hint of the 'experience vs inexperience' narrative based on Labor's attacks on the Liberals' superannuation changes. There was clearly also a dose of 'we've listened and we've learned' in Labor's campaign, with a tighter campaign not damaged by crippling leaks and leadership problems as in 2013 and 2010.

Yet, Labor's main campaign narrative was one of 'fear'. As outlined by Amanda Elliot and Rob Manwaring (Chapter 24, this volume), the 'Medicare' campaign proved highly effective, sowing highly plausible doubt about the government's commitment to funding and investing in public goods—notably, health policy. Health, as Australian Electoral Study (AES) data show, is consistently a strong policy area for Labor (see Bean, Chapter 10, this volume). Moreover, it was a policy issue that could play out locally, with MPs and foot soldiers able to raise fears on local health services. The strength of this tactic was acknowledged by the Liberals. Former NSW Liberal leader Peter Collins argued (cited in Ford 2016b):

It's all about perception and what Labor aimed to do and I think did successfully in Lindsay at least and I suspect in other marginal seats was to take a broad national issue—the Medicare scare—and to localise it and say this affects your local hospital.

There was much debate as to whether or not Labor's 'Medicare' campaign was misleading or not. Indeed, Turnbull argued that Labor's campaign was based on an 'extraordinary act of dishonesty' (Overington 2016). However, Shorten's case was built on strong, but circumstantial evidence (Henderson 2016). If privatisation is narrowly defined as purely the selling-off of state assets then Labor's scare campaign was based, at best, on mixed evidence. However, if privatisation is given a much broader meaning such as cost shifting onto the public, as Shorten outlined in his interview with Sarah Ferguson on *Four Corners*, then the case was much stronger (Ferguson, Stevens and Worthington 2016).

Overall, when evaluating Labor's policy agenda, and how it linked to its campaign, it was also striking that despite the claims for a new approach by Labor, these were policy settings best characterised as 'incremental' (Haigh 2012; Hayes 2001). By and large, much of Labor's agenda—especially its social policy agenda—was a continuation of the project developed by both Rudd and Gillard. Moreover, Shorten managed to achieve party discipline and cohesion well before the election campaign. At Labor's federal conference, pushed by the right-wing trade unions, Shorten offered a 'new direction' in Labor's immigration policy, controversially supporting boat turn backs and continuing offshore processing (Yaxley and Norman 2015). Similarly, Shorten secured a compromise over same-sex marriage—pledging to introduce a bill if elected—but MPs would be allowed a conscience vote until 2019 (Norman and Uhlmann 2015). Whilst unsatisfactory to the party's Left faction, Shorten's deft handling at the conference, backed by key trade unions, ensured that Labor had neutralised two key 'live' policy issues well before the start of the campaign.

## Labor's regional campaigns

After broadly outlining the ALP's campaign and policy strategy, it is useful to highlight some of the local factors that either impeded or amplified the campaign. In NSW, Labor generally performed well, and picked up crucial seats like Lindsay and Macarthur, with swings of 4.1 per cent and 11.7 per cent respectively. More generally across the State, Labor gained



key marginal seats, such as the famous bellwether of Eden-Monaro. A range of factors seemed to play out here. First, the general toxicity of the Labor 'brand' across the State had diminished, especially some of the debilitating politics at the end of the State Labor era (Cavalier 2010; Clune 2012). Second, Labor was clearly able to exploit wider public anxiety about the Liberals' plan to deliver economic growth. The ALP deployed what the NSW Labor General Secretary, Kaila Murnain, called a 'shoe leather and social' campaign (cited in Evans 2016). Some systemic factors also helped Labor in the marginal seats; for example, the redistribution in Macarthur was kind, syphoning off a number of Liberal districts. Overall, Shorten described this as 'Fortress NSW' (Evans 2016).

Topping the NSW results was Labor's strong performance in Tasmania. Of the five seats, the Liberals lost three to Labor, Labor retained Franklin and Andrew Wilkie entrenched his position as an Independent in Denison. Labor easily claimed the seats of Bass, Braddon and Lyons. One factor seems to be that each of the three Liberal incumbents belonged to the conservative wing of the party, all supporting Tony Abbott against Turnbull (McIlroy 2016). Defeated member Andrew Nikolic complained that Labor's aggressive campaign strategy, meaning the widespread use of robocalls, was a factor. Labor was also, indirectly, assisted by the GetUp! campaign targeting conservative marginal seats (see Vromen, Chapter 18, this volume). Liberal frontbench Senator Eric Abetz claimed the campaign group spent '\$500,000 just in the seat of Bass, with 10 full-time people besmirching the character of a great Australian servant [Nikolic]' (Ford 2016b). In a further frank analysis, Abetz perceived a failure of the centrally orchestrated Liberal campaign to dovetail to local issues in Tasmania (Smith 2016).

In SA, the emergence of the Nick Xenophon Team (NXT) had a clearer disproportionate impact on the Liberals, rather than Labor. Xenophon's shrewd targeting of Liberal MP Jamie Brigg in Mayo helped make the election competitive to the ALP's advantage. After a protracted count, Steve Georganas, former sitting member for Hindmarsh, regained his old seat from Liberal Matt Williams. Elsewhere, despite some scares, Kate Ellis held off another new challenger for the seat of Adelaide. The NXT phenomenon did pose a specific problem for Labor in SA, and it had to shape its strategy to neuter both NXT and the Coalition. Locally, there was a shrewd focus on the issue of penalty rates to try and damage both Xenophon and the Liberals. Perhaps, like in TAS, the strength of Labor's impact was arguably mostly due to the weakness of the Liberals'

campaign. Given the fiasco of the submarine deal, and with one of the largest unemployment rates in the country, it seemed clear that the Liberals had lost far too much ground to recover in the State.

In VIC and QLD, Labor's campaign had less impact. In VIC, the Liberals gained one seat from the ALP—Chisholm—with a modest swing to the government. There is a mixture of views about why Labor seemed to perform more poorly here, securing a 1.5 per cent swing, compared to the national 3.4 per cent. The more positive narrative from some Labor quarters was that Labor was already strong in VIC, and it had hit close to its threshold in the State (Gordon 2016). Yet, as noted, this might be rather kind, given that in 2010 Labor did secure a higher two-party preferred result (55 per cent in 2010, compared to 51.7 per cent in 2016). The main charge is that Labor lost ground due to Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews' decision to initiate a dispute involving the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and the United Firefighters Union weeks before the date of the federal election. One commentator suggested that the CFA dispute had some impact, in that it 'deprived Bill Shorten of oxygen' (Gordon 2016; see also Peetz, Chapter 23, this volume).

Similarly, the ALP campaign in QLD did not perform as well when compared to the national picture. In total, the ALP retained six seats, and gained two: Herbert and Longman. This remains a blue State with 21 Liberal seats and Bob Katter retaining his seat. Whilst the Longman result was a highpoint for Labor, ejecting the youthful Wyatt Roy from office, elsewhere it made little substantive impact. In target seats, Labor focused on issues such as the misuse of 457 visas, and fears over foreign workers. Evan Moorhead, the ALP State Secretary, suggested that it faced institutional barriers as they were 'up against incumbents with big budgets' (Ludlow 2016). The QLD picture is complex, not least with the resurgence of Pauline Hanson's One Nation, the disappearance of Palmer United and a State that generally tends to swing erratically.

## Conclusion: Labor through the telescope and the microscope

If we revisit the Ball–Bale framework set out at the outset of the chapter, we can make some overall judgements about the ALP's 2016 federal election campaign. First, on *fresh faces*, clearly Labor was able to offer something

like fresh leadership for the party, following the Rudd–Gillard years. Unlike Julia Gillard, Shorten had the advantage of not facing constant leaks and efforts to undermine his performance. There were two main positive elements to Shorten's leadership skills. First, he was backed up a strong shadow Cabinet, with Tanya Plibersek, Chris Bowen and Penny Wong amongst his finest performers. Shorten appears to play a 'team game', which helped distract from his lack of charisma or rhetorical skills. Second, the ALP, clearly recognising Shorten's limited personal appeal, took a policy-'rich' approach. On *fresh faces*—Shorten was just about able to convey sufficient distance from the leadership problems that beset the 2007–13 Labor governments.

On the dimension of *cohesion*, Shorten's noted negotiation skills came to the fore, and the party projected itself as unified and coherent. By neutralising key points of policy division, Shorten was able to broker key deals between the factions and unions, and galvanise union and party members for the 'ground war'.

Arguably, one of the weakest dimensions of Labor's campaign was *visibility*—in its ability to offer a new or distinctive policy agenda. Clearly, the furore around Medicare was prominent during the campaign. Yet, ultimately, this was an 'opposition' campaign, in that the party was largely directing its efforts to oppose and critique the government's agenda, with a mixed ability to offer a coherent new 'vision' for the nation. Whilst it was a strength for the party to continue many of the social policy settings set out during the Rudd–Gillard years, this had limitations. On its political economy, the *visibility* of its agenda was less clear. Interestingly, whilst Labor performed better than expected, it might well find that the challenge is even greater at the 2019 election, in that it may require more than incremental settings to secure victory.

On *efficiency* and *adaptability*, we can also see progress made by the ALP. Generally, the party worked well during the campaign, and it was a surprisingly gaffe-free campaign—almost to the point of boredom (see Gauja, Chen, Curtin and Pietsch, Chapter 1, this volume). More positively, it was very clear that the ALP was 'hungry' for office, and the Medicare campaign reflected a party that is never shy of playing negative or tough marginal seat politics to try and seal electoral gains.

The Bale–Ball framework gives us some clues with which to evaluate the ALP's campaign, and it scores reasonably well across most of these elements. If we locate the context of the Australian political system, then the scale

of the challenge facing Labor has to be acknowledged. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Australian political culture tends to allow new governments at least two terms to set out their program, especially at the federal level.

Finally, it is worth locating Labor's performance with a brief reflection on the wider, international context of the centre-left. In their account of trade unions, Rebecca Gumbrell-McCormick and Richard Hyman (2013) use the metaphor of the microscope and the telescope to evaluate the state of the union movement. The microscope examines the local factors that explain patterns and trends, and the telescope takes a broader view to evaluate the state of play. Much of this chapter has focused on the 'microscope'—especially in seeking to understand the unevenness of Labor's performance across the country. Yet, Labor in opposition can also be viewed through the telescope, by comparing its position to its international counterparts. Generally speaking, since the global financial crisis (GFC), the centre-left has been on the back foot across many advanced industrial nations. Crucially, there is a literature (e.g. Bailey et al. 2014; Keating and McCrone 2013) that argues that since the GFC, the centre-left has failed to capitalise on economic circumstances that might well have suited a revival of the centre-left. Despite some hopes of a revival of the centre-left in France and Canada, the current electoral picture for the established centre-left parties is grim. In 2017, the centre-left performed very poorly at the French (presidential) and Dutch elections, and lost the Norwegian and German general elections. Despite some resurgence under Jeremy Corbyn in the UK, the UK Labour Party lost its third straight election. Of course, in the US, the Democrats failed to secure the Presidency for Clinton.

The centre-left, it seems, is facing a range of structural and wider problems, including declining union density, rising populism, a crisis of faith in the European Union and increasingly multi-party and pluralistic systems with growing competition for the older centre-left parties. These trends can be overstated, and play out differently in different regions, but something close to a pattern is evident. Despite receiving plaudits for its handling of the GFC, the ALP's general story has been one of decline since 2007, somewhat masked by the 2016 result. It remains unclear how far the ALP might be a case that leads to a broader revival of the centre-left (e.g. Wilson 2013). Indeed, it may find the next federal election even more of a challenge than the 2016 one.

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# 12

## The Liberal Party of Australia's Campaign

Nicholas Barry

The 2016 federal election saw the Coalition returned to government with a reduced majority after a troubled term in office in which it struggled with bad poll numbers, was unable to implement key elements of its legislative agenda, and ultimately replaced first-term prime minister Tony Abbott. The aim of this chapter is to analyse the Liberal campaign in 2016, focusing particularly on the strengths and weaknesses of the campaign strategy, the state of the party organisation and the broader implications of the result for the party system. The first section of the chapter evaluates the party's campaign strategy. I argue that some of the criticisms of the campaign were overstated given the difficult context in which it took place. However, there were weaknesses, most notably the failure to put forward major policies to substantiate the focus on jobs and growth and address voters' underlying sense of economic insecurity. The second section of the chapter examines the organisational health of the Liberal Party in light of the 2016 campaign. It argues that the election demonstrated a number of problems within the Liberal Party organisation, particularly relating to factional influence over preselection processes in New South Wales (NSW), the under representation of women and a relatively weak capacity to mobilise grassroots supporters. The third section of the chapter examines the implications of the election for the Liberal Party's ideological direction and position in the party system. It argues that the result is likely to exacerbate existing tensions between

moderates and conservatives within the party, and the growing influence of Pauline Hanson's One Nation (PHON) and the Nick Xenophon Team (NXT) also point to a possible fracturing of the centre-right vote base.

## Campaign strategy

In a sense, the Liberal campaign for a second term began on the night Turnbull won the leadership in September 2015. Speaking to the media after winning the party-room ballot, he said he would adopt 'a different style of leadership' from Abbott and he signalled a shift towards a more progressive liberal approach to government, expressing the optimistic view that '[t]here has never been a more exciting time to be alive', and that Australia 'has to be a nation that is agile, that is innovative, that is creative' (Turnbull 2015).

The Liberal strategy during the election campaign continued in this vein with a relatively positive message focused primarily on economic growth, jobs and innovation. This was reflected in the party's television advertising. Industry experts estimate that around only \$1.4 million of the \$6 million television advertising budget was spent on explicit attack ads (Blumer and Conifer 2016). Instead, the most prominent Liberal advertisement during the campaign promoted its 'Plan for a Strong New Economy', and this slogan received prime billing on the party's website throughout the campaign (Liberal Party of Australia (LPA) 2016a). The campaign was also heavily oriented around Turnbull himself. The two advertisements receiving most airtime during the campaign featured Turnbull speaking directly to the camera, and much of the campaign material was marked with a 'presidential crest' inscribed with 'The Turnbull Coalition Team' (Scott and Meers 2016). Despite the government's relatively positive focus, the Liberal campaign was light on policy detail. The major policies on which it focused were a company tax cut announced in the 2016 Budget, which was handed down shortly before the campaign began (Henderson 2016), and a \$2 billion crackdown on welfare fraud that was not announced until the final week of the campaign (Dziedzic 2016).

Although the central message of the campaign was positive, it had important negative elements too. Prior to the start of the official campaign period, the government sought to target Labor as a risk to the economy because of the impact its negative gearing policy would have on house prices (see Massola 2016a). During the campaign, they also used the dispute

between the Country Fire Authority and the Victorian Labor government over a new enterprise bargaining agreement to portray Labor as beholden to the union movement (Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) 2016). They attacked Labor over its policy costings, particularly after Bill Shorten revealed that Labor would run higher deficits over the first four years of the budget cycle. The Liberals also ran an attack ad in the second half of the campaign featuring a 'tradie' who claimed that Labor was going to war on the economy (LPA 2016b), and an ad attacking Labor on the issue of asylum seekers, particularly in the final weeks of the campaign. Eleven days out from the election, Malcolm Turnbull criticised Labor's promise to ban temporary protection visas, claiming that it would:

send an absolutely unequivocal signal to the people smugglers that under a Labor government, anyone who manages to get to Australia on a boat will be able to stay here permanently. It will be used aggressively as a marketing tool by people smugglers (quoted in Massola 2016b).

In some marginal seats, Liberal Party candidates also developed tailored local campaigns that were often more negative than the national campaign. Notable examples include Michelle Landry in Capricornia, who ran advertisements attacking Labor and the Greens on asylum-seeker policy and mining (Scott and Meers 2016), George Christensen in Dawson, who campaigned on preventing Syrian refugees from being settled in his electorate, and Luke Simkins, who was accused of running a smear campaign against Anne Aly, Labor's candidate for Cowan, who is Muslim (Perpitch 2016).

A number of major criticisms were made of the Liberal campaign after the disappointing election result. The first criticism related to the timing of the election. After trailing Labor in 30 consecutive Newspolls, there was an immediate increase in the government's popularity after Turnbull took the leadership from Abbott. It pulled two points ahead of Labor in the two-party preferred vote, while Turnbull opened up a 34-point lead over Bill Shorten as preferred prime minister (Keany 2015; *Sydney Morning Herald* 2015). However, Turnbull's honeymoon period proved short-lived and his popularity declined significantly over the first half of 2016 (Hudson 2016; see also Beaumont 2016). Some argued that Turnbull should have called the election shortly after the leadership change to capitalise on the government's boost in the polls (e.g. MacCallum 2016).

Nonetheless, going to an election quickly would have carried risks for the government. After all, the previous Labor government had also received an immediate boost in the polls after Julia Gillard took the leadership

from Kevin Rudd, and that proved to be short-lived. In addition, the change in leadership inevitably left the government open to a charge of instability, so the government may have wanted to have more time to create a sense of stability and to deal with the underlying policy issues that had contributed to the Abbott government's unpopularity. Comments from the 2016 Liberal Campaign Director, Tony Nutt, in a post-election speech to the National Press Club broadly support the latter view. Nutt argued that voters 'wanted to know that Malcolm Turnbull and his team had a credible plan, which they were committed to and would implement going forward' (Nutt 2016). In addition, although Nutt does not allude to this in this speech, another important consideration in the timing of the election related to campaign organisation. The previous Liberal Party Director, Brian Loughnane, was married to Abbott's high-profile chief of staff, Peta Credlin, and he stepped down within weeks of the change in leadership (Uhlmann and Glenday 2015). As well as bringing in a new director (Nutt), the party needed time to craft a new campaign strategy, particularly given the different leadership styles and policy approaches of Abbott and Turnbull. The organisation of the Labor campaign in 2013 had been disrupted by the leadership change shortly before the election, and the Coalition was no doubt keen to leave enough time before the election to properly prepare. In sum, it is impossible to know for sure whether an earlier election would have produced a better outcome for the government, but it is easy to see why, at the time, Turnbull may have wanted to leave a longer gap between the leadership change and the election.

A second criticism from within the Liberal Party was that the campaign should have been more negative in its orientation, with a greater focus on attacking Labor and Bill Shorten. For example, Abbott-supporter and dumped minister Senator Eric Abetz asked: '[W]hy did we not run on the carbon tax? Why did we not run on union corruption?' (Meers 2016). However, Nutt defended the campaign strategy against this criticism at his Press Club address, arguing that it had held up well and that adopting a more strongly negative approach would have been counterproductive:

While their [i.e. Labor's] negativity had an effect on the Liberal Party primary vote those votes didn't always flow to Labor. Instead Labor's negative campaign helped drive a high minor party an [sic] independent vote. The danger was that if the Coalition also went to that level of negativity, it would have only boosted the other vote ... The test here is that the published polls at the start of the campaign closely matched

the actual result and the polls at the end of the campaign. That is the campaign was not undermined by being positive but was instead held up against strong negative attacks from Labor, the unions, Greens and others by positive appeals while not failing to strongly contest our opponents on key issues in relevant ways when appropriate (Nutt 2016).

Thus, in Nutt's view, the primarily positive Liberal campaign had proved effective at negating Labor's attacks. A further problem for the Liberal campaign was that advancing a heavily negative campaign, particularly one focused on asylum seekers and the carbon tax, would have sat uneasily with the image Turnbull cultivated before becoming prime minister, and the direction he set for government immediately on taking office. The decline in his popularity coincided with him taking a series of decisions that seemed to contradict this positive liberal rhetoric, so there is reason to question whether a more strongly negative campaign would have been beneficial for the government.

A third criticism of the campaign came from a number of party insiders who argued that Turnbull and Nutt had failed to respond effectively to Labor's claim that the government was planning to privatise Medicare (Labor's so-called 'Mediscare' campaign, see Elliot and Manwaring, Chapter 24, this volume). Former Liberal director and trade minister Andrew Robb reportedly agrees with this criticism in the internal review he conducted into the 2016 Liberal campaign (Murphy 2017). Nutt acknowledged the impact of the Mediscare campaign, claiming that it 'affected votes and seats and contributed to the defeat of a number of MPs' (Nutt 2016). However, he sought to shift the blame onto Labor, describing Mediscare as a 'cold-blooded lie' that involved '[c]ynically and cruelly exploiting some of the most vulnerable in our society' (Nutt 2016). He also argued that the Liberals had identified Medicare as a threat early on, that 'resources were provided for immediate rebuttal on social media and via earned media appearances', and that '[f]urther TV broadcasts and direct media messages were adjusted to include guaranteed health funding to provide a positive contrast' (Nutt 2016). One example of this was the 'Four Reasons to Support the Coalition' advertisement, which received heavy airplay in the final weeks of the campaign and emphasised that 'Medicare and education funding is guaranteed' (LPA 2016c).

In addition, although the government was relatively slow to respond to Medicare in the early stages of the campaign, in many ways, the problem predates the official campaign period. Labor generally enjoys an advantage

over the Coalition when voters are polled on which party is better able to handle health policy, and the Coalition was particularly vulnerable on this issue after the unpopular 2014 Budget, which attempted to cut projected spending on hospitals and introduce a Medicare copayment. One important effect of Medicare, then, was the way it pushed health policy onto the agenda, putting a policy area advantageous to Labor at the forefront of voters' minds. This complicated the response to Medicare because focusing too much attention on it risked distracting from the issues that the government wanted to dominate the campaign. Once again, this is in line with Nutt's own view:

Research found that the Medicare campaign also helped to shift focus of the campaign onto health and away from the economy. To provide similar weight to rebuttal of this attack would not have neutralised it. It would actually have raised it further as the campaign issue and would have taken valuable resources and focus away from the Coalition's positive appeals. The best way to practically counter it was to shift focus [sic] of the campaign back to the economy and jobs (Nutt 2016).

Nonetheless, although Nutt may be right that focusing on other issues such as jobs and growth was the best way of combating Medicare, ultimately it is doubtful whether this central feature of the government's campaign was adequately prosecuted. As mentioned above, the government put forward relatively few major policy announcements during the election. This meant there was little policy detail to give substance to the rhetoric about 'jobs and innovation' and 'jobs and growth', and it is likely that more was needed to address the sense of economic insecurity felt by voters in marginal electorates, especially in western Sydney where the Coalition lost a number of seats (Wade 2016).

In sum, the Liberal campaign, which came at the end of a difficult first term in office, was oriented around a relatively positive message about jobs and innovation. Although there was significant internal criticism of the campaign for not being negative enough or for not effectively dealing with the challenge of Labor's 'Medicare' campaign, there are reasons to treat these criticisms with a degree of caution. A negative campaign approach would have been in conflict with Turnbull's attempt to promote a more positive image, while 'Medicare' was difficult to combat given that health policy had been such a negative issue for the government since 2014. It is also important to bear in mind that the campaign was trying to convince voters to re-elect a government that had been unpopular for most of its first term in office, and whose leader had been replaced after little more



than two years as prime minister. In this context, simply getting re-elected was a challenge in itself. In the end, the major problem with the campaign may have been the same problem that plagued the government during its first term—the party did not come up with a concrete set of policies to give substance to its rhetoric around jobs and growth and help address voters' sense of economic insecurity.

## Party organisation

The 2016 election also highlighted a number of significant organisational problems in the Liberal Party. Perhaps the most evident was the influence of factional powerbrokers over preselection contests, particularly in the NSW division. This problem is well established in the literature on party organisation in Australia (see Gauja 2015) and it has also been highlighted in internal reviews of the Liberal Party's national organisation and the NSW Division (see Staley 2008: 23; Reith 2011: 23). The most recent of these reviews—conducted by former prime minister John Howard in the wake of the 2013 federal election—recommended the use of plebiscites to democratise the preselection process, reduce the influence of factions and make members feel more involved in the party. However, the reforms that were eventually adopted fell well short of these recommendations. The NSW Council instead adopted a compromise proposal to trial plebiscites for preselections in six State and federal seats between 2016 and 2019 (Hurst 2016). This compromise proposal was condemned by critics within the party who argued it did not go far enough and State Council delegates audibly laughed when Turnbull claimed that the Liberal Party was 'not run by factions', or 'by big business or by deals in backrooms' (Murray 2015).

Although the failure to act in response to party reviews is not new or unique to the Liberals, there were a number of very contentious preselection contests in the lead-up to the 2016 election that attracted significant media attention and underlined the need for reform in NSW. One notable example was the conflict over preselection for the NSW Senate ticket. In March 2016, centre-right faction candidate Hollie Hughes won the number one position on the ticket ahead of Minister for International Development and member of the conservative-right faction Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, who was moved down to the second position, while high-profile candidate Jim Molan was relegated to third spot.

Particular criticism was directed at the role of Michael Photios and Nick Campbell, factional powerbrokers within the Liberal Party and lobbyists, who were allowed to exercise proxy votes and reportedly ‘worked the room’ to ensure Hughes was placed ahead of Fierravanti-Wells and Molan (Crowe 2016).<sup>1</sup>

There were also a number of other rancorous preselection contests in NSW. In the seat of Mackellar, veteran Liberal MP Bronwyn Bishop, who had been forced to resign as Speaker of the House after a scandal over her travel expenses, had wanted to recontest the seat, but ultimately lost the preselection contest to Joseph Falinski (Dole 2016). In the lead-up to the preselection vote, there was again public criticism of the process from Liberal Party members angry at their lack of voting power and the dominance of factions. For example, party member and conservative legal academic David Flint complained to the ABC that ‘Menzies would be horrified if he knew that potential members of Parliament were not being chosen on merit, but were being chosen because of their allegiance to a factional powerbroker’ (Duffy and Kleinig 2016). In Hughes, MP Craig Kelly was also under threat from local councillor Kent Johns. Although Johns ultimately decided not to run, reportedly due to intervention from Turnbull (Trembath 2016), the dispute was played out in the media, with talkback radio host Alan Jones at one point praising Kelly on air and warning Johns that ‘if you put your head up, there’ll be a hell of a story that’ll be told about you’ (Jones, quoted in Nicholls and Robertson 2016).

While it is difficult to ascertain exactly how much electoral damage these disputes did to the party, it is clearly not the kind of publicity it was looking for in the lead-up to the election. It also has further consequences in that it undermines the force of the longstanding Liberal criticism of Labor for being controlled by factional powerbrokers and wracked with internal instability. The experience of 2016 therefore suggests that reform to preselection processes may have a pragmatic electoral rationale, as well as a democratic one.

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1 Although Hughes initially offered to swap positions with Fierravanti-Wells, the situation was complicated by Turnbull’s decision to call a double dissolution, which would see a full Senate rather than a half-Senate election, and a deal with the Nationals on the joint Senate ticket, which saw Hughes and Fierravanti-Wells fighting over the fourth and difficult-to-win sixth positions on the ticket, rather than first and second (Robertson 2016). The NSW State executive ultimately stepped in to give the fourth position to Senator Fierravanti-Wells, reportedly after the intervention of Turnbull (Tarasov 2016).

A further problem highlighted by the election is the under representation of women among Liberal MPs. The 2016 election produced the worst outcome in 25 years with the number of female Liberal MPs in parliament reduced to 18 out of 84 (Norman 2016). This is not surprising given that women generally missed out on preselection for the safe Liberal seats that became available in 2016. Six experienced Liberal MPs in safe seats—Philip Ruddock, Bishop, Ian Macfarlane, Sharman Stone, Bruce Billson and Robb—retired at the 2016 election and, in all six cases, a male candidate was preselected by the Liberals to replace them. Such a high degree of under-representation is normally a good indication that there are underlying structural barriers to the preselection of women (see Phillips 2004). It also came within months of a 2015 report presented to the Federal Executive that called for 50 per cent of Liberal MPs to be women by 2025 (Tomazin 2015). The fact the party went backwards in 2016 shows how far it has to go to meet this target. Perhaps recognising this, the Federal Executive signed off on a ‘gender diversity reform program’ in the wake of the election. Although a number of women within the party welcomed this development, it remains unclear whether it will be enough to meet the target. The extent of the problem in 2016 suggests that more far-reaching reforms such as the introduction of quotas for preselected candidates may be needed, as Stone has proposed (Greene 2014).

A further problem highlighted by the 2016 election campaign is the Liberal Party’s weak capacity to engage in effective grassroots campaigning. This kind of concern has deep roots in the history of the non-Labor side of politics, and fed into the formation of the Liberal Party itself. Party founder Robert Menzies felt that Labor’s mass party structure gave it an advantage when it came to election campaigning because it could mobilise its membership base and affiliated unions to provide the ‘boots on the ground’ needed to engage in the locally oriented activities that were characteristic of campaigning during the pre-television era (Brett 2003). The structure of the Liberal Party was thus designed to mimic some features of Labor’s mass party structure, including a large rank-and-file membership base with an ongoing involvement in the party’s activities. However, in recent decades, party membership has declined in both major parties to the point that they now have ‘a mass party model of organisation without the “mass” of members required to give it vitality and legitimacy’ (Errington 2015: 17).

Although the need for a strong party membership base declined somewhat with the emergence of television, which became the focal point for modern campaigning, the 2016 campaign illustrated that having a strong ‘ground game’ has renewed importance in a digital age. The emergence of digital media has enabled parties to gather more sophisticated data on voters using social media analytics. Key voting groups can then be targeted more accurately through online advertising and direct contact with party volunteers. Coordinating and engaging in this kind of direct contact requires an extensive field operation with party volunteers to run the ‘ground game’ and contact voters directly through phone calls and door knocking. At the 2016 election, Labor had around 15,000 volunteers who reportedly had 1.6 million ‘contacts’ with voters during the campaign (Murphy 2016; see also Manwaring, Chapter 11, this volume). In addition, the union movement ran a separate and extensive field operation, as did *GetUp!* (see Halpin and Fraussen, Chapter 17, this volume; Vromen, Chapter 18, this volume). Comparable figures are not available for the Liberal Party, but reports suggest that it was unable to match these numbers and that ‘[c]onservatives are ... trailing badly ... when it comes to large-scale, rapid, mobile grassroots campaigning, which, of course, can be the difference between winning and losing’ (Murphy 2016). Robb’s review of the 2016 Liberal campaign reportedly echoed these concerns (Murphy 2017), while Nutt (2016) has also argued that the Liberals are at an organisational disadvantage:

In terms of field campaigns, the Labor Party and the unions and groups like *GetUp!* have enormous resources at their disposal. They are able to build resources, aggregate resources, have a full-time campaign resources staff and personnel, have systems, have equipment to impact the vote during campaigns and prior to campaigns. So they are professionalising themselves all the time and the Liberal Party needs also to professionalise itself further.

Nutt also called for Australian business to build its capacity to campaign on policy issues both during and outside the official election period. Considering the capacity of the mining industry and pubs and clubs to organise effectively against a number of major policies put forward by the Gillard Labor government (see Bell and Hindmoor 2014; Panichi 2014), Nutt may be underestimating the existing campaigning power of business. Nonetheless, he is right that there are currently no right-wing organisations in Australia that have the capacity to organise the sort of grassroots campaigns that the union movement and *GetUp!* have run

in recent years. In light of this, it would not be surprising if Australian conservatives attempt to strengthen their capacity to engage in grassroots campaigning over the next few years.

Overall, the 2016 election highlighted some significant organisational problems for the Liberal Party. Although organisational reforms are available that could help the party effectively address the problem of factional control and the under-representation of women, these reforms are likely to be opposed by factional powerbrokers whose influence would be weakened. Those pushing for reform are only likely to overcome this internal resistance when these organisational problems become clear barriers to electoral success (see, more generally, Barry 2015). Given that the Turnbull government was returned to office—albeit with a reduced majority—it seems unlikely that the problems will be viewed as urgent enough to warrant the major reforms required to properly address them. The exception here might be the call for the Liberal Party and other conservative organisations to build a stronger capacity for grassroots campaigning as this would not challenge the power of factional powerbrokers, at least in the short term. This would also be in keeping with the longer-term trend whereby successful campaign innovations by one of the major parties are quickly copied by the other (see Mills 2014: 265).

## Leadership, ideology and the party system

Although he did not face any immediate challenge to his leadership in the aftermath of the election, Turnbull's position was weakened by the closeness of the result. In the days following the election, a number of MPs were openly critical of the Liberal campaign, with WA Senator David Johnston describing it as 'shocking' and stating that 'we are light years away from relating to people at the moment' (quoted in Burrell 2016). Others (anonymously) criticised Turnbull more directly, stating that he had 'no authority' (quoted in Coorey 2016). Matters have been further complicated by former prime minister Abbott's continuing presence in the party room. Although the chances of Abbott making a comeback seem remote, his comments to the media since the election have been an ongoing source of distraction for the government (e.g. Anderson 2017).

The election result also left the government in a difficult parliamentary position. The slim nature of the government's lower house majority means that Turnbull is vulnerable to threats from Liberal MPs to cross the floor, or simply abstain from voting for contentious pieces of legislation. The Nationals may also decide to flex their muscles on policy questions, particularly given that they have increased their parliamentary representation—albeit by one seat. In the aftermath of the election, they succeeded in using their improved position to secure an extra position in Cabinet (Kelly 2016), and this is just one indication of the complexities posed for Coalition politics.

Although the government's aim in calling a double dissolution was to clear out the micro parties from the Senate, the composition of the new chamber has also created challenges for the government. With only 30 Coalition Senators elected, it needs to win the support of an additional nine Senators to get its legislation through. On matters where they do not have the support of the opposition, this means the government must negotiate with the 20 crossbenchers. This includes two crossbenchers—David Leyonhjelm and Jacqui Lambie—who were targets of the Senate electoral reforms that the government pushed through prior to the double dissolution, and nine Greens Senators who are ideologically opposed to key aspects of the government's legislative agenda. The composition of the Senate has not prevented the government passing some key policies since the election, such as the industrial relations changes that were the formal trigger for the double dissolution, or company tax cuts (Coorey 2017). However, it has also run into difficulties with other major pieces of legislation, such as changes to citizenship laws (Gothe-Snape 2017) and higher education funding (Karp 2017).

The Liberals may also be confronting a more fundamental challenge in the next few years because the election results point to a possible fragmentation of the right-wing vote in Australia. The rise of PHON in the late 1990s created major electoral problems for the Liberal Party, particularly in Queensland, and it contributed to the near defeat of the Howard government at the 1998 election. The implosion of the party, combined with the Howard government's shift to the right on refugee policy and emphasis on security in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, helped the Coalition win back these voters. Although PHON's support in 2016 was well short of its peak in the late 1990s, it received over 9 per cent of the first preference Senate vote in Queensland and, across the country, four Senators, including Hanson herself, were elected in

2016. With rising support for anti-Muslim/anti-immigration parties in Europe and the US, there must be a real risk that PHON's support will grow, eating into the Coalition's conservative base. This is a further reason why Turnbull is likely to find it difficult to move the Liberals in a less conservative ideological direction.

The success of the NXT in South Australia (SA) represents a different kind of threat to the Liberals. Xenophon's blend of populist centrism was appealing enough to win just over 21 per cent of the lower house first preference vote in SA, to pick up the Liberal seat of Mayo, and to go close to winning Grey. This suggests that Xenophon is likely to remain a lower house threat to the Liberals in SA, and that it needs to be wary of taking moderate voters for granted.

In all, the 2016 federal election has drawn attention to the ideological divisions confronting the Liberal Party. If it moves in an overly conservative direction on social issues, it risks alienating moderate supporters in States such as SA, where the NXT exists to sweep up their votes, and elements of its base in Victoria and NSW. However, if it adopts a more moderate position, it risks further alienating conservative voters who are being lured by PHON and, to a lesser extent, former Liberal senator Cory Bernardi's new Australian Conservatives party. It is too soon to reach any definitive judgements, but it seems possible that the increasing polarisation of the electorate on social issues is re-opening cracks in the party system, and the Liberals may soon be facing the kind of difficult ideological balancing act that Labor has dealt with since the rise of the Greens.

## Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the Liberal Party's 2016 election campaign, examining its strengths and weaknesses, drawing broader conclusions about the organisational health of the party, and examining the implications of the election for Turnbull's leadership and the party's ideological direction. I argued that some of the criticisms of the Liberal campaign in 2016 were overstated given the difficult context in which the campaign took place. However, there were major weaknesses, most notably the failure to put forward major policies to substantiate the focus on jobs and growth and address voters' underlying sense of economic insecurity. I also argued that the 2016 campaign illustrated some significant problems with the organisational health of the Liberal Party, particularly with regard to

factional control of preselections, the under-representation of women, and a weak capacity to engage in grassroots campaigning. The election result also left the government in a difficult parliamentary position and weakened Turnbull's leadership. Lastly, I argued that the resurgence of PHON and the emergence of NXT in SA points to a possible fracturing of the centre-right vote, leading to the possibility that the 2016 election will come to be viewed as a turning point in the development of the Australian party system.

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# 13

## The Australian Greens' Campaign

Stewart Jackson

Coming into the 2016 federal election, the Greens had reason to be confident that they would substantially improve their vote. By the end of 2015, opinion polls had been good, and although they had begun to drift lower, the Greens might have considered themselves to be well placed to reap the benefits of continuing electoral success. The number of party MPs nationally sat at all-time high of 34, with only the Northern Territory (NT) without parliamentary representation. In the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), the Greens were in government as the junior coalition partner to the Australian Labor Party (ALP).

The party appeared to have a great chance of expanding their representation in the Senate and House of Representatives, with a solidly performing leader in Richard Di Natale, who portrayed himself very differently from predecessors Christine Milne and Bob Brown. Di Natale's performance was compared favourably by electors with Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, outranking the opposition leader Bill Shorten on competency and matching Turnbull on trust (Blumer 2016). On top of Di Natale's performance, the political situation appeared to be swinging in the party's favour, with the Turnbull government stumbling over key issues in health, education and climate change, and the ALP under Shorten appearing lacklustre. With a functional national management team and experienced campaigners across all States, the Greens might have been

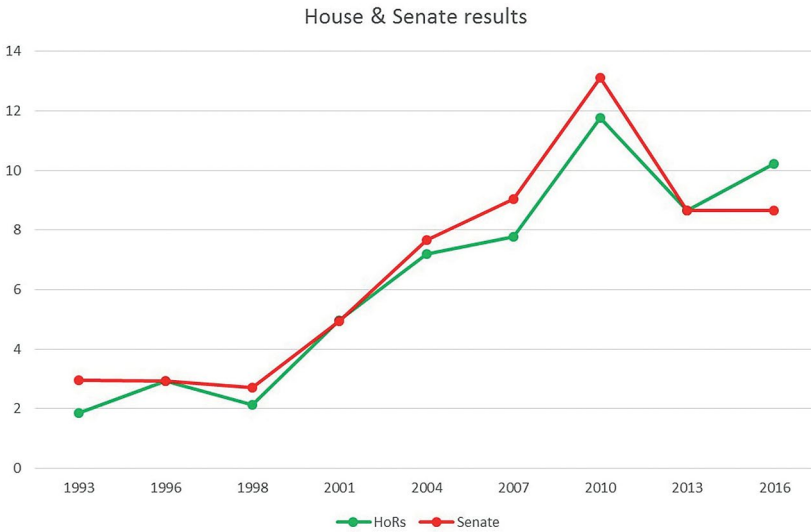
forgiven for thinking that 2016 was the year they would break through to a series of wins in both the upper and lower houses. Yet, as we shall see, this was not the case, and the party was left with reduced representation and a bruised reputation.

## Background

The Greens have a long-held view that their rise is inevitable. From small beginnings in the 1990s, the story goes that the party built a core following, allowing it to break through at the 2001 election (the so-called ‘Tampa’ election) and then continue to build strength in both State and federal parliaments. The 1990s, when the vote barely topped 4 per cent in the House of Representatives, and the Greens held seats only in Tasmania and Western Australia (WA) in the Senate, was a time when the party membership numbered in the very low thousands. During that period, the Greens could be understood as two separate parties (the Greens WA did not join the Australian Greens until 2003) and were bitterly divided along State lines. The first ‘national’ campaign by the Greens was in 2001, which coincidentally was also one of their most successful campaigns to that point. The period 1999–2001 also saw the party build their State and Territory resources significantly (Jackson 2016).

This narrative, part of party mythos, is of course far more complicated in reality; it saw ups and downs, with WA and Tasmania in particular suffering dramatic shifts in their parliamentary fortunes (see Figure 13.1). One important point has been that the party’s vote continued to rise at each federal election until 2010, when the party hit an all-time high vote of 13.1 per cent in the Senate and 11.7 per cent in the House of Representatives. The 2016 election, however, marked a break with another pattern—that of the Senate vote being higher than the House of Representatives vote. While in the early days of the Australian Greens this could be explained by a lower number of Greens candidates (i.e. the Greens did not run in every seat), an explicit focus on the Senate and a far lower number of contesting groups on the Senate ballot paper, this shift may signal a change in voter sentiment toward the Greens.





**Figure 13.1. Greens election results, 1993–2016**

Source. Compiled by author from University of Western Australia (n.d.).

The high point of 2010 (13.1 per cent) had been followed by a significantly lower vote in 2013 (8.6 per cent). In many respects, the 2013 vote was a correction to the surprisingly high 2010 vote. But losing a significant chunk of votes in the Liberal–National landslide win of 2013, even while gaining an additional Senator, did nothing to quiet criticism of the party leader, Senator Christine Milne (Tietze 2013).

However, Milne’s resignation in 2015, and her replacement by Di Natale, produced a marked shift in style within the top echelons of the party. Senator Scott Ludlam, who had initially lost his WA Senate seat in the 2013 election, won the right to recontest the seat after the election result in that State was overturned. His vote of over 15 per cent in the ensuing by-election energised the party and propelled Ludlam to national prominence. Ludlam and Queensland (QLD) Senator Larissa Waters replaced Victorian House of Representatives MP Adam Bandt as the party’s deputy leader (becoming co–deputy leaders in the process). Not only did this leave Bandt to focus on re-election, it also dampened his own leadership ambitions (Lohrey 2015).

This was followed by the Victorian State election in November 2014, where the Greens marginally increased their lower house vote but won two seats. Although the upper house vote fell by 1.25 per cent, the Greens increased their representation in the Legislative Council by two seats,

to five. Barely two months later, in January 2015, Campbell Newman took QLD to the polls, resulting in the Greens increasing their vote by almost 1 per cent to 8.4 per cent. Three months later, in March 2015, the Greens fought the New South Wales (NSW) State election, and although their lower house vote was unchanged, they increased their representation in the Legislative Assembly from one seat to three. Perhaps as an omen to the coming federal election, the Legislative Council vote dropped by 1.2 per cent to 9.9 per cent. Table 13.1 summarises the party's legislative representation immediately prior to the federal election.

Table 13.1. State and federal representation (number of MPs)

	State	Federal
NSW	8	1
VIC	7	3
QLD	–	1
WA	2	2
SA	2	2
TAS	3	2
ACT	1	–
NT	–	–
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>11</b>

Source. Compiled by author from Commonwealth, State and Territory parliamentary websites.

The State election results, while occurring in the context of different circumstances and jurisdictions, are useful pointers to issues of party focus and organisation. The focus on lower house seats in NSW and Victoria (VIC) was successful, demonstrating the utility of strong, although resource-intensive (in terms of finances and people), ground campaigns. However, this did not build the State-wide vote. The Greens' lower house vote in these two States is concentrated in inner-urban areas, and did not explicitly assist the upper house campaigns. State campaign organisations focused on target seats and not on broadly supporting general campaigning. They also did not give support (outside of that normally provided) to branches beyond these target areas. This can then be seen as signalling a clear preference for high-profile, lower house campaigns, which translated into a focus on a limited group of key seats nationally.

## The year of the double dissolution: The parliamentary context

The beginning of 2016 provided a bright start for the Greens, with the party polling between 10–12 per cent in national polls such as Galaxy and Essential and to a high of 16 per cent in the Morgan poll (see Goot, Chapter 5, this volume). The party had a full suite of policies, costed and detailed, a national campaign structure and a high-profile leader.

Debate around the proposed amendments to the *Commonwealth Electoral Act*, which saw the Greens and the Coalition support changes that abolished the old group-voting ticket in the Senate, were protracted and ill tempered. At various stages, the Greens were accused of contempt of the Constitution (Mackerras 2016), or ensuring a Coalition majority (Aston 2016). The Greens equally pointed out that they had been pursuing such changes since 2004, and had been part of the majority Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM) report into the 2013 election (this is discussed more broadly by Green, Chapter 8, this volume).

A chaotic week of argument around reference of the amending bill to a Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee, including a move by ALP Senator Penny Wong to bring on a vote on same-sex marriage, ended with the Greens voting with the Coalition to remove the group-voting ticket, but with an amendment meaning that the commencement of the changes were from 1 July. The real effect of this was to force Turnbull to have to present the 2016 Budget prior to the election, and to deal with crossbench anger over the amendments to the *Electoral Act*. Nonetheless, it was the Greens who were now the target of ALP attacks, particularly from leading left-wing MPs Penny Wong and Anthony Albanese. The ALP, it was clear, had decided that the Greens should be the target of the party 'attack dogs', while Turnbull and the Coalition policy would be left to ALP Leader Bill Shorten and the rest of his frontbench (these debates are delineated by Taflaga and Wanna, Chapter 2, this volume).

## A lower house strategy

The Greens now faced a serious threat to their desire to build upon the success of 2010, when Adam Bandt snatched the seat of Melbourne from the ALP upon the retirement of longstanding MP Lindsay Tanner.

The targets for the Greens in 2016 were now David Feeney's seat of Batman, adjacent to Melbourne, and the NSW seat of Grayndler, held by Anthony Albanese (see also Raue, Chapter 7, this volume). These would be the key seats for the party to win, among a clear group of potentially winnable seats including Sydney, Wills (also adjacent to Melbourne), Fremantle and the NSW north coast seat of Richmond. Two further seats can be added to this list: Higgins in Melbourne's south-east, held for the Liberal Party by the Minister for Revenue and Financial Services, Kelly O'Dwyer, and Melbourne Ports, held by the ALP's Michael Danby (see Massola and Hunter 2016).

This group of target seats, predominantly in the inner-urban areas of Melbourne and Sydney, became a key element for the further development of the parliamentary party. Target seats receive additional State resources from the party, extra staffing and time with key national leadership figures, and the campaign teams are linked into national campaign planning. State budgets become important here, as the larger States have greater resources to promote seats, in comparison to the relatively modest sums available to the national campaign. This provides an advantage to the NSW and Victorian State parties, with their significant membership and financial resources. This national campaign exercises limited sway over these activities, with local and State branches having considerable autonomy, only tempered by a perceived need for coordination, allowing divergent campaign messages to emerge.

Seats in these inner-urban areas would certainly appear to hold the best opportunities for the Greens, especially if State election results from the recently held elections were any guide, and they fit the established narrative of Greens being inner-urban professionals. The federal seat of Grayndler straddled the Greens-held NSW lower house seat of Newtown, while the federal Victorian seat of Higgins covered the State seat of Prahran. This was where the Greens had caused a boilover in 2014, leapfrogging the ALP candidate to beat the Liberal incumbent. While not the site of a Green State victory, in the 2014 Victorian election, the State electorate of Northcote, covering the southern half of the federal seat of Batman, had seen a Green candidate achieve a 36 per cent primary vote. The federal seat of Wills had the curious history of returning the Independent Phil Cleary in the early 1990s, following the retirement of its previous occupant, former prime minister Robert Hawke (Bean and Marks 1993). The case of the NSW federal seat of Richmond is equally

interesting as it covers the Greens-held State seat of Ballina and the Shire of Byron, a longstanding 'Green' and counter-cultural area. The Greens, therefore, held high hopes for this seat as well.

As some of the post-election news commentary picked up, there were issues with the Australian Greens' messaging and campaigns. The choice of former Fire Brigade Employees' Union State Secretary Jim Casey, who had previously been a member of the Trotskyist International Socialist party, for the seat of Grayndler allowed his ALP opponent Albanese to paint the Greens as inner-city leftists, only vaguely concerned with the environment. More dangerously, this allowed the Rupert Murdoch tabloid the *Daily Telegraph* to support Albanese against what the *Telegraph* saw as 'extremists', to the point of publishing a front page emblazoned with 'Save Our Albo' (Clennell 2016). While the *Telegraph*, in common with many newspapers, has seen its reach decline, the theme of Greens' candidates as hardline socialists was one used by other news outlets (see Aston 2016). This form of scrutiny of the Greens from mainstream media outlets, while nothing new, follows a similar pattern to that seen in the UK in the 2015 General Election (Dennison 2015).

While Casey's perceived political alignment was the focus of commentary, it distracted from the key elements of the Greens' messaging. This was focused on the State and federally funded WestConnex road tunnel, and staple Green campaign fare in asylum seekers and climate change. These two campaign points were also picked up by the Greens' Sydney candidate Sylvie Elsemore, who focused strongly on the impact of WestConnex on inner-city residents and the ALP's tacit support for such freeway developments. However, it is an open question as to whether a focus on what might be seen as a localised, State issue was the most appropriate strategy for the federal election, especially as the Greens could quite rightly point to the ALP and Coalition's joint support for offshore detention of asylum seekers as a major point of contention.

This is in contrast to the Greens' campaign in the Melbourne seat of Batman where the focus was more on the key areas of asylum seekers and local jobs. Reportage in the *Guardian* Australia, the day before the election, led with offshore detention centres as the key campaign element being argued by Di Natale and the Greens' candidate for Batman, Alex Bhathal, before moving on to the broader issues of education and the economy (Davey 2016). The difference between the two campaigns is marked. A previous media report had positioned Di Natale as focusing

on climate change and asylum seekers, articulated by Di Natale as ‘the Greens haven’t voted to lock up young kids on Manus Island and Nauru’ (Farrell 2016). The same report noted the key focus of Casey as being WestConnex: ‘[l]ocal activism, on this and other issues, will form a core part of his campaign’. This was emphasised again mid-campaign, when Casey also responded to questions regarding not attacking Albanese and the focus on WestConnex with: ‘I think we’re getting the balance right—credit where it’s due, condemnation where it’s not’ and ‘for two thirds of people he spoke to, WestConnex was an enormous issue’ (Brull 2016). However, while WestConnex worked well for the Greens in the context of the lower house State campaigns in Newtown and Balmain, it is not a national or even State-wide issue for most electors.

## Organisation

Going into the election campaign, the Australian Greens ran a sizeable operation. With a national administration with a turnover of over \$1 million, the national party could call on professional campaigners and media operatives, bolstered by a national campaign team hired for the election period. While this is not on the scale of the administrations run by the Coalition and the ALP, it still speaks to a significant administrative system. The national election budget for 2016 was also in the order of \$1 million, which again speaks to a relatively sizeable commitment, as this was for national coordination and design, with individual States running their own budgets. As an example of the size of State budgets, the Greens NSW State campaign budget was in the order of \$1.7 million, while the 2015–16 NSW State operational budget was over \$1.6 million. The Victorian party has comparable sums for expenditure, increased by an ability to draw in significant donations from sources such as major trade unions (the Greens NSW does not accept such donations, whether from unions or business). On top of this, local branches have traditionally canvassed and received donations for their own campaigns, which can lead to a significant disparity in income and expenditure between lower house campaigns. This is especially true where Greens members and supporters are concentrated, such as in inner-urban areas, or where there is a high-profile local MP, such as Adam Bandt.

While the sums discussed in relation to the Greens were dwarfed by the expenditure of the Coalition and ALP, they are similar to the sums spent on the 2013 election and place the Greens as the next-highest spending

party after the major parties. To get an idea of the size and complexity of the various parts of the party as a whole, the total expenditure reported by the Greens to the Australian Election Commission (AEC) during the 2013 election year was almost \$20 million (AEC 2016a).

The organisation that these sums support is, for a non-major party, significant. The campaign also attempted to make use of social media, in what appears to be a continuing attempt to attract a sizeable young demographic. The previous success of Scott Ludlam amongst the 'digiratti' (Visentin 2014) suggests that the party can make good use of social media. Although the Greens have over 80,000 Twitter followers, the party made only a few hundred tweets with new material in 2016 compared to well over a thousand in 2013. Equally, the party reputedly spent over \$280,000 on Facebook advertising; although, compared with the multimillion dollar advertising expenditures of the major parties, this is relatively minor.

On the ground, the party can also call upon the more than 14,000 members and the many supporters recruited by its local branches and online portal. Campaigns such as that of Alex Bhathal in Batman could call upon 6,000 volunteers to do door-to-door canvassing, letterboxing and posterage. While the large campaigns associated with the key inner-city contests had volunteer numbers into the thousands, even small suburban campaigns could call upon hundreds of volunteers, coordinated through the online systems developed since the 2010 campaign (Jackson 2013).

A key element of Greens' campaigning has to be the ground campaign. The total expenditure by the ALP and Coalition on television and radio advertising cannot be matched by the Greens. Further, the separate State and local branches limit the amount available to expend on national broadcasting. Although the national party has attempted to look for large national donors, such as Grahame Wood in 2010 (Manning 2011), the bulk of fundraising is still managed at a State level. Local branches control local supporter lists, so are able to mobilise them for their campaigns. This can also include phone banking, involving cold canvassing of voters in electorates, or direct canvassing through door knocking. The Greens obviously are not the only party to engage in local campaigning (see Mills's (2014) description of the Carrum campaign in the 2014 Victorian election for ALP activities), but it has now become a significant area of focus for campaigning.

## Policy agenda

The principal policy agenda that might be assumed for any Green party is the environment (for a comparison with the major parties' environment policies, see Pearse, Chapter 25, this volume). This is assumed to be so by the media and most scholars, even though the party spends considerable time talking about other issues (and the party's members themselves think 'social justice' issues are almost as important (see Jackson 2016)). The Australian Greens' election platform (Australian Greens 2016a) was a relatively short document, running to just 50 pages. The major policy areas for the election were outlined with many glossy photos; the document was clearly as much a marketing tool as an outline of what the party stands for. The key policy areas appeared much as might be expected; climate change featured prominently and was the first policy area delineated, closely followed by immigration, the environment, health, education and the economy. The six policy areas were outlined with a mixture of overarching statements and specific proposals. The platform was accompanied by a six-page document outlining item by item all the revenue and expenditure measures (Australian Greens 2016b). These two documents (available on the party's website) were rounded out by a third collection of web documents concerning specific initiatives dealing with the rest of the policy issues covered or announced during the election, from the arts to veterans' affairs.

One method for ascertaining the priorities within the party around these particular issues is to examine the press releases put out by the party's MPs during the election period, as this should point to what those MPs (and, by corollary, the party campaign machine) think are key topics. These media releases can be considered separately from the other media opportunities that are afforded to MPs, often on an ad hoc basis from a journalist seeking comment, as they represent public attention-seeking for the policies, and may provide a reasonable guide to the weight given to the issues by the party.

The MPs' put out 355 media releases during the period 1 May – 2 July 2016, commenting on most portfolio topics. Here, I have categorised these media releases by the key portfolio area covered, or by key issue where the releases related to a non-portfolio area. Of the 355 total releases, 262 are covered by 10 key areas and are listed in Table 13.2, with the MPs who issued four or more releases noted. One point to note



immediately is the general lack of a leader-centric focus—while Di Natale issued releases in a number of portfolio areas, he largely left commentary to the MP responsible.

Table 13.2. Press releases – top 10 topics

Portfolio	Subject releases	Key MPs covering (number of releases)
Environment	75	LW (19), LR (6), SL (6), JR (5), RDN (4), RS (4), RSW (4)
Climate related	38	LW (15), RDN (4), RS (4)
Climate/Energy	18	LW (4), RS (4)
Finance	42	AB (8), RSW (8), JR (6), PWW (6), RDN (4)
Budget	32	AB (5), JR (5), RSW (5), PWW (4)
Governance	24	LR (17), RDN (4)
Party	23	LR (12)
Immigration	18	SHY (17)
ALP	17	LR (4), LW (4), RS (4)
Transport	17	JR (6)
Health	16	RDN (6), JR (4)
Social security	15	RSW (9), LW (5)
Education	14	RS (5), LR (4)

AB – Adam Bandt; JR – Janet Rice; LR – Lee Rhiannon; LW – Larissa Waters; NM – Nick McKim; PWW – Peter Wish-Wilson; RDN – Richard Di Natale; RS – Robert Simms; RSW – Rachel Siewert; SHY – Sarah Hanson-Young; SL – Scott Ludlam

Source. Compiled by author from MPs' websites listings for 'Media Releases'. Listings show those MPs who issued four or more press releases in the period covered.

The top two portfolios were broken down further to reveal particular subcategories. The portfolio that was the subject of the most releases was in fact the environment—with 75 releases. Half (38) of these discussed the environment in connection with climate change broadly, and 18 discussed climate change and energy issues directly (whether as fossil fuels or coal seam gas, or renewable energy sources). Given that the federal Budget was brought down on 4 May 2016, less than a week prior to the formal announcement of the election on 8 May 2016, the budget period was included, and this naturally generated a significant number of press releases within the Finance portfolio area (42 out of 52).

The next two most prominent topics related to the general portfolio areas of 'Governance' (24) and 'Party' (23). Governance encompasses donations reform, the proposed national Independent Commission Against

Corruption and the republic. Party is a catch-all subject area for matters to do with the party and not specific portfolio areas. It covers the death of sitting NSW MP John Kaye, preference negotiations and items related to the party's campaign such as national and State launches, candidate announcements and the like. The important portfolio area of Immigration (18) followed these two subject areas, handled almost solely by Senator Sarah Hanson-Young. Perhaps as interesting is the category 'ALP', which were releases that focused on the activities of the ALP, so were not about the Greens responding to policy initiatives, but rather commenting on, or responding to, ALP attacks or specific budgetary measures (such as announced savings measures). The final four categories—'Transport' (17), 'Health' (16), 'Social security' (15) and 'Education' (14)—are the fairly mainstream policy issues you would expect to find discussed in an election campaign, and cover core social justice issues for the Greens.

There is an important point that can be drawn from this; the early part of the campaign (during May) contained far more finance stories for the Greens. During May, the MPs had 34 releases around finance issues, of which 25 were related to the Budget. June/July saw just eight finance-related releases, five of which were Budget related. Clearly, the number of press releases the MPs were issuing around the Budget was going to be higher, many focusing on each MP's portfolio area (and most condemning cuts to their area of responsibility). That so few releases were specifically talking about economic and financial matters suggests the Greens really did not prioritise this area. Looking at the two National Press Club addresses by Di Natale that bookended the campaign (27 April and 23 June), the earlier address, just prior to the Budget announcement, talked up both climate change and the economy, particularly in relation to the opportunities in new technologies geared to a 'clean' economy (Di Natale 2016a). The address later in the campaign talked far more about government stability, and contained a broad overview of Green claims, prior to moving to a short itemised account of the Greens revenue policies (Di Natale 2016b).

Even while the Greens might have been responding to commentary in the media, they were talking up their economic credentials. A late feature in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (Hutchens 2016) focused specifically on Di Natale, Bandt and Peter Whish-Wilson as the 'new Greens economics team'. There was a strong sense that their economic vision was so completely different from the major parties as to be suspect (Smethurst and Whinnett 2016). The tax-and-spend model proposed by Greens is

routinely criticised by conservative journalists and columnists in Australia. But as Neil Carter (2015) pointed out in relation to the 2015 UK election, it may have saliency in the electorate for the Greens. In that election, the Greens were the only significant party running on a clearly anti-austerity platform, setting them apart from mainstream conservative and social democratic parties, and garnering significant numbers of new supporters.

## The final result

The results on election night, 2 July 2016, looked quite promising for some Green campaigns, and quite disappointing for others. In VIC, the campaign in Melbourne secured a new term for sitting MP Adam Bandt, while in Batman and Wills, Green candidates went close to unseating the incumbents (see Table 13.3). Across the Yarra in Melbourne Ports, late counting looked for a period to have placed Greens' candidate Steph Hodgins-May ahead of sitting MP Michael Danby in a tight three-way contest, before Danby squeezed ahead of the Greens and finally retained his seat on a slim 1.4 per cent margin.

In NSW, however, the campaigns in Sydney and Grayndler were more subdued. While in Grayndler the Greens moved back in the two-party preferred vote against the ALP's Anthony Albanese, the 27,000 vote margin (representing a two-party preferred of 34–66 per cent) was a far cry from the 2010 campaign when the Greens' Sam Byrne ran a close second in the two-party preferred with 46 per cent. The Sydney campaign team was equally disappointed in the 18.8 per cent result, almost 5 per cent short of the 2010 result.

Table 13.3. House of Representatives seats—Greens vote over 15 per cent

Electorate	State	2016	2013	Swing
Melbourne	VIC	43.75	42.62	1.13
Batman	VIC	36.23	26.4	9.83
Wills	VIC	30.83	22.23	8.6
Higgins	VIC	25.33	16.8	8.53
Melbourne Ports	VIC	23.79	20.17	3.62
Grayndler	NSW	22.24	23.03*	0.17
Gellibrand	VIC	21.48	16.73	4.75
Richmond	NSW	20.44	17.69*	5.07

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Electorate	State	2016	2013	Swing
Brisbane	QLD	19.4	14.34	5.06
Kooyong	VIC	18.92	16.58	2.34
Sydney	NSW	18.81	17.33*	0.46
Ryan	QLD	18.75	14.44	4.31
Fremantle	WA	17.74	11.89*	5.87
Griffith	QLD	17.08	10.18	6.83
Perth	WA	17.07	10.61*	5.1
Goldstein	VIC	15.9	15.9	0
Fenner	ACT	15.26	14.07*	1.5
Swan	WA	15.02	11.55	3.79

\* Redistributions occurred in the ACT in 2015, and NSW and WA in 2015/16  
 See also Goot (Chapter 5, this volume) for a fuller discussion of these results.  
 Source. Compiled by author from swings calculated by AEC (2013, 2016b).

However, a number of the lower house campaigns saw their votes rebound towards the level experienced in 2010. The Victorian campaign overall improved its vote compared to 2010. Other States saw improvement upon their 2013 result, but not to the earlier level of support. As can be noted from Table 13.3, votes in the key Victorian seats rose between 8–10 per cent. In second-tier seats, the vote rises were more modest—between 2–5 per cent. As has been noted by some commentators, there is an apparent ‘wave’ expanding out from the seat of Melbourne (Johnston 2016). The concentration of technology and ‘new economy’ businesses in inner-urban Melbourne creates a concentrated vote of what Daniel Bell (1976) dubbed the ‘post-industrial class’, currently contained within one federal electorate (Melbourne), but expanding into a second (Batman). However, while some such as Kosmos Samaras<sup>1</sup> (2016a) might call this a post-material effect of gentrification, it might also be identified with the form of campaigning used by the Greens in Melbourne (Manning 2016: 28). The same campaign tactics identified by Paddy Manning as being used by the Greens can be said to be used by the ALP (Mills 2014; also see Manwaring, Chapter 11, this volume), and represent a long process of professionalisation and change in the Greens (see, for instance, Jackson 2013).

1 Kosmos Samaras is Victorian ALP Assistant State Secretary, and blogs as ‘Kosmos Samaras: A pragmatic progressive, cyclist and passionate atheist’ (Samaras 2016b).

More broadly, the Greens saw swings to them in every State and Territory except South Australia (SA) (Table 13.4). SA might be considered a special case because of the impact of Senator Nick Xenophon, whose campaign in the 2016 election mobilised tens of thousands of voters. Although his 2016 Senate vote of 21.7 per cent was 3 per cent lower than his 2010 vote, the formation of a formal political party (as opposed to running as an Independent) saw Xenophon's candidates pick up 21.3 per cent of the House of Representatives vote, and win the seat of Mayo. The combined effect of the success of Nick Xenophon in both Houses has seen the Greens' vote in SA halve between 2010 and 2016.

Table 13.4. Results by State, 2013–16 (percentage)

	House		Swing	Senate		Swing
	2016	2013		2016	2013	
NSW	8.95	7.95	1	7.41	7.79	-0.38
VIC	13.13	10.8	2.33	10.87	10.84	0.03
QLD	8.83	6.22	2.61	6.92	6.04	0.88
WA	12.06	9.74	2.32	10.53	9.49	1.04
SA	6.21	8.28	-2.07	5.87	7.09	-1.22
TAS	10.22	8.32	1.9	11.16	11.66	-0.50
ACT	15.09	13.4	1.69	16.1	19.27	-3.17
NT	9.09	7.89	1.2	10.78	8.67	2.11

Source. Compiled by author from AEC (2013, 2016b).

That the results were mixed is true; however, in the context they were neither unexpected nor sufficiently poor to warrant wholesale changes. Certainly the parliamentarians did not see the need to change the leadership team, re-electing them unopposed following the election (Di Natale 2016c).

## Conclusion

The Greens' campaign in 2016 cannot avoid being seen through the prism of the 2010 and 2013 campaigns—both high and low points in recent Australian Greens' history. While party expenditure in the two election years remained fairly constant across the party between the two elections, the results were quite different in terms of votes garnered, even though the 2013 election saw the Greens actually increase their

number of seats. The double-dissolution election raised the prospect of the Greens increasing their number of seats, and polling through 2015 suggested the possibility of other breakthroughs into the House of Representatives.

The Greens' 2016 election campaign, however, did not deliver the unbridled triumphs some party supporters hoped for. The vote in the House of Representatives certainly did increase, and the Greens are now positioned to take a second seat in VIC (Batman), at the next federal election. That election may also move seats such as Melbourne Ports and Wills into contention. In the Senate, six of the nine seats won at this election will have to be recontested in the next three years (Henderson and Doran 2016). The loss of one of the Senate seats, that of Robert Simms' in SA, was not unexpected given the strength of Xenophon in that State. But a good vote, similar to 2010, could have delivered a second seat in both NSW and QLD—neither of which eventuated.

At the end of the campaign, the party might have then felt that it strived for so much yet was delivered only a fair result. However, in the context of a bruising election for all the major parties, a result that sees an increase in the vote, the retention of all but one of the MPs and a solidified membership might also be seen as successful.

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# 14

## The National Party of Australia's Campaign: Further 'Back from the Brink'

Geoff Cockfield and Jennifer Curtin

In this chapter, the Nationals' 2016 election campaign and results are considered in light of three perennial questions about the party: How long until they die out? What or who do they represent? How should they relate to the Liberal Party? On the first question, we argue that the Nationals have stepped further 'back from the brink', following the terminology of Geoff Cockfield and Linda Botterill (2011) that was used in identifying an apparent halt to the party's decline at the 2010 election, something also noted by others (Curtin and Woodward 2012; Woodward and Curtin 2010). Along with their usual advantage of regionally concentrated support, the Nationals ran an effective campaign in 2016, which was locally, rather than nationally, focused and quite traditional in terms of the issues covered and the support received on the ground. Their performance, relative to the Liberals, even allowed for a post-election increase in cabinet representation. Nationals' Leader Barnaby Joyce claimed that the election was 'a stepping stone' and there should be an 'ambition to continue to grow the party' (Chan 2016a). We suggest, however, that with this result, the party is close to its limits, given Australia's seemingly relentless urbanisation and competition from the Liberals, Pauline Hanson's One Nation (PHON) and Independents.

On the second question, in 2016, there was a notable focus on issues, such as services, communication and small business viability, to support regional economies and communities. This is consistent with the Nationals' efforts to become the party of the regions and not just farming regions. Furthermore, the party's candidates, while overwhelmingly having rural or at least regional origins, were much more likely to have a small business or corporate working history than they were to be farmers. The limits to moving from a rural to a regional identity were, however, evident in the campaign issues and the results. First, the Country Party has distinctive sectoral and agricultural origins and farmers have provided a long-term support base (Bean 2009). The party must be attentive to their needs, especially when there is a crisis, such as the pre-election crash in milk prices. Second, the Nationals are vulnerable to competition from populist parties in regional areas, and a key part of Australian populism is looking after the farmers. Joyce, considered by some in the media to be a 'maverick', is by inclination and probably intention an agrarian populist; no easy identity to maintain in a market-oriented party or coalition. Third, this election again shows that the federal National Party is not 'the' party of regional Australia but rather the party of particular regions, largely those in the predominantly agricultural areas of the eastern, mainland States. The gains of 2010, 2013 and 2016 were confined to recapturing some House of Representatives seats that had been held by the Nationals in the past. In 2016, the South Australian Nationals did not contest federal seats and the Western Australian Nationals failed in a bid to re-enter the federal sphere.

On the third question of the relationship between the Nationals and Liberals, the 2016 election was a classic case of the capacity for the Nationals in the Coalition to be somewhat independent on the campaign trail, and perhaps behind closed doors in post-election negotiations. Otherwise the positioning of the Nationals reinforces the impression that Australia has a two-party system. The Nationals need their independence, as well as the Joyce-style populism, to fight off PHON, the Katter Party and other rural start-ups. We argue that in this campaign the Nationals necessarily separated themselves from the Liberals to some extent, in order to address the issues of the bush, and with some success, but the difficulties of delivering as part of a market-orientated, big-business friendly, internationalist government will keep that populist space open for competition. In addition, the election results did not give encouragement to thoughts of greater independence from the Liberals,

a perennial aspiration for many supporters. The WA Nationals, on the back of a distinctly independent stance in State politics and a consequent track record of securing funding for the regions, made no gains.

For this review, discussion of the National Party includes all the State National parties that ran candidates in the election (Western Australia (WA), Victoria (VIC) and New South Wales (NSW)) and the candidates from the two amalgamated parties, the Country Liberal Party (CLP) in the Northern Territory (NT) and the Liberal–National Party (LNP) in Queensland (QLD) who contested the election and were listed as ‘Nationals’ candidates on the federal party’s website. To examine levels of support for the House of Representatives, we add the primary votes allocated to those CLP and LNP candidates to the formal count for the Liberal and National parties. This may not capture true voter preferences, but three-cornered contests in QLD had become rare prior to the 2008 merger to create the LNP, so this approach is reasonably consistent with the preamalgamation situation and enables an examination of the trend in support for the federal party. The NSW and Victorian parties limit three-cornered House of Representative contests by agreement and run joint tickets, which look very like the LNP ticket, for the Senate in terms of Liberal–National order allocations. The exception was the WA Nationals, who ran with an independent ticket.

## The candidates and the campaign

Joyce was by far the most high profile of the Nationals candidates. Joyce was first elected as a Nationals Senator for QLD, commencing his term in July 2005, defeating former PHON Senator Len Harris. In 2013, he resigned from the Senate and stood for the NSW House of Representatives seat of New England. He became deputy leader of the Nationals in the same year, and took over the leadership after Warren Truss’s resignation in February 2016. Joyce is from a rural family but also has experience in running a regional business—in many ways he is a prototype for contemporary Nationals candidates. Analysis of the candidates’ backgrounds reveals the Nationals are mostly a party of regional small to medium business owners or people from regional branches of the finance industry. A number indicate origins in family farms and/or having been involved in a farm business, and some may still have rural investments, but the vast majority identify as having other primary occupational backgrounds. There were

only three candidates who identified as farmers, all of whom were standing for the House of Representatives in the very traditional agricultural regions of the western (John Hassall for O'Connor) and south-eastern (Andrew Broad for Mallee; Mark Coulton for Parkes) grain belts. Thus, of the 42 candidates (12 for the Senate and 30 for the House of Representatives), only 7 per cent were (primarily) farmers and, of the total Nationals elected (22, including six Senators), only two were farmers (Broad and Coulton).

The tradition of the Nationals being a party of farmers might well be history, but the tradition of it being a party of men remains. In 2016, the candidates were overwhelmingly male, especially in the House of Representatives. Of the 30 candidates for that house, only five (16.7 per cent) were women, only two of those women contested winnable seats (Michele Landry for Capricornia, QLD, and Tina MacFarlane for Lingiari in the NT). Only Landry was elected, and she performed something of a minor miracle in holding a seat with a 0.6 per cent margin and a significant Labor history. Indeed, it was proclaimed by Malcolm Turnbull during counting that if she held the seat it would have 'saved the nation' by ensuring the Coalition reached 76 seats (Gately 2016). There was some small moderation of the overall gender imbalance in the Senate, with Fiona Nash (NSW) and Bridget McKenzie (VIC) returned as the Nationals' highest-ranked candidates on the respective joint tickets. However, the end result was that only three women were elected (13 per cent of all Nationals parliamentarians) and only one of those was selected for cabinet (Nash). The post-election speculation that Senator McKenzie, seen as having considerable potential, would get an outer ministry spot was not realised (Harris and Smethurst 2016).

In the end, it was to be Joyce, as both candidate and leader, who attracted most attention during the campaign, in part because of his self-titled 'vaudeville' style (Bettles 2016b) and because he was required to campaign locally to ensure he did not lose his seat to former Independent and arch rival Tony Windsor. It is rare to see the national or State-wide press deviate from their focus on the two major party leaders, but Joyce's populism and larrikin-like style ensured the party was able to maintain a profile beyond the regional country newspapers. In April 2016, Joyce released a short video of Johnny Depp and Amber Heard apologising for bringing their two miniature dogs into Australia without clearance (Department of Agriculture and Water Resources 2016). Joyce claimed the video's message highlighted 'the importance of biosecurity in Australia. The consequences of a disease outbreak could have been terrifying. We can't take the

risk' (Joyce 2016). Although the clip was both ridiculed and satirised, Joyce benefited from the attention it brought. In May, on day 17 of the campaign, Joyce's announcement of a package of concessional loans for struggling dairy farmers was accompanied by what Michelle Grattan termed 'another episode of the Depp-Joyce show' (2016). Appearing on American TV, Johnny Depp described Joyce as looking like he was 'inbred with a tomato'. Joyce's rejoinder was to state 'I think I'm turning into Johnny Depp's Hannibal Lecter' (ABC 2016). On his Facebook page, Joyce then posted a picture of himself with a bunch of tomatoes and the line 'just catching up with a bag full of cousins at Bingara' followed by a poll on whether the public preferred his old brown Akubra, a new white one or the third option: 'Keep both hats, lose the head' (Gannon 2016).

He was never shy of hyperbole. For example, he linked Labor's suspension of the live export trade to Indonesia and asylum seeker boats from there, implying that the Indonesian government was retaliating in the latter. Joyce also has the capacity to portray himself as a regular guy, and the 'regional whisperer' was important in keeping the Nationals in the voters' minds nationally (Madigan 2016) as well as in his own electorate of New England (Grattan 2016). In late June, when Turnbull officially launched the government's campaign, it was Joyce who was reported as getting the 'biggest laughs for his description of a Greens, Labor and Independent alliance as the Glee Club' (Tillett 2016). Some in the media even suggested that his style was 'Trumpesque' (Gannon 2016).

More generally, however, the presence of Joyce, the normally ubiquitous, indefatigable and effective, retail politician, was necessarily inhibited by the latter's need to fight off the challenge from Windsor in New England. Joyce employed a lot of media work directed at announcing actual and promised spending on sports facilities and even the transfer of a Commonwealth agency administration from Canberra to Armidale, along with considerable personal sparring towards the end of the campaign (see Curtin, Chapter 16, this volume).<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, Joyce juggled both. Early in the campaign, he had heralded the Coalition's Budget as delivering much for regional Australia (Bettles 2016a). Then his 'wombat trail' began in earnest, starting in the marginal regional electorates of central QLD before moving south into coastal NSW, visiting the

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1 In November 2016, Joyce confirmed he was moving the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority from Canberra to Armidale in New England at a cost of \$157 million a year and 365 jobs from the ACT economy (Towell 2016).

challenging seat of Richmond, where the Greens are strong and mining is a key issue. By week three, Joyce was visiting regional VIC, seeking to boost the fortunes of Marty Corboy in Indi and Damian Drum, former AFL player and coach and candidate for the seat of Murray. This seat had, most recently, been held by a Liberal but further back it was a Country–Nationals stronghold. Joyce followed up in later weeks with visits to central rural NSW and WA. He also experienced some spillover coverage as he accompanied, or perhaps chaperoned, Turnbull on regional visits, selling ‘the “toff” Turnbull to the regions’ (Marzsalek 2016). For the most part, Joyce tended to spend three days on the ‘trail’ then return to his electorate for weekends, in what was dubbed his ‘yoyo tour’ (Bettles 2016b). In between times, Nash continued the national campaign with support from Darren Chester (Member for Gippsland) and other higher-profile Nationals.

At each of his stops, Joyce announced funding for regionally specific initiatives: inland rail and cotton promises in NSW and a package to address the dairy crisis and the fall in dairy payouts from both Murray Goulburn and Fonterra in VIC (Bettles 2016c). In WA, issues such as funding for the Australian Sheepdog Championships and battles between the Liberals and Nationals for the right to represent ‘the bush’ featured, while farmers railed against the government’s refusal to overturn its decision on the backpacker tax increase (Bettles 2016d; Chan 2016b).<sup>2</sup> In regional QLD, the promise of water in electorates reliant on agriculture and mining was a feature; in Landry’s electorate alone, the Coalition promised \$2 million for a feasibility study on Rookwood weir and another \$130 million to cover construction costs (Madigan 2016). Between Joyce’s visits, the Nationals’ campaigns were locally focused, relying heavily on party volunteers, with candidates targeting local and rural media, and addressing local, State-wide and sectoral issues (Bettles 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2016d; Chan 2016c).

Alongside these local issues, there were broader campaign messages that addressed traditional, rural and regional issues that have been a feature of elections past (Curtin and Woodward 2012). Roads, communications, services, water and primary industries were discussed around the country.

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2 One senior Liberal Party source said if former WA National Party leader Brendon Grylls had chosen to run for the federal Senate and leave the WA parliament, it would have forced the WA Liberals to look more closely at their regional representation credentials in deciding the Senate ticket’s order of priority (Bettles 2016e).



In contrast to the Liberals, the Nationals largely avoided the 'economy in transition' and 'innovation' themes, which was wise considering the regional impact of downturns in mining investment, continuing structural adjustment in agriculture and population and business loss in some small towns. The Nationals generally stuck to more fundamental messages about improving communications and infrastructure and looking after small business. In addition, the party demonstrated a more overt agrarian populism than it has in elections for some time. Under Truss, the Nationals had previously used the Liberals' change of leadership to Turnbull to forge a new Coalition agreement, which was generally supposed to include the return of the water portfolio to the Nationals, the introduction of an effects test into competition policy and a commitment to a same-sex marriage plebiscite. Truss, as with his predecessors Mark Vaile, Tim Fischer and John Anderson, was a strong coalitionist, keeping policy debates behind closed doors. Joyce was more combative, expressive and inclined to independent policy positions. Joyce openly campaigned for greater restrictions on overseas investment in agriculture, which resulted in tighter reporting requirements and record keeping and the disallowance of some high-profile applications, such as that for the sale of Kidman properties to a company with considerable Chinese investment (Owens 2016).

A tendency to agrarian populism does not, however, always easily translate into policy or rhetorical coherency. There are at least three major issues that proved difficult for the Nationals, both generally and on the campaign trail. First, opposition to foreign ownership of farm land, while having populist appeal, including well beyond rural areas, is not universally supported in rural industries. Major farm organisations see foreign investment as having the potential to boost agricultural productivity, support existing enterprises, provide employment in some circumstances and enable some landholders to realise their 'superannuation' on selling out to cashed-up buyers. Nonetheless, it was probably politically advantageous to have some strong rhetoric on this in order to fight off competition from the economic nationalism of PHON, Katter's Australian Party and start-ups such as CountryMinded. The farm organisations largely kept silent on this during the campaign, but will likely quietly lobby to limit further constraints.

The second issue, and more of a flash point, is the tension between mining developments and agriculture in some areas. Joyce is generally in favour of protecting 'agricultural' land but then was burdened with

a decision in his electorate to approve a Chinese mining development, leading to some definitional gymnastics around 'prime agricultural' land. Furthermore, the party has a taint of association with the mining industries. Former leaders John Anderson and Mark Vaile were both involved in mining developments after leaving parliament, and Joyce is dogged by the allegation that he was at least interested in profiting from that sector, not to mention his self-declared friendship with, and advocacy for, mining magnate Gina Rinehart, although Rinehart does also have considerable agricultural interests. The Nationals were also members of a Coalition that under Tony Abbott was particularly supportive of resources development, giving the necessary approval for the Adani mine in central QLD—a development that also faced strong opposition from some landowners.

This is a difficult issue for the Nationals. At best, many people in rural areas 'accept' resources development but are not necessarily particularly supportive, while there are others who are extremely active in opposition. The political problem for the Nationals, and indeed all governments, is that there are now alliances between the Greens and landowners, which Rebecca Colvin, Brad Witt and Justine Lacey (2015) see as not just about common cause but some degree of values alignment. Development disputes could see contests between locals, no matter their political history, and big business and State and federal governments (Sherval and Hardiman 2014). The Nationals have developed a narrative, evident in this election, about protecting prime land and implying that they fight against development in the joint party room, while trying to argue the regional benefits of particular projects.

A third and related—but so far much less significant—issue is renewable energy, especially wind energy. This is a flashpoint issue in some regions, with strong networks opposing developments, but there are also those in the regions who see a new regional industry and income replacement or supplement for farmers. Joyce had generally aligned with those Liberals, including Abbott, and some Senate crossbenchers who are antagonistic to renewable, especially wind, energy. He maintains the line that wind farms are not suitable in some locations and was consequently confronted by farmers and regional communities that want such investments, yet he also supported the development of the White Rock wind farm in the New England electorate (Chan 2016a). This was not a major issue in the 2016 election but is an interesting one for the future and reveals yet

another challenge for the Nationals in balancing support for old and new industries in the regions, as well as dealing with the changing nature of some electorates.

While strongly agricultural, pastoral and mining electorates have little in the way of a green tinge, there are some signs of change in other regional electorates. The Greens contesting a number of the regional coastal seats, once the traditional heartland of the Nationals, have become a feature of recent elections (Curtin and Woodward 2012). In 2016, the Nationals placed a strong emphasis on the environment in their party material and addressed the issue in local campaigns. Yet, the Greens won more than 20 per cent of the vote in some coastal electorates, attracted more than 10 per cent in electorates with major regional centres and more than 5 per cent even in agricultural electorates. While the support for mining and fossil fuel industries, with accompanying anti-Green overtones, plays well in the culture wars debates of national media and commentary, they are not necessarily long-term winners in regional areas, some of which contain coal mines and coal seam gas wells and pipelines. Furthermore, populations and regional economies fluctuate with resources investment, and some towns have had to deal with significant population and economic decline after the construction phase led by extractive industries has been completed.

The Nationals were, however, on generally firm agrarian ground in focusing on farm viability. Joyce had already proposed some form of rural development bank but pushed this hard during the election campaign. This has been a longstanding populist favourite in rural areas, given a deep hostility to large commercial financial institutions and the persistence of farm debt that accumulates in drought years. Furthermore, the rapidly evolving dairy crisis, triggered by a sudden reduction in the price offered by processing companies, required considerable attention from the Nationals and the Coalition more generally. Emergency and rural development loans are not quite as generous as they first appear, since around the election period governments could potentially borrow at favourable interest rates and lend at slightly higher but still historically low rates. Just how emergency loans for dairy farmers and rural development loans to those already in debt will help long-term farm viability is unclear, and this links to a more general issue of farm finance and thence to the thorny issue of foreign investment. Nonetheless, the government's swiftness in making the announcement was probably sufficient for the heat of the election campaign, where details were for the moment of lesser importance.

## Election outcomes

The Nationals contested 30 House of Representative electorates and won 16 of those.<sup>3</sup> It held off challenges from two Independents and former MPs, Windsor in New England and Rob Oakeshott in Cowper. In almost two thirds (19) of these electorates, there were swings against the Nationals' candidates on primary votes, but in 12 of those they had gains, or very minimal losses, for the two-party preferred outcomes. This suggests that the preferences of the minor parties generally flowed favourably for the Nationals.



Figure 14.1. Proportion of seats and primary votes for the Country–National Party for the House of Representatives

Source. Compiled by the authors from the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) Election results 1996–2016 and the University of Western Australia, Australian Politics and Elections Database.

Essentially, the Nationals continued to recover ground from their low point of the 2007 election (see Figure 14.1). They received approximately 6.7 per cent of the total votes for House of Representatives candidates and ended with more than 10 per cent of seats. The seat/vote ratio, as implied by the gaps between seats gained and votes won, continued to improve, though it is unlikely to return to the outcomes associated with

3 This includes those seats in the NT (Lingiari) and QLD (seven seats) where the CLP and LNP candidates clearly indicated an intended affiliation with the Nationals in the Commonwealth Parliament.

the heady days of ‘rural weightage’ (see Economou 2007). Nonetheless, the Nationals has the most favourable seat/vote ratio of any of the parties (see Table 14.1).

Table 14.1. Proportions of votes and seats for the National Party in the House of Representatives, 2016

	Per cent of totals		Seat/vote ratio
	Votes	Seats	
Liberal Party	35.7	40	1.12
Labor Party	34.7	46.0	1.33
National Party	6.7	10.7	1.59
Greens	10.2	0.7	0.07

Source. Compiled by the authors from AEC (2016b, 2016c).

Then again, the Senate result shows the moderating impact of proportional representation. For that chamber, the Nationals are the ‘fourth’ party, with six Senators (7.9 per cent of the total), while the Greens have nine and PHON have four (see Green, Chapter 8, this volume).

The run up to the 2016 election and the outcomes from it suggest that the NSW party remains the centre of power for the federal party. Eight of 13 Country–National Party leaders have been from NSW, with seven of the last eight from that State (Truss was from QLD). NSW provided nine of 22 parliamentarians, QLD provided eight and VIC only four, with Senator Nigel Scullion being from the NT. Joyce and deputy leader Nash, both of whom were Cabinet ministers, were from NSW, although Joyce had been a Senator for QLD. By contrast, QLD ended up with one minister in Cabinet (Senator Matt Canavan) and one assistant minister (Keith Pitt) and VIC’s Darren Chester was also appointed to Cabinet. Contributing factors to the relative importance of NSW include the rise of Joyce within the federal party (and his shift to NSW), as well as the retirement of a number of senior QLD Nationals, leaving the party’s representation from that State as relatively junior and less experienced (although Matt Canavan, elected in 2013, was fast-tracked into Cabinet).

## Policy and electoral implications

The Nationals now have to deal with the actual and implied promises of the election. At face value, they are in a relatively strong policy position. It was the Liberals who lost seats and re-entered government a divided party. Turnbull quickly ceded additional Cabinet positions to the Nationals, suggesting that the ‘secret’ Coalition agreement would again be favourable to the Nationals. The Nationals have kept the water portfolio, which will enable them to blunt some of the impacts of water buybacks in the Murray–Darling Basin. They did not get trade, which was once a National Party portfolio, but the Nationals’ inclination to economic nationalism may be encouraged by some similar and probably stronger inclinations amongst the Nick Xenophon Team (NXT) and PHON in the Senate, not to mention Bob Katter and NXT’s Rebekha Sharkie in the finely balanced House of Representatives. More generally, those members may combine to make this one of the more rural-sympathetic parliaments for some time.

The Nationals’ objective to win additional money for dairy farmers or other groups that strike trouble appears to have been successful and a rural development bank would also enjoy some support, although there will be some reluctance on the part of part of some Liberals to step back into more direct support of agriculture after the long and tortuous road of deregulation. Similarly, the Nationals’ suspicion of big business, something evident in the early Country Party and still seen in discussion of practices by banks and major grocery chains, will also be given encouragement by some of the crossbenchers. There will continue to be interest in restricting foreign—especially Chinese—ownership of rural land, and probably other assets. All of this will allow the Nationals to be seen to be more influential in the Coalition than if the government did not have NXT and PHON in the Senate. Mining/farming conflicts will, however, be much more difficult with the Senate crossbenchers and Katter in the lower house.

Looking forward to the next and perhaps some subsequent elections, it is hard to see how the Nationals could further increase their parliamentary representation, even excluding the WA Nationals from the equation for the moment. In the first instance, this scenario depends on joint Senate ticket agreements being no less favourable, no further losses to new Independent challengers, no losses to the Liberals in three-cornered contests and no

big swings to Labor, which could see marginal seats such as Page and Capricornia lost. Even while retaining all current representation, there are perhaps only two to three possible lower house seats to gain. The Nationals could one day regain Kennedy when Bob Katter retires, although there is the possibility that current State MP Robbie Katter could take over that part of the 'family business'.

Second, the affiliation of elected members of the combined LNP in the federal parliament could become more favourable to the Nationals. For example, a future member for Groom (the Darling Downs) might opt to sit with the Nationals. It must have been something of a disappointment that the son of a National–Country Party/Nationals member for Groom (1984–88) and its predecessor electorate of Darling Downs (1972–84), John McVeigh, opted to sit with the Liberals following the 2016 election. However, the LNP is a party that is a relatively new amalgamation and, chastened by the 2015 QLD election result, this is a reminder to both parties that the balance between Nationals and Liberals is delicate.

Third, the Nationals will have opportunities to contest some Liberal seats in rural NSW and VIC with three-cornered contests. The result in Murray, with the election of Damian Drum, a high-profile footballer and coach and former State parliamentarian, was an important regain for them. They might be able to regain Hume, which has been held by both parties, but it is hard to see any other realistic targets. There were high hopes for taking Indi in the 2016 election, with Independent Cathy McGowan on a thin margin and a struggling Liberal candidate in Sophie Mirabella. Instead, Marty Corboy finished well behind Mirabella and McGowan increased her primary vote. Elsewhere, the Nationals performed very poorly in the Victorian seats that cover the major regional cities of Bendigo and Ballarat, with 3.6 per cent and 4.2 per cent of the primary votes, respectively. In the only two peri-urban seats they contested, McEwen in VIC and Whitlam in NSW, the Nationals polled 2.4 per cent and 6.2 per cent of the primary vote, respectively.

In northern NSW, despite the good results in Page, the party did not win back the electorate long held by the Anthony family (Richmond). Here, the Green vote increased to more than 20 per cent and, even though Labor's primary vote decreased, its two-party preferred margin increased by more than 2 per cent. A challenge for the Nationals is how to at least moderate the impact of the Green vote in some regions.

Finally, there is much for the WA Nationals to contemplate. On the back of a strategy of independence from the Liberals, this party has tried to come back from decline in the 1970s, capped by the ill-fated merger with the Democratic Labour Party in 1974. The party rebuilt to some extent and re-entered a coalition in 1993; however, under the leadership of Brendon Grylls, opted for independence from 2005, though twice joining government after State elections. The party advocated for the Royalties for Regions program, whereby mining royalties were allocated to regional projects, and has subsequently made much of that program, including in the 2016 federal election. The election result was, however, a disappointment with no Nationals Senators elected compared to one from PHON (Morris and Caporn 2016). The Nationals contested five House seats with O'Connor and Durack the main targets. In 2010, Tony Crook became the first WA Nationals member of the House of Representatives since 1974, winning O'Connor, but this now seems something of a false revival. Crook did not contest in 2013 and the seat returned to the Liberals. However, in neither O'Connor nor Durack did the Nationals win more than 18.5 per cent of the primary vote in 2016, casting doubt over their 'independent' campaign strategy.

## Conclusion

This was an election where the Coalition performed poorly while Labor outperformed expectations. Yet, while the Liberals' first preference vote share in non-metropolitan electorates decreased by 3.7 per cent, the Nationals, and the LNP in Queensland, experienced a negative swing of less than 1 per cent. This was a positive result for the Nationals despite several of the 18 non-metropolitan marginal seats staying with Labor, and the increased Green vote (1.42 per cent) in rural and regional Australia (AEC 2016a). The demise of the Palmer United Party clearly favoured the Nationals, but this alone is unlikely to account for the outcome. Rather, it is possible that the agrarian populism of Joyce, his starkly contrasting political style compared to the cosmopolitan Turnbull, resonated with rural and regional voters on the eastern seaboard of Australia at a time when stability in politics is a rare commodity. The Nationals now face the challenge of warding off a resurgent PHON from within the confines of the Coalition, delivering or at least facilitating irrigation schemes and developing serious regional policies.



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# 15

## The Minor Parties' Campaigns

Glenn Kefford

While the return of the Turnbull government with a one-seat majority will be the defining story of the 2016 federal election for most political observers, equally important is the continued fragmentation of the Australian political landscape. Voters are deserting the major parties in increasing numbers (Green 2016). Dissatisfaction with Australian democracy, at least according to some reports (Evans, Stoker and Halupka 2016), is also rising. These conditions provide fertile ground for minor parties to work in and the 2016 federal election has shown—as the 2013 federal election also did—that there are significant opportunities for new or even re-energised players at the federal level in Australia. The long-term voting trend in both Houses, as shown in Figure 15.1, is away from the major parties. In the Senate, split-ticket voting once allowed us to explain the number of votes for minor parties and Independents (Bowler and Denmark 1993). But this is no longer sufficient. In the House, more than 20 per cent of voters gave their first preference to minor parties and Independents for the second election in a row, suggesting something significant is occurring (for more on Independents see Curtin, Chapter 16, this volume).

DOUBLE DISILLUSION

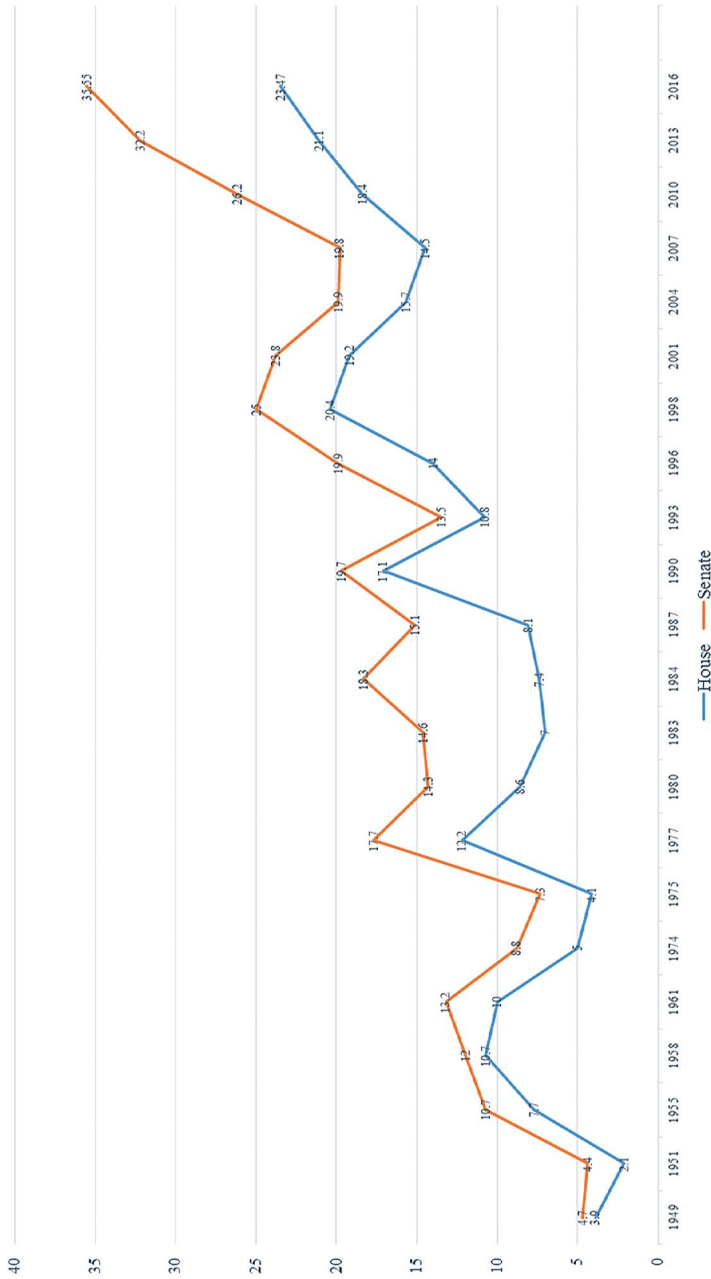


Figure 15.1. Per cent of first preference votes for minor parties and Independents

Source. Compiled by author from data kindly provided by Antony Green (2015: 400) and the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) (2016a).

In discussing the performance and outcome of this election for the minor parties,<sup>1</sup> I begin by placing the result in its historical context and by considering what it can tell us about broader trends affecting Australia's minor parties. Following this, I discuss the result for two of the more successful minor parties from this election: Pauline Hanson's One Nation (PHON) and the Nick Xenophon Team (NXT). I consider the campaigns these parties ran as well as the ideological and organisational dimensions of each party.<sup>2</sup> I conclude by considering what the 2016 election can tell us about Australia's minor parties.

## Australia's minor parties

In 2002, Ian McAllister wrote:

placed in a comparative perspective, the hallmark of Australian politics is the dominance of party. The vast majority of voters identify with, and vote for, one of the major political parties: gaining election at the federal level is next to impossible without the benefit of one of the party labels—Liberal, National or Labor; and minor parties have played little role in shaping the development of the party system (2002: 379).

Fourteen years and five federal elections later, this analysis remains only partially correct. It is certainly true that the major parties remain dominant and, in comparative terms, indicators such as party identification remain high (McAllister 2011). Yet, there is also evidence that the strength of these ties are weakening and that voters are more open to considering options beyond the major parties (Evans, Stoker and Halupka 2016; McAllister 2011).

At the national level, the 2016 result is the third federal election in a row in which the share of first preferences for minor parties and Independents in both the House and the Senate have increased. In 2013, 21.1 per cent of first preferences in the House of Representatives were directed towards minor parties and Independents (Green 2016). Results from the 2016 contest have eclipsed this figure, with 23.4 per cent of first preferences in the House being for parties and candidates beyond the major parties

1 While not discussed in this chapter, debate about what minor parties are has been dealt with elsewhere. See Kefford (2017).

2 As this is written shortly after the election, these cases should be taken as exploratory as more research and analysis is required.

(Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) 2016b). The Senate contest in 2016 was predictably unpredictable. This can be partially explained by the halving of the quota required to be elected, as well as to reforms to the Senate electoral system, which were legislated in March 2016. In total, minor parties and Independents received 35.5 per cent of first preferences in the Senate, up from 32.2 per cent in 2013.

These national-level trends are important and tell us a great deal about broader voting behaviour and the opportunities for minor parties. Nonetheless, the regional dimension cannot be overlooked. In this sense, 2016 has seen a revert to type. The minor parties that have done well have, with the exception of the Greens, generally performed well to very well in one State, while the results in the other States have been far less impressive.<sup>3</sup> The NXT and PHON results (discussed later) are typical of this. They also support the argument put forth by Narelle Miragliotta and Campbell Sharman (2012: 590) that subnational success ‘has often been a precursor to success at the federal or national level’. The results for NXT and PHON also need to be put in some context. When they are compared with other federal elections in which minor parties have done well, such as 1977, 1998 and 2013, they are impressive but not unprecedented.

When the minor parties that contested the 2016 election are analysed, it is evident that there is a significant level of diversity. This is consistent with the findings from Dean Jaensch and David Mathieson (1998), who classified the 523 minor parties that they discovered were formed between 1910 and 1996 into 13 classes of parties. Utilising the Jaensch and Mathieson typology (1998: 27–28), I classify the 51 minor parties that contested the 2016 federal election in Table 15.1. Of these, three have won one seat each in the House of Representatives: the Greens in Melbourne, NXT in Mayo and Katter’s Australia Party (KAP) in Kennedy. While in the Senate, 20 representatives from minor parties have been elected. This includes: nine from the Greens, three from NXT, four from PHON and one each from the Jacqui Lambie Network (JLN), Derryn Hinch’s Justice Party, the Liberal Democrats and Family First. The outcome in the Senate means that the number of Senators on the crossbench has reached its highest total ever.

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3 This is even the case for PHON which won Senate seats across the country, yet the result was pronounced in QLD.



Table 15.1. Minor parties contesting the 2016 federal election

Classification	Parties
1 Postmaterial, new politics, Green	Sustainable Australia; Animal Justice Party; Australian Progressives; Australian Sex Party; Health Australia Party; The Greens; Pirate Party; Science Party; Secular Party of Australia
2 Single issues	Australian Antipaedophile Party; Australian Cyclists Party; Australian Equality Party (Marriage); Australian Motoring Enthusiast Party; Australian Recreational Fishers Party; Drug Law Reform Party; Marijuana (HEMP) Party; Non-Custodial Parents Party; Renewable Energy Party; The Arts Party; Voluntary Euthanasia Party; Consumer Rights & No-Tolls; Smokers Rights Party; Bullet Train For Australia; Outdoor Recreation Party (Stop The Greens)
3 Religious, moral, Christian/humanist	Christian Democratic Party; Citizens Electoral Council; Family First; Australian Christians
4 Local, regional	N/A
5 Idiosyncratic	N/A
6 Personality	Glenn Lazarus Team; Derryn Hinch's Justice Party; Jacqui Lambie Network; John Madigan's Manufacturing and Farming Party; Katter's Australian Party; Nick Xenophon Team; Palmer United Party (PUP); Pauline Hanson's One Nation (PHON)
7 Frivolous	N/A
8 Secessionist	DLP – Democratic Labour Party
9 Race, immigration/antiracism	Australia First Party; Australian Liberty Alliance; Rise Up Australia Party
10 Social base	Australian Country Party; CountryMinded; Mature Australia Party; Seniors United Party of Australia; Shooters, Fishers and Farmers; Veterans Party
11 Doctrinal	Socialist Alliance; Socialist Equality Party
12 'New Right'	Liberal Democrats (LDP)
13 Platform parties	Online Direct Democracy; VOTEFLUX.ORG

Note. A number of these were not clear cut, so I followed Jaensch and Matheson's lead on some of the classifications. I also made one change: 'unidentified' was the final class of parties in the original schema, I have replaced this with 'Platform Party'.

Source. Compiled by author.

The 2016 contest—like the 2013 contest—shows us that despite the opportunities for minor parties, it is still exceptionally difficult to achieve federal parliamentary representation. The Greens (Jackson, Chapter 13, this volume) stand alone as a minor party that has successfully developed from the grassroots. The remainder of the successful minor parties from the 2016 election have benefited due to at least one of the following: party registration rules being different for members of parliament than for

parties started outside parliament, significant name recognition and/or good fortune. KAP, JLN and NXT were all able to use the rules permitting members of parliament to register political parties without having signed up 500 members (as per the rules for those outside parliament) to create their own personal parties.<sup>4</sup> PHON and Hinch's Justice Party, also personal parties, brought with them significant name recognition. For Family First, the Liberal Democrats and PHON, the halving of the Senate quotas impacted on who and how many of their candidates were elected.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, Hinch appears to have benefited from being first on the ballot in Victoria. What can be said for Australia's minor parties, then, is that the medium-term voting trend provides opportunities. However, significant challenges remain in translating this into effective and stable constituencies that first lead to election and second to entrenchment in the Australian party system.

## The return of Pauline Hanson and One Nation

While most of the media commentary about the minor parties during the campaign period was focused on how well the Greens and NXT would fare, the election aftermath was dominated by coverage of Pauline Hanson and One Nation. PHON won four Senate seats: two in Queensland (QLD), including one for the party's eponymous leader, one in New South Wales (NSW) and one in Western Australia (WA). But this is of course not Hanson's nor One Nation's first electoral breakthroughs. Hanson was first elected to the federal parliament in the House of Representatives in 1996 in the seat of Oxley. She had been preselected by the Liberal Party, but during the campaign was disendorsed as a result of her inflammatory comments in a letter she wrote to the *Queensland Times* newspaper about Indigenous Australians. In 1997, with the help of cofounders David Oldfield and David Ettridge, Hanson formed PHON.

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4 There are others who used the same rules who were not re-elected. This includes Glenn Lazarus and John Madigan. For more on personal parties see Kefford and McDonnell (2016) and McDonnell (2013).

5 There has been analysis conducted that suggests PHON would have won a Senate seat in Tasmania if the electoral system had not been changed. However, this appears to be based on a logic that the government would have still called a double-dissolution election (see Cassidy 2016).

Less than a year after its formation, the party did spectacularly well in the June 1998 QLD State election, winning over 22 per cent of first preferences in the unicameral legislature and 11 seats. When the federal election was held in October later that year, however, Hanson failed in her bid for re-election after moving to the seat of Blair and the party secured only one Senate seat. Since that time, Hanson has contested every federal election except 2010. However, this has not always been for One Nation.<sup>6</sup> She has also stood as an Independent or as a candidate for her short-lived Pauline's United Australia Party. In addition to these federal campaigns, Hanson has stood as a candidate in four State elections. This includes standing as an Independent in the 2003 and 2011 NSW Legislative Council elections, and the 2009 QLD State election in the seat of Beaudesert. In 2015, Hanson returned as a candidate for One Nation, contesting the QLD State election in the seat of Lockyer.

What should be evident from this is that the relationship between Hanson and others involved in the party has not always been easy. The fate of PHON as an electoral force has been largely wedded to that of Hanson and, in the nearly 20 years since its formation, most of the significant results have been achieved when Hanson has been the leader of the party. In the period after the 2001 federal election, up until the 2013 federal election when Hanson was not involved with the party, the results were modest (Ghazarian 2015: 135–59).<sup>7</sup> In this period, the party was dysfunctional; splinter groups broke away, some of the remaining parliamentarians left to become Independents or joined other parties and the party was even deregistered by the AEC.

Prior to the 2016 election, PHON had little in the way of an organisational structure and limited resources. In theory, the party is said to have a branch and conference structure (PHON 2015). Candidates for the party, however, have suggested there were little if any active members. The party had a head office in Brisbane and had one paid employee (Walker 2016).<sup>8</sup> The campaign the party ran was highly decentralised.

6 At the 2015 QLD State election, the party registered in QLD was called 'One Nation', the name here and in other States was subsequently changed back to Pauline Hanson's One Nation following this election.

7 In this period, Hanson resigned from the party and then, along with David Ettridge, stood trial and was sentenced to prison for fraudulently registering PHON in 1997. See Zareh Ghazarian (2015: 137–38) and Gary Johns (2006: 61–62).

8 At the time of writing, interviews had been conducted with 15 candidates from multiple States, which was part of a different project.

According to the candidates interviewed, they were given some media training, had a one-day meeting in Brisbane with the other candidates and then were left to their own devices to do what they could in their electorate. The party made it very clear to potential candidates that they were unable to provide them with financial support, and this meant they even had pay for their own corflutes. According to interviewees, the limited financial resources the party did possess came primarily from funds that Hanson had to borrow. Candidates therefore needed to self-finance their campaigns and the party website advises potential candidates that they consider ‘the cost of a decent campaign (without TV advertising) to be around \$5,000–\$10,000 per electorate’ (PHON n.d.).<sup>9</sup>

The organisational and financial limitations meant the campaign the party ran was hard fought but limited in scope. The party relied almost solely on social media for the sharing of videos and party-based advertising and while the majority of the candidates had social media profiles to try to engage with voters, they were basic and their use was inconsistent. All the candidates interviewed noted that they were reliant on the goodwill of members and supporters in their area as well as their friends and family to assist with local campaigning efforts. In addition to these local-level campaigns, after the writs for the election were issued on 8 May 2016, Hanson began crisscrossing the country to help boost the profile of the party’s candidates. These events were usually dubbed, ‘Meet Pauline and ...’. Most of these and the campaign launches, including those for the Senate candidates, were in regional towns. For example, the NSW Senate candidate launch was held in Quirindi, while for the Victorian candidates it was held in Bendigo. The party also set up other events to attempt to capitalise on the appeal of the Hanson story. These included a public event on 27 May 2016 in Ipswich to celebrate Hanson’s birthday and, on 29 May 2016, ‘Fish N Chips with Pauline Hanson’.<sup>10</sup> On 3 June 2016, the party held its QLD Senate launch. The event, held at the Norman Park Bowls Club in Brisbane, generated significant media attention as police were required to remove protestors from the venue (*Sydney Morning Herald* 2016).

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9 Jamie Walker (2016) suggested that an agreement had been made that candidates who reached the 4 per cent required for electoral funding would receive 85 per cent of expenses back. However, candidates interviewed said they had not been reimbursed.

10 PHON has a calendar of events on their website, from where this material is derived.

In total, Pauline Hanson's One Nation contested 15 seats in the House of Representatives and the Senate contest in all six States. While the results are not as strong as they were in 1998 (shown in Table 15.2), party support remains robust in a similar set of electorates as it did in 1998—where they received in excess of 10 per cent of first preferences in 2016, they also achieved this in 1998. In finishing in third position on first preferences in 11 of the 15 House seats the party contested, they also played a significant role in determining who was eventually elected. The average PHON voter in 1998, it has been suggested, was likely to reside in 'rural or regional areas, to be male, to be aged over 50, to be poorly educated and to have a blue-collar job' (Bean 2000; Goot and Watson 2001). By the very nature of the electorates the party chose to contest in the House, this analysis remains at least partially correct.

The impact that the double dissolution had on the number of Senators the party had elected is indisputable. Hence, while this is the best result at the federal level since 2001, the following factors are worthy of consideration in future analysis of the PHON result. First, this was the first federal election since 2001 in which Hanson stood as a candidate for PHON in QLD. This is clearly the State where the party is strongest.<sup>11</sup> Second, QLD is a fertile ground for parties espousing an anti-establishment, anti-major party sentiment. This is evident when the vote for minor parties and Independents in the past three elections are examined. In both houses, QLD voters frequently vote for minor parties and Independents at numbers higher than the national average. Third, while terrorism became an issue late in the election campaign with the attack in Istanbul in Turkey on 29 June 2016,<sup>12</sup> the salience of this and other issues that PHON focused on (such as race and immigration) requires further analysis. If the size of the vote for the other minor parties that openly espouse nationalistic and anti-migrant sentiment is any indication—and it is tiny—these issues did not appear to have a significant impact.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the electorates in

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11 Indeed, in 2004, Hanson stood as an Independent for the Senate in QLD, running against the party named after her and received 37,888 first preferences while PHON received 71,043 first preferences in total in QLD. While in 2007, Hanson again contested the Senate contest in QLD, this time for her Pauline's United Australia Party, and the party won 101,461 first preferences. However, One Nation—which had changed its name—received 4,174 first preferences. The importance of Hanson to the party is underscored by these figures.

12 According to *Insentia* (2016), the terror attack became the second biggest issue covered in the media in the week 25 June to 1 July.

13 In the first period of electoral success for PHON, however, Simon Jackman (1998) showed how salient these issues were in the electorate and Rachel Gibson, Ian McAllister and Tami Swenson (2002) argued that race and immigration policies were key reasons why voters supported PHON.

which PHON performed well, PUP also did well in at the 2013 federal election. PUP's policies on refugees and Indigenous Australians, as two examples, stand in direct contrast to those of PHON (Palmer United Party 2013). Hence, there are important and currently unresolved questions in regard to what level of PHON's vote is due to the salience of their policies as opposed to the anti-major party sentiment that has been evident in Australian federal politics through multiple election cycles.

Table 15.2. One Nation results in the House of Representatives and the Senate

Electorate	% of First Preferences 2016	% of First Preferences 1998
Blair, QLD	15.5	36.8
Dobell, NSW*	8.6	9.5
Fadden, QLD	11.9	12.7
Fairfax, QLD*	9.7	18.1
Flynn, QLD	17.1	NA
Herbert, QLD*	13.5	14.4
Hinkler, QLD	19.1	19.1
Leichhardt, QLD	7.6	14.1
Longman, QLD*	9.4	18.4
Maranoa, QLD	17.8	22.9
Oxley, QLD	8.4	18.8
Paterson, NSW*	13.0	8.3
Richmond, NSW	6.2	10.2
Wide Bay, QLD	15.6	26.7
Wright, QLD	20.9	NA
Senate – QLD	9.1	14.8
Senate – NSW	4.1	9.6
Senate – WA	4.0	10.4
Senate – SA	2.9	9.7
Senate – TAS	2.5	3.8
Senate – VIC	1.8	4.1

\* indicates seats which changed hands

Source. Compiled by author from AEC (2016c, 2016d) and Paul Reynolds (2000: 163).

PHON has long been cited as one of the classic cases of the populist radical right. The three key ingredients of populist radical-right ideology according to Mudde (2012, 2016) are nativism, authoritarianism and populism. The policies that PHON emphasised during the campaign were consistent with both their own traditions and that of radical-right populists more broadly. This included policies on immigration, refugees, Halal certification and Islam. In classic populist terms, the sovereignty of the 'people' was also asserted. This came in the form of 'Citizens Initiated Referenda'. In outlining the policy, the party criticises what it sees as the failings of representative democracy and suggests that what is needed is a 'mechanism to democratically pursue those issues [sic] to produce an outcome of legislative change that is actually the will of the people' (PHON 2016d).<sup>14</sup>

The party's policy on Islam, which received significant media attention during and following the election, calls for 'an inquiry or Royal Commission to determine if Islam is a religion or political ideology' (PHON 2016c). The policy also calls for the prevention of 'further Muslim Immigration and the intake of Muslim refugees', a ban on 'the Burqa and Niquab [sic] in public places' and 'surveillance cameras to be installed in all Mosques and schools' (PHON 2016c). In light of this rhetoric, it is worth considering the religious composition of the electorates PHON contested in 2016. Here, the evidence is revealing. Of the 15 House of Representatives electorates in which the party stood candidates, each had small to very small Muslim populations. According to the 2011 Census data, the seat of Oxley had the largest Muslim population of the 15, coming in 45th of the 150 electorates in the House. While 10 of the electorates PHON contested were in the bottom third for size of the Muslim population, Richmond, Fisher, Wide Bay and Paterson were all in the bottom 10 (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2011).

The centrality of Islam in the rhetoric of PHON during the 2016 election campaign should be seen as part of the evolution of who the 'other' is since the party's first period of electoral success. Writing shortly after the party emerged, Geoff Stokes (2000: 26) said that there were 'two kinds of "other": those categorised as oppressor or enemy, and those who by their very existence are represented as cultural or criminal threats to the Australian way of life'. While the latter group was formerly Indigenous

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14 This seems to fit with Cas Mudde's (2015) argument that populism is 'an illiberal democratic response to undemocratic liberalism'.

Australians and Asian migrants,<sup>15</sup> it has now become Muslim. Hence, while the ‘other’ may have changed, nativism remains one of the keys to unpacking the ideology of PHON. The ‘oppressor’, in contrast, remains political and economic elites who, for PHON, have been acting in their own self interest. PHON’s (2016b) economic and tax policy, for example, suggests that that party will ‘bring back federalism and restore Australia’s constitution so that our economy is run for the benefit of Australians, instead of the United Nations and unaccountable foreign bodies’. The party’s climate change policy calls for, among other things, the abolition of the Renewable Energy Target as:

climate change has and will continue to be used as a political agenda by politicians and self-interest groups or individuals for their own gain. We cannot allow scare mongering by people such as Tim Flannery, who make outlandish statements and are not held accountable (PHON 2016e).

Anti-elitism, which Barry Hindess and Marian Sawer said was ‘at the heart of Pauline Hanson’s political appeal in the mid to late 1990s’ (2004: 1), therefore also remains unmistakably central to the party’s discourse.

The election of four PHON Senators will provide institutional and financial resources that the party could use to institutionalise themselves. The \$1.6 million the AEC has paid out to the party in election funding will also help (Doran 2016). In the party’s first period of success, it was tightly controlled and a common complaint from parliamentarians and the party members was that they had no capacity to make meaningful contributions (Ghazarian 2015: 134–35). Nicole Bolleyer has shown that parties dominated by political entrepreneurs can be transformed into a ‘fully institutionalized, self-standing organization’ (2013: 214). However, this is dependent on the choices party elites make. For such a transformation to occur, a significant shift in approach from Hanson and other party elites would be required.

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15 The party’s opposition to policies that they perceive as favouring Indigenous Australians still remain. For example, the party website has a list of ‘aims’, which includes ‘to abolish divisive and discriminatory policies, such as those related to Aboriginal and Multicultural Affairs’ (PHON 2016a).



## The rise of the Nick Xenophon Team

While in the election aftermath, PHON may have been the minor party dominating the headlines, the impact that NXT will have on the 45th Parliament as a result of the success they achieved at this election is indisputable. NXT secured three Senate seats in South Australia (SA) and the seat of Mayo, also in SA, in the House of Representatives. In doing so, NXT has positioned itself as a force to be reckoned with in a parliament where the numbers in both houses place them in a strong negotiating position. The threat NXT posed in the 2016 election is evident when the scale of the campaign the major parties ran against the party are considered. Senior federal politicians from both the ALP and the Liberal Party publicly outlined their opposition to the party and one high-profile interviewee from NXT suggested that a million dollars had been spent by the major parties on negative advertising targeting NXT in SA (Starick 2016).<sup>16</sup>

Xenophon brought considerable name recognition to his party as a result of the decade he spent in the South Australian Legislative Council. According to Haydon Manning (2007: 8), when Xenophon was elected to the Senate in 2007, he made 'history as the first South Australian elected to the Senate as an Independent. With ... a remarkable 14.8 per cent first preference vote which equated to 1.03 quotas'. As Xenophon's six-year term in the Senate came to an end in 2013, he decided to form his own party. He argued, 'the current federal laws are stacked against Independents running for the Senate, which is why there have only been a handful of independent senators in 112 years' (Australian Associated Press (AAP) 2013). Registered with the AEC on 1 July that year, The Nick Xenophon Group, as it was then called, contested the South Australian Senate election with Xenophon and one other candidate, Stirling Griff, and the party received 24.8 per cent of first preferences (AEC 2013). Yet, despite this strong showing, the party was able to win only one Senate seat, with the preference deals of the other parties seen as a key reason for why the party failed to secure a second Senate quota.

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16 The opposition from both major parties can partially be explained by NXT's decision to run open tickets and not to encourage its supporters to preference one over the other.

The 2016 campaign can therefore be seen as a breakthrough election for NXT. As is evident from Table 15.3, NXT stood candidates in 18 seats in the House of Representatives. In the Senate, the party had 14 candidates across the country. In both houses, the primary focus of the party was in SA where the party had candidates in each of the 11 House of Representatives seats and also had four Senate candidates including the party's eponymous leader, Nick Xenophon. In the South Australian Senate contest, the party won 21.7 per cent of first preferences with Xenophon, Griff and Skye Kakoschke-Moore elected. The party also received 21.2 per cent of first preferences in the House of Representatives across the whole of SA (AEC 2016a). Results outside SA were less impressive and, in many lower house seats in other States, the NXT candidate was running against a high-profile opponent. The Senate result in the other States followed this trajectory.

Table 15.3. The Nick Xenophon Team results in the House of Representatives and the Senate

Electorate	% of First Preferences
Adelaide, SA	12.8
Barker, SA	29.0
Boothby, SA	20.6
Calare, NSW	5.4
Grey, SA	27.7
Groom, QLD	7.6
Higgins, Vic	2.2
Hindmarsh, SA	15.0
Kingston, SA	17.2
Lindsay, NSW	2.0
Macarthur, NSW	3.6
Makin, SA	16.6
Mayo, SA	34.8
Moreton, QLD	4.7
Port Adelaide, SA	18.7
Sturt, SA	21.1
Wakefield, SA	20.4
Warringah, NSW	6.3
Senate – QLD	2.0
Senate – NSW	1.7
Senate – WA	2.1

Electorate	% of First Preferences
Senate – SA	21.7
Senate – TAS	1.5
Senate – VIC	1.5

Source. Compiled by author from AEC (2016c, 2016d).

Xenophon, who is well-known for his use of stunts to generate media exposure, had suggested during the campaign that NXT had a ‘dental floss budget’ with which to campaign (Anderson 2015). Like PHON, they had one full-time salaried staff member to manage candidate-related issues. Also, like PHON, candidates were required to fundraise or self-finance, and would then be reimbursed depending on the election results. According to one high-profile interviewee, the party spent an estimated \$200,000 outside SA. In addition to this, individual candidates interviewed outlined how they had spent thousands of dollars on local campaigning. In this regard, one candidate disclosed how they had spent \$30,000 on their campaign, while another estimated that for them it was closer to \$50,000.

In contrast to a number of other minor parties, NXT put their candidates through a rigorous preselection process. Starting with 450 applications initially, the party whittled the numbers down to 90 from which they formed Electoral Advisory Committees (EACs) in a number of States (Starick 2015; candidate interviews). With input from Xenophon and Griff, the EACs assisted in selecting candidates in each of the States, and eventually 32 candidates from across Australia were selected (NXT n.d.; candidate interviews). With candidate selection completed and the EAC in place, planning for the campaign began for most candidates by the end of 2015. From March 2016, the party was coordinating multiple ‘Meet Nick and the Candidate’ events each week in SA. The candidates outside SA were told that Xenophon would make multiple visits to each of the other States in the lead-up to, and during, the actual campaign. They were also advised that while they could contact the head office in Adelaide for support, and they had weekly phone hook-ups, their campaigns were still largely up to them.<sup>17</sup> According to those interviewed, this meant that candidates, and the EACs supporting them, were meant to work out

<sup>17</sup> At the time of writing, 17 semi-structured interviews had been conducted with candidates from multiple States as part of a different project. All interviews were conducted on the condition of anonymity.

a way to utilise and engage the members and supporters to help with campaigning. Unsurprisingly, for most of the candidates from outside SA, this challenge was immense as the number of active EAC members declined and they had little help from supporters.

When asked to describe the party in ideological terms, Xenophon says it is in the 'political centre' (Grattan 2016). This positioning also extended to the advertising the party used with one piece suggesting that the party wanted to 'break the duopoly' of the major parties. When the policies of NXT are analysed, what can be said is that they are largely protectionist in nature, with a heavy emphasis on Australian manufacturing and government intervention into markets. There is also a strong emphasis on infrastructure, improving education and health outcomes, and acting on predatory gambling and poker machines. On social issues the party is, for the most part, socially progressive. Support for same-sex marriage and constitutional recognition for Indigenous Australians are examples of this. The obvious historical comparison with NXT is the Democrats. Both parties have tried to position themselves as centrists, performed well in SA and broad policy comparisons can be made with their socially liberal, economically protectionist and interventionist range of policy measures (Sugita 1997). The ideological profile of NXT is, therefore, certainly not as incoherent as that of PUP (Kefford and McDonnell 2016), but neither is it as clear cut as the Greens or PHON.

The inevitable problem for NXT in both organisational and electoral terms is that the party is seen first and foremost as an advocate for the interests of South Australians. This view appears to have some basis when the party constitution is examined (NXT 2014). John Warhurst (2016) noted prior to the election that the Australian federal system has never really generated a successful State-based regional party compared to Canada, as even those parties that have been strong in one State 'have also had wider national aspirations and representation right from the beginning'. NXT has the potential to break the mould in this respect. Xenophon has previously indicated that he would field candidates in the South Australian Legislative Council elections in 2018 and would consider whether the party would also contest the House of Assembly (Wills 2016). Based on the outcome of the federal election, it appears the next logical step for NXT is to entrench themselves further in their stronghold of SA by running candidates in both houses in the next State election. While the 2016 election can, therefore, be seen as a success for

NXT, the challenges for the party are still significant. Not the least of these will be how the party will fare in the next federal election when Xenophon is not expected to be a candidate.

## Conclusion

The nationwide results of the 2016 federal election will be seen as evidence that the grounds are fertile for new or existing minor parties in Australia. This is for good reason. The evidence certainly shows a trend away from the major parties in the medium term and evidence of relatively new or resurgent minor parties winning seats in both the House and the Senate. This is certainly significant. Nonetheless, the challenges for minor parties in Australia cannot be understated. In particular, questions remain about the capacity of those minor parties that have been able to achieve parliamentary representation to institutionalise. Angelo Panebianco articulated the challenge that new parties face when they move from a phase 'in which organizational identity is *manifest* (the objectives being explicit and coherent), to a phase in which the organizational ideology is *latent* (the objectives being vague, implicit, and contradictory)' (1988: 18–19). The goals of parties such as NXT and PHON were to turn Xenophon and Hanson's personal popularity and name recognition into something larger than themselves. What are the objectives now they have achieved this aim? Successfully managing this transition will require party elites to clarify what the objectives of the party are, and to think about ways to include candidates, members and supporters in party decision-making. If this cannot be achieved, these parties may replicate the fate of PUP, which faded as quickly as it rose due to party organisation mismanagement.

The 2016 federal election is clearly significant for Australia's minor parties. It is the first election fought under a new Senate electoral system since 1984. However, the government's decision to use the triggers available to it to call a double dissolution means that the impact of these changes are yet to be fully understood. As the minor parties can no longer use the group-voting tickets to their advantage, it would appear likely that the number of parties contesting federal elections in the future are likely to shrink. Indeed, as noted in Table 15.1, there are a number of similar minor parties who may need to consider merging to improve

their competitiveness. Ultimately, the 2016 federal election suggests that Australia's minor parties can be cautiously optimistic about their future prospects.

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# 16

## Independents Return and the 'Almost' Hung Parliament

Jennifer Curtin

One wonders if, when Malcolm Turnbull called the federal election early, the chance of another hung parliament crossed his mind. In 2010, a first-term government, whose electoral position had seemed unassailable six months earlier, was almost defeated and with it came the first 'hung' parliament since 1940. It was interpreted as an exceptional moment in Australia's political history (Costar 2012).

However, by the end of May 2016, the proposition of a hung parliament was back in the mix and the likely (re)election of several Independents to the House of Representatives increased in significance. On 6 June, the *Australian's* Newspann indicated that 15 per cent of respondents were considering voting for an Independent or micro party, the highest level of support (during a formal election campaign) in the poll's 31-year history (Hudson 2016). An Ipsos (2016) poll 10 days later also suggested the vote for 'Others' stood at almost half that of Labor's support. Although seat-specific polls were particularly unreliable (see Jackman and Mansillo, Chapter 6, this volume), that the national polls were showing a combined vote of 28 per cent support for Greens, micro parties and Independents was sufficiently perturbing to prompt both Turnbull and Barnaby Joyce to urge voters to avoid the 'chaos of a hung parliament' (Davey 2016).

In the end, these calls fell on deaf ears. The combined vote for minor and micro parties as well as Independents remained sufficiently high to result in the narrowest possible victory for the Coalition. Although it was to be the minor parties rather than the Independents that scooped a significant share of the non-major party vote, Independents remained keenly visible during the campaign and in the results. There were 108 candidates who stood as Independents, and collectively they won 2.81 per cent of the primary vote nationally compared to 1.85 per cent for the Nick Xenophon Team (see Kefford, Chapter 15, this volume). Moreover, while in 2010 it was evident early in the count that neither Labor nor the Coalition would win the 76 seats required, resulting in 17 days of negotiations to form a government, in 2016 it was less clear cut whether the Coalition would need the Independents or micro parties to govern.

It was to be 17 days after the 2 July election that Turnbull was sworn in as prime minister. No protracted deals were required but neither were they desired by the Independents. Andrew Wilkie and Cathy McGowan agreed to support the government in terms of supply and confidence, but chose to go no further. Rather, they explicitly stated that being an Independent meant standing by principles rather than exchanging them for something—thus retaining independence meant ‘no deals’ (Hutchens 2016; Kimmorley 2016).

Arguments as to whether this support for Independents represented an ongoing malaise, a fragmentation of the party system or some other kind of protest vote have been canvassed in many elections before, both in Australia and elsewhere (Curtin 2004). In 1998, the backlash against John Howard’s government almost cost him office, in part a result of the swing towards then ‘Independent’ Pauline Hanson and her fledgling One Nation party. However, her style of independent politics was in stark contrast to that of Peter Andren, MP for Calare from 1996 to 2007 and champion of regional policy issues as well as democratic accountability and human rights (Costar and Curtin 2004). Between then and now, we have witnessed the rise of other successful Independents: Bob Katter (now leader of a minor party, see Kefford, Chapter 15, this volume), Tony Windsor and Rob Oakeshott, followed by Wilkie in 2010 and McGowan in 2013.<sup>1</sup> While Wilkie

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1 While the *Australian* counts Katter as one of the parliament’s Independents (Black 2016), the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) records Katter’s Australian Party as a party and so his campaign is not considered here. Katter increased his primary and two-party preferred vote share, in part a result of the demise of the Palmer United Party. For more information see Kefford, Chapter 15, this volume.

represents a regional urban electorate, urban Independent candidates from large metropolitan electorates have been less successful than their regional and rural counterparts. In the 1990s, Ted Mack from North Sydney and Phil Cleary from Wills in Victoria (VIC) won their electorates in Sydney and Melbourne respectively and, in 2016, James Mathison stood in the Sydney seat of Warringah and featured prominently in the Sydney media (see Raue, Chapter 7, this volume). However, it was to be the rural and regional Independents that the national media focused on in 2016.

As such, this chapter provides an overview of the three rural and regional Independents' campaigns (Windsor, Oakeshott and Wilkie) and then offers a closer look at the electorate of Indi (McGowan).<sup>2</sup> I build on analysis made in *Abbott's Gambit: The 2013 Australian Federal Election*, where we explored how it was that McGowan was able to win the safe Liberal seat from long-time incumbent, soon-to-be minister, Sophie Mirabella (Curtin and Costar 2014). But the case of Indi also offers us an analytical spotlight on what personality, localism and non-party representation have come to mean, particularly for those in regional Australia. As such, it momentarily shifts the focus away from party choice and towards the phenomenon of candidates attracting support for who they are, or what they have done, or what they might do, rather than simply because of the party to which they belong, or not, in the case of Independents (Bean and Papadakis 1995; Marsh 2007; Weeks 2011).

The explanations for the rise of voter attraction to candidates rather than parties, and Independents in particular, tend to include the personality factor, the impact of the electoral system and the degree of 'localism' (Anckar 2000; Greenberg 1994). Certainly in the case of Australia, the institutional arrangements of compulsory voting combined with preferential voting have come to serve Independents well (Curtin and Costar 2014). And the incremental decline in party identification has been accompanied by a rise of anti-party sentiment that has left some of the established parties dealing with surges of unpopularity in a variety of electorates (Costar and Curtin 2004; Curtin 2004; Rodrigues and Brenton 2010). Thus, although it remains unlikely that Independents

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2 Interviews and participant observation were conducted by the author in the electorate of Indi two weeks before Turnbull called the election. I am grateful to Ben Raue for directing me to additional information on the Denison how-to-vote information (Australian Labor Party (ALP) 2016).

will ever replace parties as the main organisational form in parliamentary life, voting for an Independent is no longer deemed by all as irrational behaviour (Bolleyer and Weeks 2009).

## Election 2016 and the Independents

Initially, the national campaign gave little attention to the relevance of the (re)election of Independents to the House of Representatives. All eyes were on the Senate and what the double dissolution, along with the new voting rules, would produce in terms of a result. There appeared to be a general agreement, although muted, that Turnbull would scrape, rather than romp, home; in part because his personal ratings as preferred prime minister sat well above those of Shorten.

Ultimately, however, as we have seen in previous chapters, the result in the lower house was a close-fought race and the Independents once again featured as part of the story. Both major party leaders faced questions on whether they would work with the crossbenchers, and both signed a 'solemn pledge' drafted by the *Daily Telegraph* undertaking not to form an alliance or do deals with the Greens (Benson 2016). Yet, neither leader ruled out the option of forming a minority government with the support of 'Others' on confidence and supply. This decision proved prescient given the close result, and the re-election of two Independents alongside Katter and the Nick Xenophon Team.

Despite Turnbull's claims that every single vote for the Independents represented a vote for chaos, with predictions of instability and policy paralysis, voters remained undeterred, and four key electorates remained open to wins by Independents. In New South Wales (NSW), Windsor and Oakeshott came out of retirement to contest the electorates of New England and Cowper, while Wilkie and McGowan ran as incumbents in their respective seats of Denison (where the margin was a safe 15 per cent) and Indi (with a margin of just 0.3 per cent). Each of the four campaigns was different, although it was to be Windsor and McGowan who received the most press coverage at the national level, with multipage spreads dedicated to the 'power of one' (Alcorn 2016). Arguably, this was as much about who these Independents were up against as it was about their own individual campaigns.



Windsor announced his decision to contest his former seat of New England as an Independent candidate in March 2016. This was always likely to be a high-profile battle, given the seat was held by the self-styled larrikin-like National party leader and Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce (Cockfield and Curtin, Chapter 14, this volume). Joyce had won the seat comfortably upon Windsor's retirement at the 2013 election, but was vulnerable on several policy issues—most visibly the federal government's decision to approve the \$1.2 billion Shenhua Watermark coalmine in country NSW, which farmers opposed, as well as the national broadband network, the Gonski education reforms (specifically extra funding for country schools), water, renewable energy, anticorruption measures and climate change (Chan 2015, 2016a).

However, the campaign for New England was also personal. The *Guardian* reported that this was a fight that would test regional voters on policies but 'overlaid are more personal issues such as pride and hubris' (Chan 2016b). Some in the media argued that Joyce wanted to beat Windsor because he had not had the chance to do so in 2013, hinting that there was a lingering resentment from decades past when Windsor left the Nationals to stand as an Independent in the NSW parliament (Costar 2012). Joyce claimed the only reason Windsor was back was to drain resources from the Nationals' broader campaign (see Cockfield and Curtin, Chapter 14, this volume). It worked—Joyce was in the electorate up to three times a week, with the traditional wombat trail curtailed.

Throughout the campaign, Windsor sought to portray himself as an authentic local, compared to Joyce, who was characterised by Windsor as the career politician flown in from Queensland (McKeith 2016). Windsor's platform was more progressive than that of the Nationals (as it had been during his tenure in office), but his message was complicated by his need to defend his family's previous decision to sell land to a mining company. He also battled some personal slurs. National Party advertisements released in the last two weeks of the campaign implied Windsor was a 'philanderer' and he also had to fend off a front-page newspaper story claiming he had been a schoolyard bully (Hunter 2016; SBS 2016).

Personalities aside, Windsor believed that this was the 'first time since I started in politics that I've seen circumstances where the local issues of a country electorate align with the major national issues' (Bettles 2016). He took up these issues with daily posts on Facebook and Twitter

(his Facebook page and Twitter account both had over 27,000 followers), while also profiling his electorate events, his dog, video clips on how to vote and information on how a hung parliament works in practice. He ran on a strong history of delivering for his electorate as an Independent, and made use of NationBuilder and a good number of volunteers to support a traditional roving ground campaign enabling him to connect with locals across the electorate (Mills 2016; Thomson 2016). Nationally, he was profiled on *Four Corners*, participated in the Sky News *Politics in the Pub* program and featured regularly in the national press.

This strategy appeared, on face value, to be working. Prior to Windsor announcing his decision to run, a January ReachTEL poll of 712 residents in the seat had found that 32.2 per cent would vote for Windsor as their first preference if he returned—compared with 39.5 per cent for Joyce (Chan 2016a). Two months later, a poll of 518 voters in the electorate suggested the former Independent member for New England could unseat Joyce, with Windsor ahead 52 points to 48 after preferences (Hudson 2016). That the media considered Windsor an outside chance was reflected in their soliciting of his views on formal agreements should a hung parliament result (Taylor 2016). However, small local polls are considered unreliable at best (see Jackman and Mansillo, Chapter 6, this volume) and, in the end, the Deputy Prime Minister differentiated himself sufficiently from Turnbull to win both core and swing voters.

Similarly to Windsor, Oakeshott's attempt to win in Cowper was always likely to be difficult. Oakeshott had previously represented the electorate of Lyne, from 2008 to 2013 when he retired, but a redistribution had shifted his home town of Port Macquarie into the electorate of Cowper. Oakeshott announced his candidature on 9 June, just three weeks before the election. He stated that he had hoped to see more progress by local MPs on education and health and the disadvantaged communities in his region, but that these issues, along with tax reform and the constitutional recognition of Indigenous peoples, had not been sufficiently addressed since he left parliament. This, he said, drove his decision to re-enter politics (Dziedzic 2016).

However, in part because of his late start date, Oakeshott did not receive the same degree of national media coverage as his Independent colleagues; his campaign was largely limited to local news media, and he had to build his profile from scratch in the major centre of Coffs Harbour.

Moreover, he was up against long-time sitting National Luke Hartsuyker, first elected in 2001 and well-known in the Coffs Region. Yet, one week out from the election there was a moment of worry that the former Independent might sneak home. It was reported that Coalition strategists had hit the 'panic button', sending the Prime Minister into the electorate to protect Hartsuyker. Considered an unusual move for a PM, Turnbull then followed up by cold-calling a small ABC radio station to remind voters to vote for the Nationals (Aston 2016). Two weeks earlier, a ReachTEL poll indicated that Hartsuyker's primary vote support had fallen from 53 per cent to 39 per cent, as result of Oakeshott entering the race (ReachTEL 2016). Oakeshott has since claimed the Nationals spent close to \$750,000 to ensure they would secure the seat, including a \$300,000 advertising blitz; a mammoth amount compared to his meagre spend of \$52,300 (Kelly 2016). Ultimately, Oakeshott did better than Windsor in terms of the two-party preferred vote, although this may say more about Joyce's profile and preference deals than the likeability and reputation of the two Independent candidates.

Wilkie was the only Independent almost guaranteed re-election. A locally popular candidate, with a strong primary vote, and a two-party preferred vote of 67.8 per cent in 2013, meant his seat was classified safe. Yet, from the national perspective, his campaign was overshadowed somewhat by the Senate race in Tasmania, and the independently styled Jacqui Lambie in particular. In the lower house, the focus was on whether the sophomore Liberals in three seats with very small margins would be able to hold on. In this sense, Wilkie's campaign was always going to be the least interesting for the media, given it was likely he would face no real contest. Indeed, a ReachTEL poll found 62.4 per cent of Denison voters rated Wilkie highly, making him the best-performing Tasmanian member of federal parliament (Smith 2016).

Wilkie did not take this lead for granted, however, recognising the importance of retaining preferences. He reminded voters that he was the underdog in the seat. Former Labor MP Harry Quick, Deputy Mayor of Glenorchy, had advertised his support for the Liberal candidate in the local paper, suggesting that Labor might direct voters to preference the Liberals (Glenorchy Gazette 2016; Wilkie 2016). Moreover, he had to fend off claims from both the major parties that his capacity to deliver for his electorate was limited because he no longer held the balance of power (Smith 2016). In the end, Wilkie's concerns were unfounded—

Labor preferenced Wilkie third, after the Greens, and listed the Liberal last, and in the Glenorchy Council area Wilkie narrowly outpolled Labor on primary votes and won around 58 per cent of the two-candidate preferred vote.

While committed to local concerns, such as the redirection of the Cadbury closure spoils to the marginal Liberal electorates instead of the northern suburbs of Hobart located within Denison, Wilkie also continued to champion his signature issues: gambling, animal welfare and the environment (Richards 2016). His views were well represented in the local papers, while nationally, it was his position on government formation that received the most attention. His message was consistent—should another hung parliament result, he would not do deals with any party to form government (Butler 2016; Kelly 2016). Such a focus is perhaps unsurprising. Wilkie was the only sitting Independent who had signed a formal agreement with the Gillard government in 2010. He walked away from the agreement in 2012, relatively unscathed electorally, but this experience enabled him to speak with authority on the realities of minority government in practice. When Turnbull spoke of chaos, Wilkie claimed the PM was being ‘blatantly dishonest by trying to claim that power-sharing Parliaments lead to anarchy’. He went on to say:

History shows that in fact power-sharing Parliaments are often quite stable and reformist, as was the case during the 43rd Parliament. It’s also extremely arrogant for the Prime Minister to try and tell voters that they shouldn’t give their vote to an Independent ... Comments like this are terribly disrespectful of the democratic process which allows every Australian to vote for whichever candidate best reflects their views (Butler 2016).

Both major parties sought to deter voters from choosing Wilkie in particular, and the micro parties and Independents more generally, which was criticised as failing to recognise the value that comes with power sharing (Barns 2016; Dick 2016). This approach also risked raising the ire of voters who were turned off by nationwide negative campaigning at the expense of addressing the grassroots, a point noted by the Nationals in their post-election analysis (Maher 2016).

## A new mode of 'independence' in politics: The case of Indi

If Wilkie's seat was one of the 'safest' Independent seats in recent memory, McGowan's seat of Indi was one of the most marginal. The story of McGowan winning the seat of Indi from Mirabella in 2013 has been revisited many times. It was spectacular for a number of reasons. Initially portrayed as an anti-Mirabella movement, the contest quickly turned into something more, with McGowan running an issues-based grassroots campaign that harnessed large numbers of volunteers and sufficient resources to ensure a real challenge resulted. Mirabella lost her margin of 9 per cent and lost the seat by only 439 votes. She was the only Liberal MP to lose her seat in a national swing to Tony Abbott. As such, it was always expected that the 2016 campaign would be close.

In late March, an Australia Institute poll found that McGowan had 37.3 per cent of first preference votes, with Mirabella on 26.9 per cent. Support for Mirabella was at its highest in the 65-and-over age group, where two out of five voters would vote for her compared to only 16.4 per cent of 18–24-year-olds. By contrast, McGowan's support was more evenly distributed across age groups, but those in the 51–64 age group responded to her best, with nearly half of voters in this age range saying they would vote for her (Medhora 2016). This result suggested Mirabella would be dependent on preferences flowing from the Nationals candidate, Marty Corboy, whose support was around 10 per cent. However, despite much discussion between the two parties' campaign teams, there was never complete confidence amongst the Liberals that they could count on Nationals supporters giving their preferences to Mirabella over McGowan (Alcorn 2016). Former Nationals leader Warren Truss was clearly a Mirabella supporter, but Joyce was less so, mocking her chances on several occasions and sending mixed messages to voters. Ken Jasper, a Victorian State National MP for four decades, suggested that Nationals voters direct second preferences to McGowan (Chan 2016b; Loussikian 2016).

Understanding McGowan's lead in this early poll requires a review of her time as an MP between 2013 and 2016. As an Independent, who did not hold the balance of power, it could have been difficult to demonstrate she had made a difference. However, rather than focusing solely on winning policy dividends or funding for her electorate (although these

outcomes remained important), McGowan used her time in office to embed a different kind of representational process, based on two distinct but connected strategies. The first involved taking the 'Voice for Indi' movement to Canberra. McGowan's 2013 campaign was underpinned by a grassroots movement inside Indi that wanted to create change in the way its issues were represented federally. As a candidate, McGowan had engaged in 'kitchen conversations' across the electorate to gather information about local concerns and broader issues such as marriage equality, climate change and asylum seekers. These issues were also discussed and prioritised at an 'Indi Summit'. Not bound by party discipline, McGowan was able to reconcile both conservative and progressive positions articulated across her demographically diverse electorate (Chan 2016c; Curtin and Costar 2014). Once elected, her face-to-face consultation across the electorate grew into an Indi volunteer program whereby Indi constituents volunteered to work as staffers in her parliamentary office (Evans 2014; Hendricks 2016). Hundreds of locals came to experience national politics from the vantage point of an MP's office, the objective being to facilitate a sense of connection and ownership of the political process, and reduce the alienation historically felt by many in safe rural electorates (Curtin 2004).

McGowan's second strategy has come to be known as the 'Indi Way'. Politics, as McGowan describes it, should focus on policy and not the personal, it should be clean and undertaken with integrity, an 'authentic contest of ideas and values' to enable greater knowledge and trust in the democratic process (Alcorn 2016; Evans 2014). The Indi Way informed McGowan's parliamentary voting record: she voted 443 times with the government and 32 times against. The latter included votes in favour of retaining the carbon tax and against the deregulation of university fees, while she supported limited mandatory detention (Morgan 2016). McGowan did not see herself as 'in opposition' but as having a role to work with the government irrespective of who that is to get the best outcome for Indi. She also chose not to align herself with other Independents in the House, although some conversations were inevitable when sharing the crossbench position. And her mode of campaigning was based on building relationships. She is described as having a warm personality and being a good listener, networker and able to work across party lines (Alcorn 2016). This personal dimension was supported with a revised version of the successful campaign strategy employed in 2013. The campaign made innovative use of crowd-funding software, social media strategies, hundreds of volunteers and she had claimed the colour orange as signifier of independence (Evans 2014; Mills 2016). The central office in

Wangaratta featured posters reminding volunteers of the Indi values—respect, inclusivity, positivity, courage, trust, integrity—and McGowan exhibited these qualities during candidate debates (Alcorn 2016).

McGowan's focus on the representational process did not preclude her from working on policy wins for Indi. She claimed that in excess of \$800 million had been committed to Indi since her election, but that it was a result of collective advocacy. For example, she had worked with the Indi Telecommunications Action Group to draft a whole-of-electorate plan for federal funding for black spots that resulted in the electorate winning 30 mobile base stations, enough to fix two thirds of the blackspots identified (Alcorn 2016; Morgan 2016). Similarly, she argued that funding for the Wodonga Business District and the awarding of a defence contract to a company in her electorate during her time in office had involved advocacy from herself and others. Both claims were vehemently dismissed by the Liberals for Indi (Smithwick 2015).

Alongside this, the region was experimenting with independence at the State level and experiencing some largesse. Shepparton voters had elected Suzanne Sheed in 2014, and while the Country Fire Authority dispute received considerable attention, the Andrews-led Labor government had committed millions to areas 'where folks have never ever voted for his party' but which was nevertheless welcomed by the Victorian Farmers Federation (Sullivan 2016a, 2016b). This included drought funding, money for the baiting of wild dogs, and \$36 million for rural police, some of which went to stations in McGowan's electorate.

Outside of local politics, McGowan's 'Indi' brand had gained national attention, and stood in stark contrast to Mirabella's brand, with the latter portrayed as abrasive, ambitious, arrogant and 'the Queen of Mean' (Lambert 2016). Mirabella was preselected in June 2015, although her decision to stand was not supported by all in the Victorian Liberal Party and her candidature meant that, as was the case in 2013, the campaign for Indi in 2016 was as much about Mirabella as it was about McGowan. Indeed, those inside the McGowan camp said the latter's campaign strategy may have looked very different without the presence of the polarising Mirabella.

Mirabella did have some influential supporters. The Liberals for Indi campaigned avidly on her behalf and made a loud appearance at the Sky News *Politics in the Pub* event, while the *Australian's* attempt to delegitimise

McGowan's win in 2013 was significant. In 2014, the newspaper claimed 'McGowan's 439-vote winning margin in the Victorian rural seat of Indi came after a number of her dedicated younger backers allegedly engaged in electoral fraud' (Thomas and Arthur 2014). The Liberal Party also put to federal parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM) that fraudulent re-enrolments may have been coordinated in 'a particular seat', which the *Australian* suggested was Indi (Thomas and Arthur 2014). The *Australian* identified more than 20 cases where voters had changed addresses shortly before the roll closed and these were then investigated by the Australian Federal Police and the Australian Electoral Commission. It took 18 months for the McGowan campaign to be cleared. Commonwealth prosecutors withdrew electoral fraud charges against two young voters, one of whom was McGowan's niece, four weeks before the 2016 election campaign began. One insider suggested the investigation had involved 27 public servants and 1,850 police hours, while others claimed it to have been a 'shameful political exercise' (Akerman 2016). Meanwhile, local media proclaimed McGowan as 'vindicated', with the electoral fraud claim finally vanquished (*Border Mail* 2016).

However, it was to be Mirabella's campaign, and the media reporting of it, which damaged the slim chance she had of regaining the seat. First was the 'awkward encounter' at the opening of a new wing of an aged care facility, with the *Benalla Ensign* reporting that Mirabella 'very publicly pushed Ms McGowan out of the way' to prevent her having a photograph with Liberal MP Ken Wyatt (Savage 2016). Mirabella contested the *Ensign's* version of events in the press and on Twitter, but the paper did not retract their version for several months. Following this, Mirabella announced live on national television that a \$10 million allocation for the Wangaratta Hospital did not happen because Indi voters had elected McGowan rather than her in 2013. Treasurer Scott Morrison and Health Minister Sussan Ley stated there had been no public commitment of funds, but accusations of pork-barrelling made headline news for close to a week (Koziol 2016). The *Age* editorial argued Mirabella's claim offered 'rare and dispiriting insights into dishonourable cynical tactics that political parties adopt in campaigns', which only highlighted the contrast in operating styles of major party and Independent candidates and campaigns (*Age* 2016: 32). Mirabella's campaign never recovered, and her party support floundered as a result (Gorr 2016). Meanwhile, McGowan was labelled 'Miss Congeniality' and continued to campaign scandal free with largely positive support from local and national media (Kingston 2016).



## The results

As noted by Ben Raue (Chapter 7, this volume), high-profile Independents ran in five electorates, but only two were elected. Three of the five were contested outside major cities, continuing the tradition of regional Australia's interest in alternatives to major party representation (Costar and Curtin 2004). Nevertheless, despite Windsor's best efforts to challenge Joyce on policy and personality, he won only 29.2 per cent of first preferences compared to Joyce's 52.3 per cent, and Joyce won easily in a majority of booths, both large and small, across the electorate. Windsor held his own in parts of Armidale and Tamworth, but this was not enough to make up for Joyce's wins elsewhere. Similarly, former Independent Oakeshott won just over a quarter of the first preference vote (26.3 per cent) in the NSW seat of Cowper. However, the Nationals incumbent Hartsuyker required preferences to win, in part because of the support Oakeshott received from booths in Port Macquarie, which, prior to the redistribution, had been part of his former electorate of Lyne.

Table 16.1 reveals how close the four rural and regional races (plus Katter's) were in terms of primary and two-party preferred votes. The data indicate it is too soon to yet again suggest that minority governments will become a thing of the past.

Table 16.1. Results for Independents (and Katter), 2013 and 2016

Candidate	Primary vote		% change	2PP		% change
	2013	2016		2013	2016	
Bob Katter (KAP) (Kennedy)	29.35	39.85	10.5	52.19	61.12	8.93
Rob Oakeshott (Cowper)		26.29			45.44	
Tony Windsor (New England)		29.22			41.48	
Andrew Wilkie (Denison)	38.08	44.07	5.99	65.51	67.78	2.27
Cathy McGowan (Indi)	31.18	34.76	3.58	50.25	54.83	3.58

Source. Compiled by author from Australian Electoral Commission (n.d.).

Ultimately, it was to be the two incumbent Independents who won, and won well. Wilkie achieved 44 per cent of the primary vote in Denison, an increase of 6 per cent and 21 per cent ahead of Labor's candidate. Wilkie went on to win 67.8 per cent of the two-party preferred vote, and preference flows reveal Wilkie's appeal is politically broad—he received 72 per cent of Green preferences and 75 per cent of Liberal preferences—making Denison an incredibly safe seat for an Independent.

McGowan's race was more complex. She was subject to a three-cornered contest meaning the Liberals and Nationals were likely to be exchanging preferences with potentially damaging consequences. In the end, McGowan received 85 per cent of Green preferences, 84 per cent from Labor and 27 per cent from the Nationals, and her appeal was geographically wideranging; she outpolled her opposition in three quarters of the booths, and was the clear winner in both Wodonga and Wangaratta. In some smaller towns and in a couple of the Wangaratta booths, the Nationals candidate came in ahead of Mirabella. The total first preference vote for the Coalition parties totalled 44 per cent and the seat remains marginal, with McGowan winning 54.8 per cent two-party preferred, up 3.6 per cent from 2013.

## Conclusions

It has been argued that the success of Independents is best measured using the framework of 'policy, office, or votes', with involvement in government formation being a significant feat (Miller and Curtin 2011). However, the outcome of the 2016 election for the Independents, and their decision to support confidence and supply only, suggests that Australian Independents have a more measured view of success. Instead of deals, they have chosen to retain their independence, looking to work with government, issue by issue, in a way that is responsible, ensures government stability, but protects their capacity to represent both local and regional concerns.

In the case of McGowan, she has taken what it means to be a local representative to a new level, building connections and a level of engagement with Canberra that has democratic potential but is only possible in the absence of a party machine. The McGowan model is not unlike the representational style of Andren in that it involves championing reforms to the democratic process, taking a progressive stand on moral and human rights issues, while also working on local issues (Costar and

Curtin 2004). Comparatively, the former is less common, as there is often a tendency for Independents to focus solely on local parochialism and protest votes in ways that are conceived of as populist or reactionary (Brancatti 2008; Hijino 2013). However, the type of Independent elected in Australia has been sufficiently varied over time to suggest that there is no one 'model' of independent representation. In rural Australia at least, it seems the election of Independents has helped to revive and reinvigorate the Nationals campaign style and their electoral fortunes. The presence of Windsor and Oakeshott reminded the Coalition's partner of the need to focus on the grassroots and local communities, and to be prepared to address both progressive and traditional issues. In the case of Indi, there is a hint that the seat is being 'set up' for a return to the Nationals in 2019, complementing their win in the adjacent seat of Murray (Grattan 2016). More generally, however, there is continuing evidence that rural and regional voters are open to supporting candidates unconnected to the major parties on the right. The shifts identified in this election may not be sufficiently seismic to disrupt Australia's two-and-a-half party system, but it should be a warning to political leaders that dismissing a vote for 'Others' as potentially chaotic offers few deterrent effects.

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# 17

## Interest Groups and the Election

Darren R. Halpin and Bert Fraussen

This chapter provides an overview of the various means by which interest groups involved themselves in the 2016 Australian federal election campaign. As far as possible, we address this task through an engagement with the broader political science and public policy literature on interest groups and elections. This literature is sparse, but our hope is that through this contribution we can play some small part in pushing the broader engagement of group scholars with those of elections and political parties.

We focus on the following themes: relationships between groups and parties, the reasons why elections matter to interest groups, and their most visible and manifest public policy activity during elections, namely their group manifesto or policy priorities document. For each theme, we combine some background from the broader literature on groups and elections with specific illustrations of the strategies and activities that various groups applied during the election. We define interest groups as collective membership organisations that engage with public policy (Jordan, Halpin and Maloney 2004: 205).

We conclude that efforts by interest groups to shape Australian elections are hard to assess, but in reality they are likely to be very slim. Direct attempts to change outcomes in specific seats seem limited to those well-resourced groups who can in effect replicate a party's organisation on the ground. For most groups, the strategy most available—and therefore utilised—is to generate credible policy 'asks' (or requests), and to have

parties engage with them. We speculate that groups most often engage in campaigns to address organisational maintenance issues, such as convincing members they are active on the issues that matter to them.

## Relationships between groups and political parties

The broader context for this chapter is the relationship between groups and political parties, irrespective of elections. While interest groups have some similarities with political parties (e.g. they are both membership bodies and engage with public policy), a critical difference arises from the fact that interest groups do not participate in elections. As a result, they strongly rely on good relationships with political parties, particularly those in government, in order to achieve their policy objectives. These relations, however, are not only relevant in the context of their lobbying activities. Many interest groups (notably groups that have citizens as members or provide services) rely strongly on government funding, and therefore ensure that close and good relationships with policymakers and government officials are also a matter of organisational survival and maintenance.

As regards the nature of the ties between political parties and interest groups, various relationships are foreshadowed in the literature (Allern and Bale 2012; Thomas 2001). A dominant perspective emphasises *financial* dependencies, mapping the regular or systematic flow of funds between them—for instance, through the provision of donations. While these financial interdependencies have been often highlighted (and problematised) by political observers and analysts, three other types of ties appear equally relevant for understanding relations between interest groups and parties. First, one might also emphasise an *organisational* focus, which highlights sharing of key personnel, or the overlap of staff. For instance, there is a strong flow of union officials into the ranks of the Australian Labor Party (ALP). Second, affinities between groups and parties might be more *ideational*, whereby shared views on what the key policy problems of day are, and how they ‘ought’ to be resolved, matter. Groups who are ideologically close to each other (e.g. progressive or conservative) might be more likely to develop close ties and to (formally or informally) cooperate and support each other. Finally, one might focus on shared or overlapping *membership* between groups and parties, in the sense that people are members of, for instance, a trade union and the ALP.

While these may all be logical possibilities, for most groups such relationships simply do not, and have never, applied. Indeed, the international literature has asserted that linkages are irrelevant for most, but not all, groups (Thomas 2001). Yet, we know that some key sets of groups in western European democracies have long been strongly linked with political parties. Social democratic parties and organised labour, farmers and farmers' parties, as well as business and conservative parties, have historical (if weakening) links in many European countries (see Allern and Bale 2012). To these, we might add the contemporary relations between environmental and peace movements, and the development of Green parties in Western Europe. In these few cases, parties and groups might actually be allies, and closely coordinate their activities and messages during election times to increase the chances of their message gaining traction. That Australian electoral regulations allow groups to be directly engaged in elections might lead one to conclude this would be a frequent activity. In the 2016 election, the Business Council of Australia (BCA) came out strongly in favour of the Coalition, with the Chief Executive Officer reported as being 'gobsmacked' by Labor's campaign and announcing that 'the council will be launching its own campaign in the run-up to election day to underline how business underpins the wealth of the country' (*Guardian* 2016). These relationships, however, are the exceptions, rather than the rule.

In the Australian context, some groups do have formal links with parties in a structured manner. The trade union movement—at least parts of it—still remain vital allies of the ALP. Some report that the influence of the union movement extends to deciding placement of specific candidates in 'safe' positions in federal Senate tickets. This special relationship also means a degree of coordination in the messaging of the trade unions' election campaigning and extends to large-scale on-the-ground canvassing of voters in marginal seats by union members. As has long been documented, the proximity of certain social groups to parties can harm their electoral appeal to the broader community (Kirchheimer 1966)—and so the canvassing by union members tends not to involve direct appeals to 'vote Labor', but rather aims to focus voters' attention on particular issues that feature in the Labor manifesto. For groups, a similar problem can emerge where traditional allegiances with a specific party can blunt the influence of the group when 'their' party is out of government, or when this party makes unpopular decisions and seeks the support of their traditional group ally (which may result in the latter losing members over their stance on this issue).

The Australian case resonates with the above analysis. Yet, there is some debate as to the trajectory. The orthodoxy in the Australian literature places interest groups as second-tier players compared with political parties (Matthews and Warhurst 1993). The key argument here is that changes in government have a strong influence on the prospects of groups in achieving policy change. Trevor Matthews and John Warhurst argue:

for many producer and promotional groups ... it is above all else the adversarial character of Australian party politics that shapes their strategies, their access to government, and their chances of success. They operate in the shadow of strong parties (1993: 82).

In the intervening two decades, there is some cause to revise this position, not least because of the emerging bipartisan nature of group lobbying and the changing complexion of the party system (for more details, see Halpin 2015). In the latter respect, to the extent that a shift to a cartel party system is occurring, this creates even fewer incentives for groups to see the 'party in government' as a critical variable in explaining policy success. Our own 2015 survey work, examining the views of close to 400 national interest groups, indicates that very few groups have a strong ideological position (see Table 17.1). In fact, 25 per cent indicated that the ideology of their group is not relevant, with about 54 per cent indicating it was moderate, somewhat progressive or somewhat conservative.

Table 17.1. Ideological positions of Australian national interest groups

Ideology	Frequency	Per cent
Very conservative	12	3
Somewhat conservative	32	8.1
Moderate	74	18.6
Somewhat progressive	109	27.5
Very progressive	71	17.9
Not relevant	99	24.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>100</b>

Source. Compiled by authors with data from Australian Interest Group Survey, 2015: [interestgroupsaustralia.com/?page\\_id=88](http://interestgroupsaustralia.com/?page_id=88).

## Why do elections matter to groups?

Before we go further, the fundamental question that must be asked is why do elections matter to interest groups? After all, by definition, interest groups do not seek political office and thus do not contest elections directly. What is in it for them?

The literature, to the extent that it has considered this question at all, tends to assume groups will by and large have a general interest in election campaigns and outcomes, but will seldom intervene (Binderkrantz 2015). As such, there is not a great deal to guide the curious student of elections as to the role (if any) of interest groups (but see Farrel and Schmitt-Beck (2008) for an exception to this pattern). We offer a three-fold approach here. We organise our discussion by highlighting three possible objectives that might guide the activities of interest groups during elections: shaping the election outcome; affecting the policy agenda of the incoming government; and considerations related to their organisational maintenance and survival.

As outlined, the Australian position is that party politics decisively shapes the opportunities for groups to get access and ultimately to influence the policy agenda and legislative activities of government. It follows that groups would have an interest in seeing the party win government with which they have most affinity. Groups may seek to *shape the election outcome*. For some groups, the direction in which this effort is pointed is self-evident—we think here of organised labour and business. Yet, for many others, there is no clear-cut alignment between their interests and those of parties. For these groups, the election outcome does not fundamentally affect their chances of realising their policy objectives. However, we note that many groups who are not clearly ideological or aligned with a party still engage in various activities during the election period. For such groups, the engagement can be viewed in terms of progressing substantive policy goals—getting ‘their’ issues on party agendas and into party policy positions, which in turn may be acted upon in the new parliament. Groups may seek to *affect the policy agenda of governments* (and would-be governments) by using the election period as an opportunity to increase the political and/or public salience of issues that they are concerned about. Of course, groups may also see election campaigns as a chance—when the national media are more attentive to political stories—to get noticed and to raise their profile. That is, groups may seek to engage in elections as an

opportunistic strategy to *maintain their organisations*. Here, the objective is not so much as shaping election outcomes or the future policy agenda, but rather ensuring that the organisation is visible to (potential) members (even though this organisational visibility might not actually translate into policy outcomes).

## Election outcomes

As a first possible objective, groups may take a longer-term or indirect approach, seeking to change the overall electoral outcome or the result in specific seats. That is, they seek out a political strategy (on the presumption that this will eventually lead to policy change). If groups decide to engage in any of the strategies outlined below, we can safely assume that the outcome of the election (and the composition of the next government) is critically important to them.

## Political donations

Groups might involve themselves in elections in myriad of forms. The most obvious—and headline grabbing—approach has been to donate money directly to parties. Recent discussion of party funding has underscored the controversial nature of such a strategy; for example, the Australian Hotels Association's donations to the Liberal Party (Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) 2016). Even though the available data on donations suffers from various shortcomings, we can safely assume that the majority of groups abstain from making political donations. Most of them are simply unlikely to have the financial resources required, whereas others will be very cautious about establishing these kinds of visible linkages to a certain party.

Details of funding by groups to parties for specific campaigns sometimes leak. The independent Senator Nick Xenophon and his new party, the Nick Xenophon Team (NXT), became a target for the Australian Hotels Association (AHA). While the AHA is ostensibly a liquor industry lobby, the reliance of clubs and pubs on poker machine revenue has made antigambling candidates a target. It was reported that the AHA had made contributions to the two main parties to aid efforts to repel the NXT and Greens candidates (Millar and Schneiders 2016).



## Marginal seat campaigns

Perhaps the most obvious way for groups to shape election outcomes is to target specific seats—particularly marginal seats—where ‘their’ issue is likely to gain traction. Groups might target specific candidates or incumbents whose views or ideologies are clearly antithetical—for instance, progressive groups targeting conservative flag-bearers. They might also direct their members on how to vote, or run marginal seat campaigns. Some groups might seek to influence the ideological nature of a party by shaping the outcome of preselection contests in specific seats. GetUp! launched a funding campaign to produce 1 million how-to-vote cards. While marginal seats were the focus, the broad strategy was actually to target ‘right-wing’ figures in the Coalition, and Senate candidates such as Pauline Hanson. While Hanson was herself elected, efforts by Liberal Senator Cory Bernardi to establish a conservative GetUp! after the election suggests that their activities had a substantial impact, or at least highlighted the absence of grassroots mobilisation efforts by the conservative side of the political spectrum (see Vromen, Chapter 18, this volume). Indeed, the postmortem offered by the Liberal Party’s national campaign director, Tony Nutt, explicitly acknowledged the professionalism of the unions and GetUp! in respect of running campaigns on the ground (Warhurst 2016).

The union movement constituted a big presence on the ground. The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) had emergency services staff door knocking 20,000 homes in marginal electorates, asking people to write down their pledges to support certain policy outcomes. That is, not to ‘Support the Labor Party’ or ‘Vote Labor’, but to support a specific policy outcome that happens to be Labor policy. The ‘pledge’ is posted back to the individual and a follow-up call made prior to election day (Maher 2016).

As they did in 2013, the ‘Friends of the ABC’ again engaged in a large and creative campaign to gain pre-election commitments on ABC funding. Targeting 20 marginal seats across Australia, the strategy included volunteers asking voters to sign pledges, with the use of several parody videos circulated through social media highlighting possible program cuts under a more market-oriented ABC. The organisation claims to have taken the scalp of Coalition MP Warwick Smith in 1993, arguing this result shows its capacity to change electoral outcomes. As Randal McDonald, ABC Friends spokesperson explained, ‘we’re throwing everything we have at changing public opinion because we see this as a crucial election for the national broadcaster’ (quoted in Gordon 2016).

## Policy agendas

In general terms, given the unprecedented media attention, elections offer groups the prospect of shaping the ordering of the public agenda, and the chance to reframe public understandings of salient policy issues. These might include having a party or candidate adopt or commit to a key policy ‘ask’. Election periods can represent a ‘critical juncture’ from a policy perspective, and therefore several groups will attempt to make their issue one of *the* key election issues. For most, however, disappointment is likely, as political parties are unlikely to engage with new issues during election campaigns, and the room for new issues to enter the debate (in addition to ongoing policy matters from the previous government and current events) is limited.

The approach that groups take to get these commitments is not too different to the standard choice between insider and outsider strategies (see McKinney and Halpin 2007).

### Insider approach

As we outline in more detail below, most groups in the 2016 election took an orthodox policy process approach, setting out key policy priorities or ‘asks’ for both parties in the lead-up to the election (see Halpin and Fraussen 2017). Presumably, the intention being that it offers ready-made bite-sized commitments that parties might see advantage in adopting. A successful insider approach is unlikely to emerge during election periods; groups who successfully follow this strategy often build upon good longstanding relations with a particular party (as it requires know-how in respect of who to approach in the party, and the particular internal party processes that determine the focus of the party’s election platform).

### Outsider approach

The Australian politics literature has noted the apparent rise of ‘outside’ advertising campaigns by groups that are usually considered to be powerful—and thus least likely to engage in such a strategy (Orr and Gauja 2014). Arguably, election campaigns provide a most likely environment for groups to utilise such campaigns—as there are media and electorate focuses on politics at this time. As Graeme Orr and Anika Gauja (2014) argue, such advertising campaigns can have a multitude of aims—including as part and parcel of a party-political strategy to harm a specific party or candidate (in that sense they can sometimes be seen as part of a marginal seats campaign). Whether overtly criticising a party

platform or actively campaigning to get a particular issue noticed, this approach sets out to increase the salience of an issue in the minds of the general public and policymakers. Such a strategy relies on recalibrating the calculus of politicians as to the electoral cost of ignoring a specific issue. But, no doubt, these are also utilised to demonstrate to their members and supporters that they are actively lobbying.

Perhaps the classic example in recent times was the political advertising campaign of the mining industry in the 2013 election (for an overview, see Eccleston and Hortle 2016). There was no equivalent in the 2016 election, but there were some similar clear-cut public facing campaigns.

The level of payments from Medicare for GP visits, for instance, became an issue in the 2016 campaign. The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) instituted a campaign whereby members placed posters in surgeries and went on the offensive in the media, outlining that the sustainability of the system of general practice was under threat. In a series of advertisements aired on national television, the RCGP drove home the message that higher charges mean that patients would delay visits to see medical professionals, ultimately leading to higher health costs (Lee 2016).

Another example involves the BCA, who (as mentioned earlier) launched ads attacking the Labor Party for its antibusiness agenda. Specifically, the adverts flagged the impact of Labor policies on business investment, highlighting that a spending plan needed to be accompanied by a plan for growth (Sexton 2016).

Of course, these twin approaches—shaping policy commitments and electoral outcomes—can be linked; a ‘marginal seats’ campaign is typically about raising the profile of a given issue or policy ‘ask’ by targeting seats where incumbents face stiff competition for re-election. While GetUp! most clearly linked these two objectives, the majority of groups have prioritised issue-related advocacy, rather than directly targeting particular MPs.

## Group maintenance

It is tempting to view the actions of groups in the context of elections as determined by rational calculations as to net benefits in policy or political terms (Binderkrantz 2015). Yet, we might also assume that the election period provides other ‘goods’ that groups might seek. It has been

argued more broadly that before groups can engage in lobbying or attend to policy influence, they face the more basic task of survival (Lowery 2007). Attention is a ‘good’ that can assist in the group-maintenance task. For instance, as elections deliver a once-in-three-year high of journalistic and politician engagement in political discourse, groups might view this as an important opportunity to flag to members and donors that they are salient policy players. Given the cluttered advocacy landscape in Australia, and the difficulty for smaller niche players to cut through, it is not unreasonable to expect that many groups might seek out possible free media attention and the heightened attentiveness of politicians. This is what, in our view, explains the broad engagement of groups in generating election policy priority documents (see discussion in the next section), even where the prospects of these having any impact seem very slim indeed. Again, the findings of our survey of Australian interest groups underline the precarious nature of group survival, with 50 per cent of all groups indicating that they are likely to face a threat to their survival in the next five years. This high level of mortality anxiety underlines the importance of basic survival for groups.

## Election manifestos and policy ‘asks’

While the activities of groups in the context of elections are not a key traditional focus of the group literature, we find that many groups do seek to engage in election campaigns to further their policy goals, and adopt a range of strategies to do so. In this section, we focus in on what is, by our estimation, the most usual form of engagement by Australian interest groups in contemporary national election campaigns: the written *policy priorities* document. These documents list policy reforms sought by the interest group. The priorities are often in a short (or dot point) form and then expanded. Our research on these documents found that all election priority documents were in PDF format and typically available on the interest group’s website. The length of the document was anything between one and 80 pages. The typical title would be ‘Publication Title: Election Statement/Policy Priorities [year]’. For our purposes, we call these documents ‘election policy priorities’ documents. Of course, in practice, the groups called the documents various names. Examples include ‘key election issues’ (issued by the Australian Psychological Association in 2013), ‘reform priorities for the next Australian Government’ (issued by

the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry in 2013) and ‘election year policy scorecard’ (issued by the Australian Mines and Metals Association Inc. in 2016).

There is considerable variation in how, and the extent to which, groups utilise these election manifestos, as we clarify in the illustrations below:

- The case of the RSPCA is perhaps indicative of many well-resourced groups. They developed a glossy policy priorities document, which outlines key aims. The policy priorities that the RSPCA made include specific requests related to funding certain policy programs, initiating particular action plans or specific policy positions. The policy documents are routinely sent to the parties during the early weeks of the campaign.
- Many groups combine this policy priorities document with additional strategies, including requesting parties respond to questions—to produce what is generally referred to as a ‘report card’. This practice is probably more consistent with the professionalised core of the group system, but provides a good sense of how elections can be engaged with by groups.
- Of course, those groups that have been defunded—or for whom government service delivery contracts constitute a key source of financing—are unlikely to engage directly or visibly in the election campaign (or in public lobbying more generally).

How big are the policy ‘asks’ within the policy priorities documents? Not all ‘asks’ are equal. Some ‘asks’ are specific in nature and easy to implement: they are ready-made for action. For example, ‘the government will create a task force’, or the ‘creation of a fund for ...’. Others are motherhood statements, for example, urging government to introduce tax reform. The former are actionable items that a party could announce within the confines of a campaign, the latter are strategic changes that take time and cannot be accommodated within a campaign. Others vary with respect to ambition; some are items that are soft or low-hanging fruit that will not be contentious, while others are challenging ‘asks’ that will potentially cause parties some discomfort.

In reality, the likelihood of actually having the government shift position or make specific announcements during a campaign as a response to these documents is limited. Instead, it is most likely that they represent a public statement (or signal of positions) that—ideally—have been fed

into the policy formation positions of parties in the nine to 12 months prior to the election, or else are the first signal of what the groups will be seeking to progress as future critical junctures emerge—such as pre-Budget submissions and statutory reviews of legislation—which allow groups a chance to pursue change.

The example of the ‘backpacker tax’ is instructive. Rural, farming and tourist interests voiced concern that the removal of the tax-free threshold for earnings by workers on tourist visas would adversely affect the labour market in these sectors. While this was flagged prior to the Budget, and the views of these groups were well known and publicised, the context of an election campaign enabled such interests to renew their efforts. The government pledged to reverse the decision, albeit for six months. The point here is twofold. First, governments do change pledges during campaigns. Second, while groups like the NFF got what they wanted in this case—it was one of the groups opposing the tax—it failed to get traction with many other issues it championed (it had formulated over 35 priorities, most of which have been ignored).

Another question involves the extent to which these policy asks are useful in cluttered election campaigns. While it is easy to point to a handful of cases where group electioneering has garnered media and public attention, the limited evidence we provide suggests that these are not evenly spread. In fact, we can surmise that the modal group in Australia probably presents a set of policy ‘asks’—by way of a document and press release—that has little hope of cutting through the media cycle’s laser focus on a handful of issues at a time. As referred to in the chapter on Indigenous policy (see Perche, Chapter 27, this volume), the National Congress of Australia’s First People was not able to get its Redfern Statement noticed; doubly surprising given the proximity to a referendum on constitutional recognition of Indigenous persons. By contrast, the issue of marriage equality dominated a great deal of the campaign, with both sides of the debate—perhaps best captured by the Australian Christian Lobby and Australian Marriage Equality—managing to attract political and media attention to the issue. In response, Labor proposed a parliamentary vote on the issue if elected, while the Coalition retained the position established by former leader Tony Abbott to hold a plebiscite (see Williams and Sawer, Chapter 28, this volume). Of course, even when attention is garnered, it is easy for politicians to park issues until after the election is over. For instance, the concern over the sustainability of the Australian

dairy industry gained high media attention, and quick responses by supermarkets to defend their cheap milk marketing campaigns, but only promises of future possible dairy industry assistance plans.

While we can highlight cases of success, focusing on the dependent variable in relation to influence can generate misleading conclusions, as it would omit the multiple cases where the actions of groups result in limited or no reaction from policymakers.

## Conclusion

The interest group system in Australia is vast (Fraussen and Halpin 2015), which renders attempts to generalise in the absence of systematic data difficult. Instead, what we have offered here are some useful illustrations as to the variety of ways that groups involve themselves in election campaigns. We used the 2016 campaign as a canvas.

In this regard, we put forward a framework that highlights three different objectives that interest groups might aim to achieve through their activities over the election period: shaping the election outcome; shaping the policy agenda of the next government; and considerations related to organisational maintenance and survival. While we have not provided a systematic analysis, the illustrative examples provided here suggest that only a few well-known and resourceful groups possess the resources and capabilities to affect election outcomes—for instance, through campaigns in marginal seats. For them, elections really do provide important junctures to substantively shape policy.

For the majority of groups, the stakes are probably much lower. At best, they might be able to generate more attention for the issues that they prioritise (and in the long run possibly shape the agenda of the next government). This appears more likely where these topics align with the policy priorities that parties pursue during the campaign. Much of the election activity of groups is probably best understood from considerations related to organisational maintenance. Members and supporters expect the group they support to be active and visible during this period, even though the chances of shaping the agenda (let alone policy outcomes) are rather limited.

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# 18

## GetUp! in Election 2016

Ariadne Vromen

GetUp! is a unique political organisation in Australian politics. Since their formation in mid-2005, they have accrued over 1 million members and fundraise about \$8 million annually in donations from mostly small donors. From the 2010 Australian election onwards, their high level of declared third-party political expenditure to the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) has placed them among an influential group of traditional Australian interest group organisations of business and unions (see Vromen and Coleman 2011). In 2016, they had their most successful election campaign so far, both in terms of member mobilisation and political impact. Yet, they do not construct themselves as just another insider-oriented interest group, but as a mass movement intent on progressive mass mobilisation. Their networked approach to online campaigning uses distinctive rapid response, repertoire switching. Members can pick and choose which campaigns they are active on, and some campaigns have been much more successful than others, ranging from issues such as electoral enrolment reform, abortion law reform, mental health policy, refugee rights, marriage equality, climate change, carbon tax, renewable energy, coal seam gas, higher education fees, Medicare charges and so on. They have also run dedicated national election campaigns in 2007, 2010, 2013, as well as several State election campaigns including the most recent elections in Victoria (VIC) and Queensland (QLD). However, the strategic approach GetUp! took in the 2016 election was a departure from

their previous election campaigns and risky. The risk-taking strategy that targeted right-wing Coalition politicians and relied heavily on the use of Facebook seemed to work.

GetUp! has always claimed to be a progressive, social movement-oriented organisation, and was established purposefully in 2005 by young activists Jeremy Heimans, David Madden and Amanda Tattersall as a counterpoint to the Liberal–National Coalition government’s majorities in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Since 2005, it has grown in size and political influence, and also been (unsuccessfully) referred to the AEC several times for acting as an associated entity of the Labor Party. Correspondingly, it has also been accused of being an arm of the Australian Greens when its policy scorecards handed out on successive election days favoured their policy agenda (Milne 2010). It is simplistic to interpret or analyse GetUp!, a third-party organisation, in partisan terms. Yet, as shall be shown below, they generate most attention when they are involved in more traditional forms of electoral campaigning, than when they campaign on their broader post-material issue-driven agenda. This tension and reconciliation between their political and movement mobilisation role, and subsequent political and social influence, is explored and reflected on in the 2016 election context.

GetUp!’s pioneering of digital tactics for participation has also been important in Australia. They have routinised the use of online petitions and mass email sending (see Sheppard 2015), introduced microdonation fundraising to political campaign work inspired by the 2008 and 2012 Obama campaigns in the USA, and have used Facebook to communicate core messages and drive interaction and mobilisation. Yet, it is not only the novel digital campaigning tactics that GetUp! uses that makes them distinct among Australian political organisations. It is also their commitment to a theory of change strategy with its use of storytelling that has had a significant influence on established and emerging political organisations in Australia. A core part of the GetUp! effect has been to focus on shaping and changing political narratives through novel communications and personalised conversations (see Vromen 2017). Using new data from interviews and social media analysis, this chapter outlines GetUp!’s 2016 election campaign through a focus on their policy agenda, their political strategy and campaign tactics, particularly their use of Facebook and videos, as well as their use of phone banks and local

actions. It also discusses the media attention they generated, and ongoing political debates, as well as surmising their effectiveness and their future as a significant political organisation in Australia.

## Election policy agenda

GetUp! as a campaigning organisation is structured around three campaign areas: climate change, economic fairness and human rights. They regularly survey their membership to identify and prioritise which issues and policy debates within these three areas they ought to focus their campaign work on. Early in 2016, they identified the following four campaign priorities for the 2016 election:

1. climate change and renewables
2. hard-right politicians
3. multinational tax
4. healthcare and hospitals.

This agenda emerged from a number of previous campaigns and events. Climate change is routinely the most important issue identified by their membership in GetUp!'s pre-election Vision survey. GetUp! had originally planned their campaign around 2016 being the 'climate election'. They had found in general Facebook analytics that climate change was also popular and topical with their base. GetUp! was also committed to including economic fairness, predominantly hospitals (rather than Medicare) as a main focus. Very little of their pre-election campaign planning focused on their high-profile campaign on human rights issues that included refugees, detention centres and same-sex marriage. During the campaign itself, they found that some climate issues broke through, such as the Great Barrier Reef and renewables, but not significantly, and their election campaign strategy became much more tightly focused on the other three areas, especially on local issues in conservative electorates.

The choice to construct a campaign storyline around the 'hard-right' section of the federal government had its roots in both the prime ministership of Tony Abbott, including his failed austerity Budget in 2014, and the change in prime minister to the more moderate Malcolm Turnbull. During the January 2015 Queensland State election, GetUp! had already successfully campaigned against conservative national policy

agendas on climate change and economic issues, yet when Turnbull was made leader of the Coalition, GetUp!'s membership wanted the organisation to find conciliatory ways to work with the new leadership group for progressive policy change. From this there emerged a different storyline, where Turnbull was being held to account for undue influence by the conservative arm, the 'hard-right' of the government, who were discursively represented as maintaining disproportionate power over the government's policy agenda. This was a significant shift in GetUp!'s narrative approach to adversarial politics via the focus on individual MPs that members loved to hate; hard-right MPs were constructed as roadblocks and local campaign plans were made to unseat them. The other two policy areas, of underspending on core resources such as hospitals and tax avoidance by the most powerful multinational corporations, were woven into this story of out-of-touch politicians beholden to conservative interests. The campaign messaging and subsequent strategy revolved around 'put the Coalition last' on election day.

## Strategy and campaign priorities

GetUp!'s political strategy is analysed here in terms of the policy agendas, and their hybrid political tactics of hyper-local campaign work coupled with digital communications, centred on Facebook and video production. GetUp! articulated their election policy agenda as an extension of their interests in creating a progressive Australian policy context, and as responsive to their members' concerns. There is a long history of both progressive and conservative single-issue advocacy organisations using Australian elections to rate and compare party policies on relevant issues. This includes organisations as diverse as the Australian Christian Lobby, the Australian Conservation Foundation and the Women's Electoral Lobby (Sawer, Abjorensen and Larkin 2009).

GetUp! published a comparative party policy survey related to three of their campaign areas:

1. climate change, renewables and the Great Barrier Reef (along nine policy issues)
2. hospitals and Medicare (four issues)
3. political donations (three issues).

GetUp! used a similar policy evaluation process to that used during the 2016 election for online voter advice applications such as the ABC's Vote Compass and Fairfax's Your Vote. That is, parties were rated as being for, against or uncommitted on each policy issue based on their published policy and election campaign statements, as well as a follow-up survey where parties had the right of reply to how they had been rated. GetUp! compared 10 parties, but the four more conservative parties did not respond to GetUp! via their post-rating survey. They then used this policy evaluation data to inform their local seat and Senate with how-to-vote materials. Figure 18.1 is GetUp's comparison of the parties on four core issues to do with health policy, especially hospitals, Medicare and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. It shows that the two government parties were not rated as likely to change policy, while most other parties were.

While traditionally most of GetUp!'s research and policy analysis for their campaigns is undertaken in-house by their campaigning staff, their economic fairness campaign team commissioned an academic research report on multinational tax avoidance that was released just before the federal government's May 2016 Budget. The main findings were about technology and pharmaceutical companies taking their profits offshore and minimising their tax in Australia (McClure, Lanis and Govendir 2016). The report was completed by accounting academics from the University of Technology Sydney and is densely written and technical, thus unlikely to be read closely by GetUp! activists or supporters. It did, however, receive extensive legacy media coverage in both broadsheet newspapers and public broadcasting (e.g. Aston 2016).<sup>1</sup> GetUp! followed up the report launch with the production and dissemination of two 30-second television ads (Christensen 2016) that focused on how missing taxes from large corporations led to a diminution of public services, such as schools and hospitals. As will be shown below, this topic had high salience among GetUp!'s engaged supporters on Facebook.

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1 Legacy media is used here to refer to traditional and well-established newspaper and broadcast media brands, as opposed to new, born-digital media brands.





## Hybrid interdependency between local campaigning and digital technologies

However, focusing on only GetUp!'s policy agenda, lobbying and media work misunderstands the premise of the organisation. GetUp! is best analysed and understood as a hybrid campaigning organisation: it uses both insider- and outsider-oriented interest group strategies and tactics for engaging political elites, its membership and the mass public. It is also hybrid in that it simultaneously uses both offline, on-the-ground fieldwork—which in this campaign they referred to as their 'hyper-local campaigning' work—with digital tactics.<sup>2</sup> Increasingly, all kinds of political organisations find it necessary to run both fieldwork and digital campaigns, yet GetUp! is part of a small group of 'born-digital' organisations that have reframed their approach to all dimensions of campaigning, including membership, fundraising and tactics. This distinction between traditional political organisation and hybrid campaigning organisations is often purposefully ignored in political and media debate as traditional organisations, such as political parties and legacy media, still set the agenda. For example, GetUp!'s campaign was praised in the conservative legacy media for transcending their digital work to undertake targeted fieldwork: 'under boss Paul Oosting GetUp! has moved from an outpost of generic online grievances into carefully targeted countryside campaigns' (Albrechtsen 2016). This summation misunderstands both the narrative-based campaigning work they do and how their campaign work is still primarily built on digital forms of political engagement and organising.

GetUp! has pioneered the use of digital tools for campaigning in Australia, starting from mass emails and online petitioning over 10 years ago, to the use of campaigning system software like NationBuilder, and recently leading the way in using Facebook in a targeted way. David Karpf (2017) points out that online campaigning organisations share a culture of digital testing and listening that means a constant monitoring of an array of data collected from social media engagement rates, member response to calls to action in emails, to profiling volunteers and activists. He argues that a 'culture of testing creates feedback loops that help analytic activists learn, innovate, adapt, and evolve within a fast-changing hybrid media

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2 On the growth of this kind of political phenomena, see Chadwick (2013); Chadwick and Dennis (2016); Karpf (2012, 2017); Vromen (2017).

system' (ibid.: 2). In addition to public-facing social media, GetUp! used the following powerful campaigning tools and databases to organise, test and listen for their digital and local fieldwork campaigns:

- NationBuilder: a content management system that links data on members, social media and fundraising.
- Tijuana: a highly secure central system of record, storing tens of millions of online actions, including raising more than \$30 million for GetUp!'s campaigns.
- ControlShift: a campaigning tool that hosts local efforts of national GetUp! campaigns and trains new recruits in how to run and win local campaigns.
- Turf or Walk List: a purpose-built tool that allows volunteers to generate maps of more than 60,000 specially selected blocks across Australia (Smith and Redrup 2016).

## GetUp!'s 'hyper-local' campaigning

The main part of GetUp!'s campaign was the discursive and strategic focus on 20 lower house electorates with 'hard-right' members of parliament. In the end, eight of these electorates voted out their conservative MP; several others received a swing against them of up to 5–6 per cent, thus more than the general 3.5 per cent swing against the Coalition in the election (see Raue, Chapter 7, this volume). GetUp! ran field operations using local organising tactics in four electorates: Bass (Tasmania (TAS)), New England (NSW), Dixon (QLD) and Dawson (QLD). They also moved in and out of other local electorates when opportunities arose. Called 'hyper-local' campaigning, this strategy was coordinated via GetUp!'s Sydney office with a paid lead organiser and organising teams in each electorate focusing on locally identified issues, especially local hospitals. Using a strategy that was different from previous campaigns, the 2016 election was mainly focused on lower house seats, and not to any large extent on the Senate, as voting was judged harder to influence in the more volatile double-dissolution context. However, late in the campaign, GetUp! sent text messages to south-eastern Queensland voters about the risks of Pauline Hanson and One Nation.

The most time-intensive and expensive part of GetUp!'s campaign was organising phone banking by 3,700 GetUp! members and volunteers to have scripted, persuasive conversations with over 40,000 voters in marginal seats (GetUp! 2016b). Despite original plans, door knocking was not used extensively as it was considered too resource intensive; other local tactics used included community stalls, leaflet drops, paid billboard and cinema advertising. In addition, petitions on local services were delivered and how-to-vote cards were distributed on election day. In 2016, very little television advertising was used as it was too expensive and untargeted in contrast with paid Facebook advertising. The exceptions were a few ads on Sky News, and in local television stations in Launceston and New England. On election day itself, 3,020 GetUp! members handed out 1.1 million how-to-vote cards across 500 polling booths in marginal seats (GetUp! 2016b). The use of how-to-vote cards was a first for GetUp!. In the 2007, 2010 and 2013 elections, they devised scorecards that compared the parties contesting the election on GetUp!'s main campaign issues. In 2016, in line with their shift towards focusing on conservative MPs and electorates, they designed how-to-vote cards that distributed preferences to a range of progressive parties but purposefully asked voters to 'put the Liberals last' (Karp 2016). Each targeted electorate had tailored how-to-vote cards highlighting a major local campaign issue. Figure 18.2 from the South Australian electorate of Mayo, which the sitting Liberal MP Jamie Briggs lost, focuses on hospital funding.

While the main indicators of campaign success were the reach of their materials and messages, as well as seats either changing hands or a reduced vote share for targeted MPs, GetUp! also commissioned polling in several of their targeted seats and found that there was increased recognition of who GetUp! was after the election, and what they stood for.

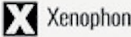
**LOWER HOUSE: MAYO**

# VOTE TO SAVE OUR HOSPITALS

THE LIBERALS WILL CUT \$54 BILLION FROM HOSPITALS OVER THE NEXT DECADE.

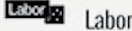
Doctors warn that Coalition health cuts will lead to more deaths in emergency and see you pay more for visits to your GP<sup>1,2</sup>. Below are parties committed to fully restoring hospital funding to 2020 and unfreezing the Medicare rebate.

**Here are parties committed to protecting Medicare and fully restoring hospital funding to 2020**




**BALLOT PAPER  
DIVISION OF MAYO**

- 3 DALLIMORE, Glen  
AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY
- 1 SHARKIE, Rebekha  
NICK KENOPHON TEAM
- 4 DZIVINSKI, Luke  
LIBERAL DEMOCRATS
- 2 DANIELL, Nathan  
THE GREENS
- 5 BRIGGS, Jamie  
LIBERAL
- 6 HICKS, Bruce  
FAMILY FIRST



**BALLOT PAPER  
DIVISION OF MAYO**

- 1 DALLIMORE, Glen  
AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY
- 2 SHARKIE, Rebekha  
NICK KENOPHON TEAM
- 4 DZIVINSKI, Luke  
LIBERAL DEMOCRATS
- 3 DANIELL, Nathan  
THE GREENS
- 5 BRIGGS, Jamie  
LIBERAL
- 6 HICKS, Bruce  
FAMILY FIRST



**BALLOT PAPER  
DIVISION OF MAYO**

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LIBERAL DEMOCRATS
- 1 DANIELL, Nathan  
THE GREENS
- 5 BRIGGS, Jamie  
LIBERAL
- 6 HICKS, Bruce  
FAMILY FIRST

<sup>1</sup> Funding cuts undermining public hospital emergency department targets', Australian Medical Association, 2016  
<sup>2</sup> 'Your Medicare rebates have been frozen - fast facts', Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, 2016

GetUp! is a campaigning community of over one million Australians working towards a fair, thriving and just Australia led by the values and hopes of everyday people. To determine who appears on this how to vote card, parties and candidates in contention were researched and surveyed for their position on thirty three policy areas. For more information and the full results of the survey go to: [getup.org.au/vote](http://getup.org.au/vote)


Remember to number every box in the lower house. Authorised by Paul Oosting, 14/338 Pitt St, Sydney 2000 

Figure 18.2. GetUp! – How to vote in Mayo

Source. GetUp! (2016a), used with permission.

## Digital campaigning: Election videos

The use of well-designed, easily shareable videos to launch or promote campaigns has been a stable part of GetUp!'s repertoire since early in their history. Kjerstin Thorson and her colleagues (2013: 425) noted the increased production and circulation of videos by social movement actors being used to promote a shared collective identity, share information and promote a particular movement trajectory. GetUp! uses short videos for all of these movement meaning-making reasons but, as is apt for a hybrid actor, also to capture news and policymakers' attention, especially by crowd-funding particular videos to become television advertisements. Video production and sharing came of age during the 2010 federal election campaign when GetUp! published eight videos on YouTube that received a total 549,000 views. This was a significant number of views for a small number of videos. In comparison, there were only 256,000 total views for the Australian Labor Party incumbent government's 59 videos (Chen 2012). In 2010, GetUp! took one video that targeted the Opposition Leader Tony Abbott's conservatism to prime time commercial television spots, this was also partially funded by the large \$1 million donation from the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (Vromen and Coleman 2011). In the 2016 election campaign period, GetUp! published 23 videos on their dedicated YouTube page that received a total of only 167,000 views. Four videos had over 15,000 views: three on multinational corporations' tax avoidance, and one on youth electoral enrolment. Clearly, YouTube has diminished as a novel and distinct site for member and voter engagement. GetUp! supporters were more likely to be watching videos shared via Facebook, as highlighted below. GetUp! claim that their election-made videos were watched 5.25 million times (GetUp! 2016b: 17), but there is little detailing of how they were accessed across social media platforms and television.

## Digital campaigning: Facebook

As noted earlier, the 2016 election was not 'the climate change election' for GetUp!. Instead, it was actually 'the Facebook election'. GetUp!'s extensive use of Facebook, both via content on their own Facebook page, as well as the extensive use of paid and targeted Facebook advertising, was a powerful tool throughout the campaign. GetUp! claimed that their use of these digital marketing techniques was inspired by the hybrid digital campaigns

run by Bernie Sanders in the US and Justin Trudeau in Canada (GetUp! 2016b). The Facebook platform itself is seldom analysed as a campaigning and mobilising tool used by advocacy organisations. In the recent digital politics and movements literature, there is an over-reliance on platforms that are mainly public facing and where the application programming interface can be accessed to create more complete datasets; thus, a focus on Twitter and distributed petitioning sites. Yet, most ordinary citizens are still much more likely to use Facebook, and various studies consistently show that it is the leading social media platform for accessing everyday information on news and politics (Reuters Institute 2015; Vromen et al. 2016). It is possible, however, to focus on public or community Facebook pages (see e.g. Larsson 2016). GetUp! has around 400,000 followers on its Facebook page, and the organisation has deliberately tried to increase this community over time, with many of their campaigners involved as interactive participants in Facebook-based conversations and subsequent calls to action (see Vromen 2017).

During the election campaign, GetUp! created 274 Facebook posts on their public page from their campaign launch post on 14 April until a post on the final Senate election outcome on 11 August. They referred to this campaign work as their ‘organic’ use of Facebook. I collected these public posts into a database using Netvizz software and subsequently coded and analysed the posts with the highest levels of engagement from GetUp!’s Facebook community.

Of these 274 posts:

- 38 per cent were an ordinary status update with a photo or meme
- 33 per cent of posts had a GetUp!-created short 30–40 second video as the post, and another 7 per cent had an animated gif in the post
- 20 per cent of posts linked to articles in online legacy media, mostly either the *Guardian* or Fairfax newspapers (the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Age* or the *Canberra Times*).

Facebook use by political organisations needs to drive supporter engagement, and the creation of shareable memes, infographics and short videos is core to how GetUp! approaches it. Facebook, like Instagram and Snapchat, is now more a visual than text-based medium, though commenting affordances make it more interactive. It is also notable that one in five GetUp! posts was a link to a new article in left-of-centre media, generally reinforcing the post’s point. This count may have been higher

as GetUp! often used the first comment after the main post/status update to post a link to a news article about the topic being discussed (I did not manually code these instances). Yet, it is the level of engagement with a post that drives the use of Facebook to help GetUp! spread their political messages and get supporters involved in their campaigning work. I found that:

- 10 per cent of posts had over 10,000 people engage with them (engagement comprises the sum of likes/reactions, shares and comments on a post), with an average of 4,571 people engaging with any election post.
- There was a total 378,000 shares and 656,000 likes for GetUp!'s 274 Facebook posts. This is more engagement than the major parties were receiving on Facebook: the ALP received 312,000 shares, the Liberal Party 119,000 and the Greens 102,000 (Smith and Redrup 2016).

Data on actual reach (the number of people who saw the post) is not available through Netvizz, but even if a simple estimate of reach is applied, the election led to substantial Facebook engagement for GetUp!. That is, the average post with 4,571 publicly visible engagements (likes/shares/comments) could have 200 friends view it (the median number of Facebook friends a user has, see Smith 2014) leading to nearly a further million views, and this does not even include the original 400,000 GetUp! Facebook supporters who may have viewed but not publicly engaged with a post.

Table 18.1 summarises my analysis of the top 24 Facebook posts that had over 10,000 individual engagements, listed in chronological order of appearance during the election campaign. First, the majority of these posts had original GetUp! video content. While most of their campaign issues are represented in this list, it was clearly the focus on hard-right politicians that attracted consistently high levels of supporter engagement, closely followed by multinational corporations (MNCs) and tax avoidance. Only nine of 24 posts contained an 'ask' or 'call to action' for followers (usually in the first comment on the post). GetUp! told me about the high success of their calls for donations for advertising, and to the campaign generally, on the back of their hard-right politicians campaign, especially that which centred on the member for Dickson and Immigration Minister, Peter Dutton. For example, they raised \$200,000 quickly to run an advertisement focusing on Dutton, \$40,000 of which was directly from Facebook.

**Table 18.1. Getup!’s 2016 Facebook posts with over 10,000 engagements, April–July 2016**

Election topic	Date (2016)	Video Views	Engagement	Ask
Innovation	18 April	241,000	11,642	n/a
MNCs	26 April	648,000	23,605	vote on ad for tv
Health	9 May	n/a	11,586	share cuts map
Climate change	15 May	n/a	10,960	n/a
Hard-right politicians	18 May	n/a	22,544	n/a
Hard-right politicians	19 May	1,200,000	39,828	donation
Hard-right politicians	20 May	n/a	13,037	donation
Health	23 May	313,000	10,385	n/a
Indigenous human rights	26 May	n/a	29,837	n/a
Climate change	27 May	n/a	17,262	n/a
MNCs	30 May	255,000	10,945	n/a
Hard-right politicians	10 June	n/a	10,746	n/a
Barrier reef	10 June	n/a	13,808	n/a
Health	14 June	486,000	12,059	n/a
Economic fairness	15 June	470,000	17,578	n/a
Hard-right politicians	16 June	235,000	10,809	donation
Climate change	18 June	n/a	16,964	election rally
Climate change	20 June	247,000	12,906	donation
Climate change	21 June	310,000	13,777	donation
Senate vote	28 June	547,000	10,615	Senate vote
MNCs	29 June	848,000	25,236	n/a
Hard-right politicians	4 July	n/a	10,257	n/a
Hard-right politicians	6 July	n/a	15,087	n/a
Health	8 July	n/a	17,301	n/a

Source. Compiled by author from content analysis of GetUp! Australia’s Facebook Page.

I also analysed these top posts to better understand what kinds of engagements were contributing to their success within the GetUp! Facebook public page. Table 18.2 lists the top posts from the highest number of shares to the lowest and compares the proportion of engagement—that is, shares with comments. Here it is clearer that the most shareable content came from GetUp!’s economic fairness campaign on MNCs, health and hospitals, and the economy generally; with their



climate change campaign also featuring. Claims are made of the potential for Facebook to move beyond being a substitute media and broadcast-only site to produce political conversation and interaction. Yet, as can be seen here, only a small proportion of the overall engagement is actually comments being made. There was an average of 300 comments per post for all 254 election posts, and an average of 790 comments for the subset of the 24 most popular posts; with two hard-right politicians' posts focused on Peter Dutton posted in mid-May attracting the most debate (around 2,200 comments). This suggests that the successful political use of Facebook is multifaceted: sharing and liking are important as they promote core messages and ideas into a larger networked community; whereas commenting and active debate within the GetUp! community provides incentives for mobilisation, particularly fundraising and donations for campaign work.

Table 18.2. Facebook election posts with highest engagement – shares and comments

Issue	Date (2016)	Shares (%)	Comments (%)
MNCs	29 June	71	2
MNCs	26 April	64	2
Health	23 May	59	3
Economic fairness	15 June	54	4
Climate change	27 May	53	4
Senate vote	28 June	50	4
Health	8 July	45	5
Health	9 May	44	3
Climate change	21 June	44	5
MNCs	30 May	37	3
Hard-right politicians	16 June	37	4
Climate change	20 June	35	4
Indigenous human rights	26 May	32	4
Hard-right politicians	19 May	30	5
Hard-right politicians	20 May	30	6
Hard-right politicians	10 June	27	12
Barrier reef	10 June	24	5
Health	14 June	22	5
Innovation	18 April	22	5
Climate change	15 May	22	3

Issue	Date (2016)	Shares (%)	Comments (%)
Hard-right politicians	18 May	22	10
Hard-right politicians	6 July	17	8
Climate change	18 June	9	3
Hard-right politicians	4 July	7	11

Source. Compiled by author from content analysis of GetUp! Australia's Facebook Page.

Yet, focusing on posts on GetUp!'s public Facebook page alone is only part of why this was considered 'the Facebook election' for GetUp!. Over 1,400 pieces of content, which included Facebook information posts and short videos, were paid for and shared by GetUp! over the election campaign, and were targeted at 29 of Australia's most marginal lower house seats. In sum, GetUp!'s targeted digital advertising program reached 830,000 voters in these electorates (GetUp! 2016b). Most of these posts appeared as sponsored advertising in the Facebook newsfeeds of voters in targeted marginal electorates; several were also translated into Chinese, Arabic and Vietnamese. However, these Facebook posts are impossible to retrace through Netvizz software. I was told by GetUp! that one of their more popular posts was about Launceston Hospital funding, which was targeted at voters in the electorate of Bass in TAS. It used a specially made short video of one of the hospital's doctors talking to camera, urging voters to 'put the Liberals last'. GetUp! saw this as a wholly different audience, and crafted messages that would not necessarily resonate with their members but were aimed at swinging voters. These ads focused more on economic fairness and hospital funding in particular, and not on climate change. GetUp! paid for their ads to appear in the Facebook newsfeeds of commercial media and celebrities. This kind of personalised digital advertising as political campaigning is not sufficiently understood and analysed in either the Australian political context, or in the burgeoning international research literature.

## Media attention to GetUp! during and after the campaign

Thus far I have argued that GetUp!'s novel use of digital and hyper-local campaigning for member and supporter mobilisation, and message sharing, contributed to a successful 2016 election campaign. However, political and legacy media attention also matter to cement their ongoing place as an influential Australian interest group. In their own campaign

analysis, GetUp! discursively utilised legacy media attention and, pointedly, complaints about GetUp!'s tactics from targeted Liberal Party politicians such as Andrew Nikolic as evidence of their success (GetUp! 2016b). I analysed 42 news media articles where GetUp! was mentioned in the headline or lead paragraph, collected via the global news database Factiva, and published in major Australian news publications, with the addition of articles published online on *ABC News* and in the Australian edition of the *Guardian*. Most were published after 2 July, election day 2016, and 25 of the 42 articles (60 per cent) were published in News Corp newspapers, 14 in the *Australian* alone. Many of these went beyond news reporting and were negative about GetUp!'s campaign. In 2010, I analysed 150 articles on GetUp!'s election campaign, 115 of which were primarily focused on GetUp!. This is a significant decrease in legacy media attention for their election campaign work, and I argued that the notable decline in attention from a high point in 2010–12 was due to their novelty having worn off, and evidence of their mainstreaming as a core interest group in Australia (Vromen 2017: 106).

The 42 articles were published between GetUp!'s campaign launch event in Sydney on 30 April and late October. Overall, 65 per cent of the 2016 articles were neutral or positive, but a sizeable third were negative. In analysis of GetUp!'s 2010 election campaign, we found that only 10 per cent were negative, and 76 per cent did not label the political stance of the organisation (Vromen and Coleman 2011). The increased negative reporting from News Corp is well recognised by GetUp!, and it only actively concerns them when newspapers such as the *Australian* agenda set for other media, such as the ABC. While significant campaigning energy is spent on social media, GetUp! also employs a media relations expert who sends out daily media releases and cultivates networked relationships with sympathetic journalists. This is an acknowledgement of both the need to receive positive stories in the legacy media that their members access, such as the ABC, but it is also cognisance of the fact that when campaigns and issues reach the legacy media it also draws the attention of political elites. In 2016, the vast majority (70 per cent) of articles labelled GetUp! as either left-leaning or progressive, with another 20 per cent linking them with the Labor Party. I also coded the label used in each article to place GetUp! as a political organisation: 52 per cent labelled them as an activist group and 31 per cent as lobbyists or advocates. Negative articles were much more likely to call them an 'activist group', which was used pejoratively to frame GetUp! as less legitimate within the electoral campaign context. Further, all positive newspaper articles

quoted either Paul Oosting, GetUp!'s National Director, or another core campaigner directly; whereas half of the negative articles did not quote anyone from GetUp!.

Table 18.3 shows which election campaign issues were mentioned: 43 per cent mentioned the campaign against hard-right politicians, and the second-largest category was commentary or mention of GetUp!'s general approach to the election campaign. The other campaign issues of health and Medicare, the Great Barrier Reef, renewables and climate change, and tax paid by MNCs received much less attention. This was similar to 2010 when the media largely focused on GetUp!'s most traditional campaign issue and action: successfully taking a case to the High Court over voter enrolment (Vromen and Coleman 2011). The contrast in framing and reception of campaign issues on Facebook versus legacy media is illustrative of the importance of analysis of the hybrid media and information-sharing systems that voters now use.

Table 18.3. Reportage of election campaign issues

Campaign issue	Percentage of 42 articles
Hard-right politicians	34
Barrier reef/Climate change	10
Hard-right politicians <i>and</i> reef or climate	9
General campaign	21
Health	7
Multinationals tax	7
Other	7

Source. Compiled by author using content analysis of articles from Factiva database.

Table 18.4 shows what kind of campaign tactics were discussed in the set of articles. Similarly, the more traditional actions of handing out how-to-vote cards on election day at polling booths, donating and raising money and, to a smaller extent, door knocking are those most likely to be highlighted by the media. Much less attention is given to the crowd-sourced actions that, over its 11-year history, have come to distinguish GetUp!: online petitioning, social media campaigning and local actions and stunts, including purchasing billboards and television advertising. Even more important is that the most time- and labour-intensive tactic that GetUp! used in 2016 was phone banking and persuasive conversations with undecided voters, but this is barely recognised by the media reportage.

Table 18.4. Reportage of election campaign tactics

Tactic	Percentage of 42 articles*
Election-day actions	29
Donating and raising money	26
Door knocking/conversations	17
Advertising or billboards	14
Online petitions and social media	10
Phone calls	8
Local actions	7

\*Adds to more than 100 per cent as articles are counted more than once if more than one tactic was mentioned

Source. Compiled by author using content analysis of articles from Factiva database.

## Conclusion

GetUp! fundraised and spent at least \$3 million during the 2016 election campaign. This is a significant amount for a mid-sized third-party organisation, but is less than the Australian Council of Trade Unions who were estimated to have fundraised between \$10–20 million for their election campaign (Bramston 2016; Peetz, Chapter 23, this volume). GetUp! also spent less on television or newspaper advertising than in previous elections, instead focusing on the combination of phone banking, Facebook campaigning and advertising and hyper-local campaigning work. The ‘Facebook election’ campaign and subsequent success for GetUp! were important watershed moments, suggesting that comprehensive digital strategies will remain important campaign terrain for other Australian political actors in the future. Indeed, many of the in-depth legacy media articles written about GetUp! after the election praised their tactics and urged others from all sides of politics to emulate them. This included Cory Bernardi’s call for a conservative version of GetUp! to revive his earlier attempt at starting CanDo after the 2010 election, and leaders within business lobbying organisations, such as the Business Council of Australia, suggesting they had much to learn (Ryan 2016). Yet, GetUp!’s (2016b) assessment of their campaign success in terms of mobilisation and campaigning analytics also needs further unpacking. Are these just ‘vanity metrics’ (Karpf 2017: 131), rather than real indicators

of campaign success and political change? Karpf suggests that we need to think more about what the new data analytics turn means, and whether it leads to sustainable political organisation and citizen politicisation:

The simplest online interactions tend to be the ones that are most amenable to analytics. Tracking clicks and shares is easy. Tracking conversations is a bit trickier. Tracking online-to-offline participation is still quite hard. Tracking impacts on elite decision makers is nearly impossible. The more complex the task, the fewer people will engage in it and the more variables you need to simultaneously account for (ibid.: 22).

The reality of the post-election political context is also increasingly important as there has been a renewed focus on trying to use institutional mechanisms, such as donations and third-party campaigning law, to constrain GetUp!'s future involvement in election campaigns. The focus during GetUp!'s testimony to the federal Joint Standing Committee on Election Matters (JSCEM 2016) was mainly on their use of how-to-vote cards that were seen as too partisan, and questioning the transparency of their donations and funding base. This was not unexpected as GetUp! themselves released a report in time for the JSCEM hearing called *Dark Money* (Edwards 2016), which used detailed research to question political-party donations and called for more transparency. It seems that the Australian institutionalised electoral context remains 'politics as usual', and has not yet come to grips with the meaning and challenges from a new focus on hybrid campaigning underpinned by hyper-local actions and social media mobilisation and advertising.

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# 19

## Still the Main Source: The Established Media<sup>1</sup>

Andrea Carson and Brian McNair

The Australian federal election of July 2016 came at a time of ongoing turbulence and transition for the established press and broadcasting sectors—the ‘legacy’ media, as they are often described. In the period since 2013, when Wayne Errington argued that ‘mainstream media still matters’ (2015: 67), there have been more redundancies in the Fairfax, News Coporation, and ABC newsrooms. More local newspapers, such as the *Cooma Monaro Express*, have closed. New entrants to the Australian public sphere such as *The Conversation*, and local versions of global news brands such as the *Guardian*, *Huffington Post*, *Daily Mail* and *Buzzfeed* have emerged as serious competitors for the established providers such as Fairfax Media and News Corporation Australia (News Corp). And yet, as recent research has found (Watkins et al. 2015; McNair et al. 2017), mainstream broadcast and press news brands remain the main sources of news for the majority of Australians. The explosion of online sources and social media platforms has certainly influenced how the established media engage and interact with their audiences, and it is true that younger demographics are steadily moving to online platforms for their

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1 This chapter draws on research undertaken as part of the Australian Research Council–funded Discovery Project ‘Politics, Media and Democracy in Australia: Public and producer perceptions of the political public sphere’ (DP130100705). A more detailed account of the findings of that work is contained in McNair et al. (2017).

consumption of news as well as other forms of culture. But they had still not, by 2016, supplanted the older, familiar providers of journalism as the most trusted and routinely accessed sources of information, including election news and analysis. This chapter examines how the established media covered the campaign.

We find that a national election is still front-page news, occupying about half of the surveyed press front pages during the campaign. Overall, front-page priority is given to negative over positive stories—a trend long observed in political reporting in the United States and Britain. There were many more negative stories about the Australian Labor Party (ALP) than the Coalition during the campaign. While it is difficult to isolate the significance of media effects, we can identify in the media the reach and prominence of negative campaigns about Medicare (see also Manwaring, Chapter 11, this volume), asylum seekers and, more locally, the Victorian Country Fire Authority (CFA) dispute. Overall, the impact of the coverage on voters is difficult to pinpoint as different campaign messages may negate one another (as discussed by Jackman and Mansillo, Chapter 6, this volume), but priming and framing of some of these issues in the media coverage might have marginally improved the position of some conservative candidates in Victoria and Pauline Hanson's One Nation in Queensland. We find evidence for intermedia effects whereby a news outlet influences others' story selections during the election. In an internet age characterised by audience fragmentation, the 2016 election saw some established media outlets and their journalists produce innovative election reporting, using blogs, podcasts and other digital technologies to engage broader audiences using the strengths of different media platforms.

We divide the chapter into two main sections, devoted to the established press and broadcast media respectively. We discuss how these outlets covered the 2016 election, against the background of wider debates on the role and performance of the political media in Australia.

## The economic context of contemporary journalism

On 9 May 2016, the day after Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull called the election, Fairfax, Australia's second-largest newspaper publisher, announced more job cuts (Kennedy 2016). In line with the downsizing

trend, both Fairfax and its largest newspaper rival, News Corp, had cutback staff multiple times. The single largest cutback was in June 2012 when they shed almost 3,000 employees between them. This time it was 30 jobs at Fairfax but, unlike previous rounds, these were not voluntary redundancies, and the timing added unwelcome pressure on journalists during the busy period of a longer-than-usual eight-week election campaign.

Newspapers have played an important role in covering Australian elections (Simms 2002: 93). Marian Simms outlines the normative function of the news media during an election campaign: independent reporting and providing a platform for discussing issues and airing diverse opinions. Newspapers' election coverage has traditionally been worthy of particular attention because they collectively employ more journalists than other outlets, have more reporters in the federal press gallery and their stories have set the news agenda for other media. Since the late 1960s, Australian Election Study (AES) data have shown that, second only to television, most Australians get 'a good deal' of their election news from newspapers, but, as outlined below, these proportions are declining (McAllister and Cameron 2014: 6). Traditionally, Australia's print newspapers have had concentrated media ownership (Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy 2012: 60). During the 2016 election, newspaper ownership further consolidated when Seven West Media, Australia's third-largest newspaper proprietor, purchased Western Australia's *Sunday Times* masthead and *PerthNow* website from News Corp—completing the transformation of Perth as a truly one-owner newspaper town (Prestipino 2016).

The earmarked job losses in Western Australia, along with Fairfax's forced redundancies, are further indications of the disruption to Australia's news media landscape in the digital age. Further, as Peter Chen (Chapter 20, this volume) reveals, new news media entrants, including the overseas players listed earlier, have expanded Australian's political news choices. These digital media entrants, together with niche online local publications such as *TheVine*, *Crikey*, *New Matilda*, *The Mandarin*, *Inside Story* and *The Conversation*, along with round-the-clock social media and blogger commentary, have arguably diluted the political influence of the established print oligopolies.

In addition, Australia's major media companies have experienced revenue falls exacerbated by the fierce competition for advertising from these digital news alternatives, including global hegemony like Facebook and Google. This has further driven down advertising's unit price (Carson 2015: 1035). While it is true that online readership of Australia's daily newspapers is at record highs, revenues from paywalls and digital advertising have not yet matched revenues lost from hardcopy advertising necessary to sustain large newsrooms, thus explaining repeated cutbacks to their journalism resources (*ibid.*: 1038). Indeed, just weeks after the election, Fairfax wrote down its company value by \$1 billion after its annual advertising revenue fell 15 per cent (Mitchell 2016).

These shifts, from analogue to digital news and the advent of foreign-owned media colonising Australian audiences online, represent the political economic environment of Australian media companies in the twenty-first century. These changes have implications for Australia's federal election coverage as they not only have an impact on newspapers' journalistic resources, but also contribute to the increased fragmentation of its news audiences. For example, 55 per cent of AES respondents relied on printed newspapers for election coverage in 1969. By 2016, the newspaper audience of election coverage had fallen to 17 per cent, for the first time lower than the percentage of Australians using the internet (19 per cent) or radio (15 per cent) to source election news. Television more than halved its election news viewers, falling from 63 per cent (1969) to 25 per cent (Cameron and McAllister 2016: 8). Disruptions to the news media landscape and audience share raise important questions about the Australian press's capacity to cover an election campaign in the digital age and what, if any, influence that coverage has on voters.

## Media effects and undecided voters

In terms of electoral outcomes, media effects are notoriously difficult to measure. While the weight of scholarly research identifies a 'limited effect' on the media's capacity to alter voters' choices, studies also find that media effects are strongest on the least-engaged voters. These voters are the most likely to be undecided until the election campaign begins, and are potentially more open to political news coverage influencing their vote choice—even if they pay cursory attention to it (Albaek et al. 2014: 102; Denmark, Ward and Bean 2007: 90–91). Doris Graber (2001), Klaus

Schoenbach and Edmund Lauf (2002) and Shanto Iyengar et al. (2010) have found that people who are the least politically interested tend to acquire most of their information about current affairs from news media.

This is important in the context of Australia's compulsory voting system whereby most adults do vote, regardless of their political interest. Television is singled out for its capacity to reach less interested or undecided voters with election news (Bean 1986: 58; Denmark, Ward and Bean 2007: 90; Ward and Stewart 2006: 194). From these studies' findings, it follows logically that in contemporary Australian election contests, less engaged, undecided or swinging voters in marginal seats will be the key targets of political parties' media campaigns. As a proportion of the Australian electorate, these voters are estimated to be rising, to between 30 and 40 per cent of voters (McAllister 2002: 24–25; Young 2011: 88). Earlier research also suggests that undecided voters are particularly 'vulnerable to scare campaigns' (Crisp 1965: 131). Additionally, since longitudinal AES data reveal that fewer Australians receive election news from the press, we can reasonably expect that political parties will utilise all forms of paid and free news media—television, print, new entrants and social media—to try and influence undecided voters in 2016.

Media effects also speak to the power of media proprietors to influence elites and policy-making processes. Australian prime ministers have been sensitive to this power and over the years have availed themselves of opportunities to meet with media moguls, particularly News Corp's Rupert Murdoch (Moses 2007). Yet, as Rodney Tiffen (2014) reminds us, the influence of media owners can be overestimated. Murdoch has backed losing sides in politics on more than one occasion despite, at times, overtly partisan coverage in his newspapers. Tiffen concludes that it is 'impossible to quantify the impact of Murdoch's editorial positions on public opinion, let alone on election results' (*ibid.*: 120).

With the changing economic environment for media, and with research about media effects in mind, the next section specifically examines how Australia's daily metropolitan press reported the 2016 campaign. We then examine the election coverage of Australia's established broadcasters.

## How the press reported the 2016 election campaign

Over the course of the 56-day federal campaign,<sup>2</sup> a content analysis of 11 Australian daily metropolitan papers found election coverage ran as a front-page story in half of these papers (261 front pages; n=528).<sup>3</sup> This was also the case in the 2015 daily front-page newspaper coverage of the British election (Deacon and Wring 2015: 313). As with the British example, this finding masks large differences in front-page coverage between smaller and bigger capital city dailies, and the national papers.

### Front-page election story frequency

More Australian front-page election news was published in the first and final two weeks of the campaign. That the first two weeks would be a period of significant coverage is not surprising, as this is a novel phase of the campaign during which political parties unveil their strategies. Similarly, the final two weeks showcase the major parties' campaign launches, enabling them to reiterate their key promises to voters as polling day approaches.<sup>4</sup> Both parties received favourable Monday headlines after their weekend launches, indicating these are still purposeful media events and not just in-house affairs for the party faithful.

Australia's (only) two national print mastheads, the *Australian* and the *Australian Financial Review* (AFR) provided frequent front-page election coverage. News Corp's *Australian* dedicated two thirds of its front pages to election news, more than any other paper; while Fairfax's AFR committed half of its cover pages to it (see Figure 19.1). The findings are not unexpected as both national papers cater to a predominantly tertiary-

2 The analysis excludes Sunday editions because not all papers have a Sunday masthead.

3 In all, 518 pages were analysed and election coverage was identified on 261 front pages; however, there were 10 missing entries (masthead front pages). The *Canberra Times* is not included due to incomplete data gathering. However, other Fairfax daily mastheads are and, as discussed in this article, the analysis of federal political reporting from Fairfax mastheads (the *Australian Financial Review*, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age*) reveals a high degree of overlap of front-page story topics compared to News Corp's front-page mastheads. Of course, the papers published many more election stories inside their mastheads; however, for the purposes of a snapshot of what print media outlets considered to be the most important election stories worthy of being placed on their front pages, only page one stories were analysed here.

4 Launch dates were Sunday 19 June 2016 for Labor and Sunday 26 June 2016 for the Liberal Party.



educated and business-minded audience for whom federal politics matters. According to Sally Young (2011: 99), these elite publications also have a higher proportion of conservative voters.

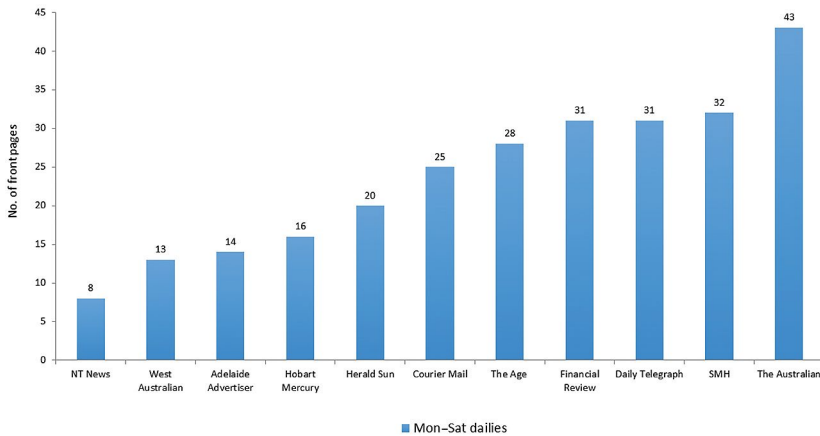


Figure 19.1. The number of front-page stories in Australia's daily mastheads' Monday to Saturday editions during the 56-day 2016 election campaign

Note.  $n=261$ .

Source. Constructed by © Carson and McNair.

Sydney's competing daily mastheads, the *Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH) and the *Daily Telegraph*, also committed more than half of their front pages to election news, followed by Melbourne's *Age* and Brisbane's *Courier-Mail*. But beyond the east coast of Australia, election coverage was infrequently on the front page; instead, their cover pages promoted local issues. This suggests elite agenda-setting and priming of election issues by political parties is made more difficult by the lack of press coverage in the less populated States. In such instances, other forms of political communication are likely to be more effective for swaying voters. The Northern Territory's (NT) *NT News*, renowned for its irreverent stories, had the fewest election stories, an average of one a week. Among local issues headlining smaller capital cities' front pages were crocodiles (*NT News*); shark attacks and the 'ice' scourge (methamphetamine) in the *West Australian*; homelessness, healthcare and domestic violence in the *Adelaide Advertiser*; and Tasmania's damaging storms in the *Hobart Mercury*.

The *Courier-Mail* gave more positive coverage to the Coalition than any other paper on its front page (see Figure 19.2). At the same time, it also gave prominent coverage to the Coalition’s electoral rival, One Nation Senate candidate Pauline Hanson, with a full front-page cover photograph of the former politician and one-time fish-and-chip shop owner with a prophetic headline: ‘Senator Hanson’ (*Courier-Mail* 2016b). The *Age* in Victoria was the only paper to provide more positive front-page news about Labor than the Coalition. This largely reflects the *Age*’s reader demographics, which are more educated, left-leaning and sympathetic to postmaterialist concerns than most other news audiences (Young 2011: 248).

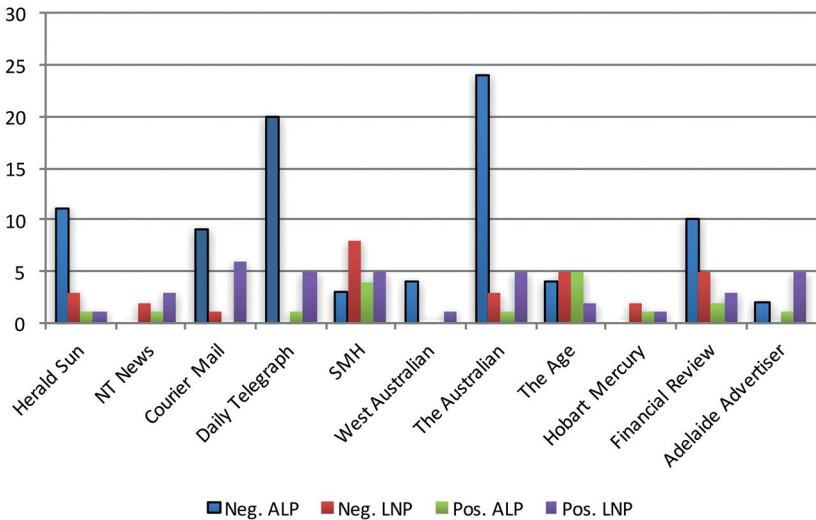


Figure 19.2. Number of positive and negative daily front-page stories by masthead for Liberal and Labor

Notes. n=187 with 74 neutral stories not shown.

Source. Constructed by © Carson and McNair.

### Front-page story sentiment: Positive and negative coverage

The descriptive statistics show that almost exactly half of daily mastheads’ front-page election stories were negative in message, more than double the number of positive election stories (22 per cent) and higher than the number of neutral stories (28 per cent). This negative coverage is consistent with time series analysis of US political reporting that identified negativity about presidential candidates had risen over the decades to become the

norm by the year 2000 (Schudson 2011: 84). Similarly, in the 2015 British election, front-page election coverage was almost always negative, and much more so for Labour (Deacon and Wring 2015: 313). Australia's 2016 campaign coverage also provided its major left-of-centre party with many more negative front-page headlines (87) compared to the Coalition (29), Independents (9) or Australian Greens (4).<sup>5</sup> About a quarter (74) of all front-page Australian election stories were neutral (see Figure 19.3).

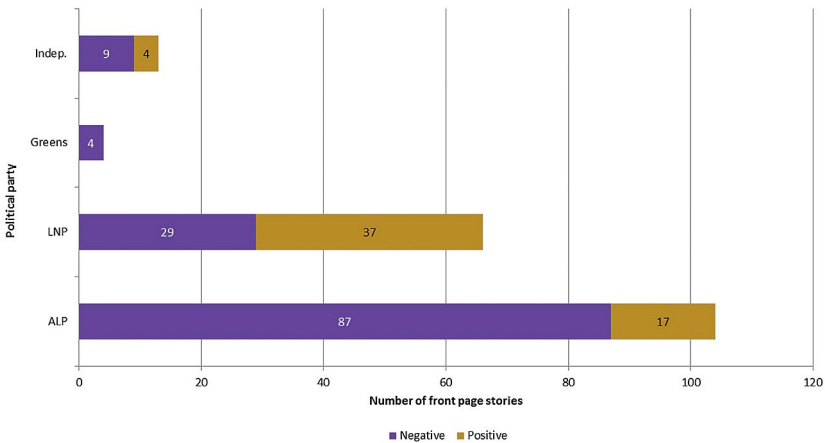


Figure 19.3. Number of positive and negative daily front-page news stories during the election campaign by political party

Notes. n=187 with 74 neutral stories not illustrated.

Source. Constructed by © Carson and McNair.

The weeks of the campaign with the most negative stories about Labor were two, five and eight ( $\geq 15$  stories per week). These included front pages in Sydney and Melbourne criticising lower house MP David Feeney for failing to declare a \$2.3 million home in his electorate on the parliamentary Register of Members' interests. The second week included stories about the controversial Australian Federal Police raids of Labor officials' addresses in Melbourne over allegedly leaked National Broadband Network documents. Other negative stories for Labor during the campaign's early stages included the *AFR's* questioning of the party's stance on penalty rates, and the Murdoch press probing the ALP's policy on asylum seekers (see Figure 19.4).

<sup>5</sup> Negative coverage was defined as stories that reflected poorly on the party or politician under focus. Positive stories were those whose central message was positive for the party or its candidate. A positive or negative assessment of the story does not necessarily indicate journalistic bias.

## DOUBLE DISILLUSION

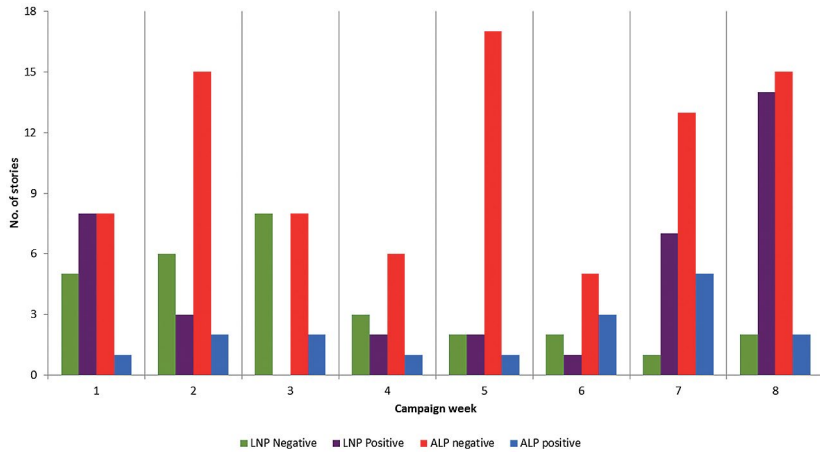


Figure 19.4. Story sentiment of front-page newspaper stories during the federal election for Liberal and Labor

Notes. n=187 with 74 neutral stories not illustrated.

Source. Constructed by © Carson and McNair.

## Fear campaigns in the media

The asylum seeker coverage (see Dehm and Walden, Chapter 26, this volume) began the day the election was called when Liberal Immigration Minister Peter Dutton held a press conference to confirm an asylum seeker boat was turned back to Sri Lanka. He then called out ALP candidate Melbourne’s Sophie Ismail for comments that appeared to contradict her party’s official asylum seeker policy (Anderson and Dziedzic 2016). The media persisted with negative asylum seeker coverage, usually linking it to Labor, in the weeks that followed. News Corp’s (17 May 2016) front page described a party torn by its asylum seeker policy: ‘Shorten holed on boats’ (Harris 2016). The same day, the *Courier-Mail*’s front page told readers about ‘ungrateful illegals’ sent to Manus Island who were trading Australian taxpayer-supplied cigarettes for televisions and smartphones, with the punny headline: ‘Turnback the remotes’ (*Courier-Mail* 2016a). News Corp’s *Daily Telegraph* also ran negative asylum seeker stories linked to Labor on page one: ‘Shorten’s maple leaf boat “fix”’ (*Daily Telegraph* 2016). In week six, the issue was moved to the inside pages, but still given prominence with an ‘exclusive’ double-page spread warning *Daily Telegraph* readers that Labor would ‘invite thousands of illegals to stay’. The story featured a giant front-page picture of a welcome mat with inside stories about Labor’s message to asylum seekers on pages 6, 7, 9 and 14,

including distant images of asylum seekers arriving by boat (Meers and Benson 2016). A week later, asylum seekers were again front-page news with the *Daily Telegraph's* self-proclaimed exclusive, 'Here they come: Smugglers re-start evil trade' (Benson 2016a), about a boat intercepted by the Royal Australian Navy in the Timor Sea. According to iSentia data, which tracked the top five media issues each week, asylum seekers were a prominent election issue in the first half of the campaign, ranking fifth in week one (8,685 mentions), second in week two (8,115 mentions) and third in week three (6,603 mentions).<sup>6</sup> It was the only media issue during the campaign to persist for three weeks in the top five national stories.

As an election issue, boat arrivals have had prominent media attention since 2001 (see Simms 2002). Since this time, the Coalition has had the most consistent, hardline approach to boat arrivals (Carson, Dufresne and Martin 2016; McAllister and Cameron 2014: 25). Australian political scientists find that negative immigration messages benefit conservatives in electoral contests, and that the issue played particularly well for Hanson in the 1990s (Jackman 1998). Labor and the Coalition shared the same policy on asylum boat turn backs in the 2016 campaign, yet the prominent media coverage, particularly by the Murdoch press, framed the issue as a Labor problem and gave it prominence and reach in three daily mastheads—effectively priming the issue to reinforce the political messages of Hanson and the Coalition's Dutton.

However, fear campaigns were not just the domain of the Murdoch press. Labor persisted, with limited evidence, in a narrative that Medicare would be privatised under a Turnbull government (see Elliot and Manwaring, Chapter 24, this volume). The scare campaign caught the electorate's attention with a 30-second ad airing nationally on a Sunday night (12 June) halfway through the campaign. It featured former prime minister and 'father' of Medicare Bob Hawke warning of a Coalition plan to privatise the universal health system. The Medicare claims were widely repeated in the news media and quickly ascended to the top five most talked about topics across Australia in the final two weeks of the campaign, scoring 20,362 media mentions in week seven and 9,456 in the last week according to iSentia data.

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<sup>6</sup> iSentia weekly monitoring includes 400 broadcast outlets, over 1,000 print publications and over 1,000 news websites across national, metropolitan, suburban, regional and rural media (author correspondence with Peter Baume, iSentia's managing director, 26 February 2015).

The media coverage of these two ‘scare’ campaigns caught the public’s attention. Australians responding to a Vote Compass questionnaire during the 2016 campaign identified asylum seekers and healthcare as salient election issues for them. When 60,310 respondents were asked to nominate what issue was ‘most important’ to them, ‘healthcare’ ranked third, after ‘education’ and the ‘economy’. More notably, for self-declared ‘undecided voters’, these issues ranked higher with ‘healthcare’ the second ‘most important’ issue after ‘immigration and asylum seekers’ (Vox Pop Labs 2016: 3).<sup>7</sup> In terms of counter messaging on these issues, Labor’s Medicare campaign prompted the Murdoch press to condemn it as a scare tactic on its front pages in the *Australian* and through a *Daily Telegraph* cover depicting Bill Shorten as the fabulist Pinocchio.

Past the campaign’s mid-point, Labor also encountered intense negative coverage about its fiscal plan in major mastheads. The *Daily Telegraph*’s front page bellowed: ‘32 pages of “mush”’ (McCran 2016) followed the next day on 10 June with an appeal to the middle and working classes: ‘Revealed – Shorten slashes family welfare’ (Benson 2016b). The *AFR* warned its business-minded readers: ‘Labor plan would blow out deficit’ (Coorey 2016). In a similar vein, the *Daily Telegraph* earlier in the campaign derided Shorten as a blonde-haired Willy Wonka with the headline ‘Bill Shorten and the money factory’ (Benson 2016c), which seemed a little nonsensical given that Willy Wonka was a successful businessman.

It should be noted that none of these headlines or images on Murdoch’s front pages matched the full-blooded attack against the ALP in 2013. Headlines then were unambiguously anti-Labor such as the *Daily Telegraph*’s ‘Kick this mob out’ on the first day of the 2013 campaign (5 August 2013).

While Medicare and asylum seekers received national coverage, a more parochial campaign developed in Victoria (VIC) in week five. Disparate groups including paid firefighters, the Coalition and the *Herald Sun* sought to link the federal ALP with the Victorian government’s industrial dispute with voluntary country firefighters. This industrial fracas accounted for 17 front pages of the *Herald Sun* in the remaining weeks

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7 Respondents self-selected to participate in the survey through the ABC website. The data was weighted using Australian Bureau of Statistics demographics to provide a more representative result of the Australian population.

of the election, and the newspaper even produced tens of thousands of ‘Back the CFA’ stickers for Victorians regardless of whether they bought the newspaper (*Herald Sun* 2016). Not all of the paper’s CFA front pages connected the dispute to the election, but those that did included ‘Burn the votes’ (Whinnett, Harris and Smethurst 2016). Some commentators, like Melbourne ABC morning host Jon Faine, quipped that more *Herald Sun* front pages were dedicated to the CFA dispute than when Australia entered the Iraq war. The prominent coverage might not have shifted votes, but almost certainly influenced Labor’s campaigning choices, costs and resource allocations. For example, the Prime Minister applied pressure to federal Labor and gained national headlines by campaigning on the steps of the Victorian Parliament, vowing to make the rights of volunteer firefighters his priority if elected. He also campaigned in marginal Victorian seats such as Corangamite where the CFA has a strong membership presence.

In contrast, the Coalition’s most fraught week in front-page headlines was week three (n=8) when the press revealed that Turnbull had once lunched with the now-deceased lawyer for the Mafia, Joe Acquaro. Acquaro had donated more than \$100,000 to the party and allegedly some of it on behalf of Mafia figures (McKenzie and Baker 2016). Turnbull’s dinner guests proved a problem again for him in week six when an Iftar gathering at Kirribilli saw him criticised for dining with a Muslim cleric with profound anti-gay views (Chambers and Morton 2016).

## Press coverage and voter impact

In the final week of the campaign, front-page headlines across the nation were overwhelmingly negative for Labor: 15 negative and two positive stories, contrasting sharply with the Coalition’s 16 positive and two negative. Front-page missives against Labor included ‘budget blowout’ stories, while the Murdoch broadsheet accused it of a backflip on the same-sex marriage plebiscite (Shanahan 2016a). Some headlines simply predicted Labor’s defeat: ‘Going down’ (Benson 2016d).

The editorial positions of the papers were little different. In the final days, all Fairfax and News Corp daily printed mastheads recommended a vote for the Coalition, citing a need for stable government—a central message of Turnbull’s following Britain’s Brexit vote to leave the European

Union (EU). Australia's online version of the *Guardian* refrained from a party endorsement, as did the online news digest *Crikey*, which claimed editorials were 'a throwback to an earlier era of political reporting' (Robin 2016). The weekly *Sunday Age* was the only capital city paper to urge a vote for Labor.

## Story convergence and reporting opinion polls

Two other striking features of the front-page election coverage were topic convergence between mastheads in the same newspaper stable and heavy reliance on commissioned poll results as news (see Goot, Chapter 5, this volume; Jackman and Mansillo, Chapter 6, this volume). Much has been written about why newspapers use polls to set the news agenda, and the 2016 election coverage was no exception with 40 poll-based front-page stories (Jackman 2005; Matthews, Pickup and Cutler 2012; Simms 2002).

Syndication of stories was particularly evident with Fairfax's *Age* and the *SMH*, more so than News Corp stable of papers. Fairfax stablemates replicated or pursued the same story angles on their front pages at least 11 times during the eight-week campaign. Earlier in the year, the wall separating Fairfax's *Age* and *SMH* Canberra bureaus was removed; this syndication of election stories suggests a convergence beyond bricks and mortar. This is a concerning trend because it limits story diversity from these press outlets in the public sphere. It also gives more power to a handful of political reporters whose names regularly appear in these mastheads. As print media loses paid circulation, revenues and ultimately institutional influence, some high-profile journalists benefit from these power shifts and gain personal authority from them. In the digital age, reporters' personal branding matters (Molyneux and Holton 2015). In some instances, individuals have more readers or followers than the paid circulation figures of the mastheads for which they write. Examples include Andrew Bolt (News Corp) with a self-proclaimed 1 million readers; *Sunday Age* columnist and *Kitchen Cabinet* host (ABC) Annabel Crabb with 336,000 Twitter followers; and Laura Tingle (*AFR*) with 65,000 Twitter followers.



## Innovations and adaptations in newspaper election coverage

On a positive note, the 2016 election coverage highlighted how mastheads were using digital technologies to report in ways not previously possible. Fairfax photographers published a revealing portrait series on Instagram to show candidates' microsecond responses to a series of emotional images, allowing voters to see them in new ways. Political journalists leveraged their personal brand to update audiences about the campaign using social media sites including Twitter, Snapchat, Facebook and Instagram. The *Guardian's* Katharine Murphy through her *Australia Politics Live* blog was one of several examples that threaded breaking political news and pictures with social media posts, memes and audience interactions via 'third spaces' such as below-the-line comments sections. *Crikey* tracked election promises and how much parties were allocating to them with 'Cash Tracker' and gave readers political content not found elsewhere including Shorten's and Turnbull's more obtuse comments with #Zinger and #Malsplain respectively.

Other digital adaptations included political podcasts from stalwarts of the press gallery. Among them were national political editor of news.com.au Malcolm Farr and his News Corp stablemate Dennis Atkins (*Courier-Mail*) discussing the latest election issues using the apt title *Two Grumpy Hacks – An Australian Election Podcast*; the ABC's Leigh Sales with Crabb and their *Chat 10 Looks 3* series; and 'Australian Politics Weekly' by *Guardian* editor Lenore Taylor with Katharine Murphy.

The election campaign gave rise to new media collaborations too. News Corp and Facebook teamed up to bring voters the first-ever online Australian leaders' debate using Facebook Live and streamed on the news.com.au site. Facebook and news.com.au reported a total reach of 4.2 million people who saw the debate advertised in their Facebook newsfeed (news.com.au 2016) and 1.6 million who saw the debate in their newsfeed on the night of 17 June 2016 (news.com.au 2016). Whilst Fairfax partnered with the Netherlands' Kieskompas to offer readers the YourVote experience. Similar to ABC's Vote Compass that debuted in the 2013 election campaign, Your Vote allowed Australians to see how their views on election issues aligned with the policy positions of the major political parties.

## Broadcasting and the 2016 election

Recent research by the News and Media Research Centre at the University of Canberra—part of a 26-country comparative study initiated by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism—finds that, as of early 2016, TV news bulletins were still the main source of news for Australians, followed by 24-hour news channels (ABC News 24, Sky News) and radio news programs and bulletins. The dominance of traditional media is particularly pronounced in older demographics. While the 18–44 age group report that they mainly access online sources for news, the main online sources accessed by younger people, as with the population in general, are the web editions of established news brands such as the ABC and News (Watkins et al. 2015: 7). There is clearly a profound generational transformation underway in the channels by which people access news, including news about elections, but the continuing authority of established, trusted news brands is also clear.

Against this background, TV and radio coverage of the 2016 election featured some new elements, as well as the traditional outputs of news and current affairs programming. As usual, the ABC led the way in coverage of the election on free-to-air TV and radio. While all free-to-air channels reported the campaign daily in their breakfast shows and news bulletins, only the ABC provided in-depth analysis and current affairs coverage, with frequent appearances by Turnbull, Shorten and other senior politicians on ABC radio and TV flagships such as *AM*, *PM* and *7.30*. In 2016, to a greater extent than in 2013, the Coalition leadership engaged with the ABC.

Turnbull was friendlier towards the ABC than his predecessor, and openly approving of some of its key journalists such as Leigh Sales. Indeed, more than half of Turnbull's radio interviews in the first six months of his prime ministership were given to the ABC. This arguably reflects Turnbull's more open style of political communication in general and his judgement that ABC programs such as *7.30* and *AM* occupy key places in the Australian media cycle—opportunities to set the wider media and public agendas that senior political actors cannot afford to ignore. It also contrasts with his predecessor Tony Abbott, who was openly critical of the ABC during his time in opposition (and indeed pursued such tactics as a boycott of programs such as *Q&A* by his cabinet ministers when in government). Turnbull's press secretary David Bold explained the regularity of the Prime Minister's *7.30* appearances:

It offers the Prime Minister the opportunity to do a lengthy one-on-one, which is something he enjoys doing. There aren't many other platforms available to do those lengthy interviews on TV and with the sort of audience 7.30 has (Lacy 2016).

The ABC's charter binds the broadcaster to impartiality in election and other news coverage, of course, and no one has suggested that the improved tone of ABC–Coalition relations in the Turnbull era led to 'better' or more favourable coverage. But there was certainly more cooperation and engagement with the ABC in the run-up to the election than had been the case with the Abbott government, allowing, one might infer, a fuller account of Coalition policy to emerge on this most important of all national news platforms. ABC viewers and listeners may or may not have agreed with everything Turnbull and his colleagues said on the ABC, but they undoubtedly got to hear 'from the horse's mouth' what the Coalition election pitch was.

Three free-to-air channels (ABC1, Channel Seven, Channel Nine) produced election night specials, against a background of media complaint about the alleged dullness of the campaign. Competing for journalistic and public attention in the many weeks of what was Australia's longest election campaign in history were the EU Referendum in the UK, the US presidential campaign featuring Donald Trump and regular explosions of terrorist violence in Orlando, Florida, Turkey and elsewhere. In contrast with these events, and with the brutal tone of the Brexit and Trump campaigns in particular, the Australian election of 2016 was indeed polite, well mannered and rather predictable. To this extent, perhaps, it was also dull. Indeed, *news.com.au* reported on the eve of election night that: 'Bill Shorten and Malcolm Turnbull face "Mission Impossible" to get viewers interested in election TV' (Fenton 2016). Perhaps ironically, the Ten Network broadcast a five-year-old *Mission Impossible* movie against the election-night programs.

Notwithstanding this challenge, the combination of ABC1 and ABC News 24 (4 pm – 11.45 pm AEST) received the most viewers, with a record 5.3 million tuning in at various times through the evening. An additional 2.8 million people accessed coverage on online and social media sites. Nine and Seven reached fewer viewers, not least because the latter opted not to broadcast the coverage on its main Melbourne channel (due to a clash with AFL coverage). OzTAM ratings for the three programs are shown in Table 19.1. These ratings are consistent with repeated survey

findings that the ABC remains the most trusted source of news for the great majority of the Australian people. And, like the BBC in the UK, this movement to the ABC is greatest at times of great national importance, such as an election.

Table 19.1. Ratings for free-to-air election night TV programs

Network	Program	Audience numbers
ABC1	<i>Australia Votes</i>	856,000
Channel Nine	<i>Election 2016: Australia Decides</i>	606,000
Seven Network	<i>Federal Election 2016</i>	318,000

Source. Compiled by Carson and McNair using OzTAM figures.

Both 24-hour news channels also covered the election, although, in the main, with fewer viewers. The subscription-only Sky News election-night audience peaked at 113,000, while ABC News 24 peaked at 393,000, which was larger than the free-to-air coverage of Seven.

On radio, ABC again provided the great bulk of coverage, although commercial radio talkback shows such as Alan Jones on 2GB featured regular interviews with politicians, and public access to the debate through phone-ins. The evidence of the 2016 election is that the 2GB radio network continues to be viewed as an especially important broadcast platform for political communicators. Turnbull famously ‘black banned’ the channel after his ascent to the prime ministership, because of the perceived hostility of its leading presenters, Jones and Ray Hadley, to his ousting of Abbott. The offending interview of Turnbull (2014) by Jones before the successful leadership challenge of 2015 went as follows:

**Jones:** Can I begin by asking you if you could say after me this? ‘As a senior member of the Abbott government I want to say here I am totally supportive of the Abbott–Hockey strategy for budget repair.

**Turnbull:** Alan, I am not going to take dictation from you.

Later in the interview, Jones said to Turnbull:

You have no hope ever of being the leader. You’ve got to get that into your head. No hope ever (quoted in McNair et al. 2017: 132).

One can understand, given the tone of this exchange, why Turnbull might have preferred not to favour Jones in future media appearances. However, he apparently came to realise that bans and boycotts would be no more effective for him in relation to Jones than Abbott's anti-ABC stance had been (and which certainly contributed to his downfall). Focus group research evidence assembled by one of the authors (McNair et al. 2017) shows that members of the Australian public believe this form of 'mediated access' to politicians to be potentially important in shaping opinions. Several focus group participants referred to Alan Jones' impact on the 2015 Queensland State election—unexpectedly lost by the Coalition. Campbell Newman had swept to power in Queensland three years before with a landslide majority, but lost it to Labor three years later. For many, including several of the focus group respondents, Jones' intervention in this outcome was crucial. He had accused Newman of breaking campaign promises about extensions to coal mining in Toowoomba, and declared that 'he wouldn't back the Premier to win a chook raffle' (Withey 2015). One focus group participant stated the view that 'Alan Jones could kill Campbell Newman in Queensland just by being on air, obliterating him, you know'. Another stated: 'You know, one man can have a massive influence over a large number of people, just by the fact that his radio shows are played, I think, through New South Wales and Queensland'. 'If you think of Alan Jones, it's huge, I think. So yeah, personal opinion really matters. Particularly if a person's appealing to people' (McNair et al. 2017: 132–33).

Jones had a similarly confident opinion of his role in elections when he declared that 'no one has ever won an election by not appearing on my program' (Shanahan 2016b). He added: 'My program has the largest radio audience in the country and we go to some 77 stations with either program or highlights.'

It may have been with these words and the Newman experience in mind that, as the 2016 general election approached and with Turnbull now installed as prime minister, he decided to build bridges with the controversial pundit and go back on to his program for the campaign. This decision, like his more positive engagement with the ABC, did not prevent Turnbull's government from losing many seats in the election, and there is as yet no evidence that broadcast media coverage in any way shaped the campaign outcome.

## The ABC and the campaign

In addition to straight news coverage, the ABC devoted considerable resources to the 2016 campaign, with election editions of *7.30*, *Q&A*, *Insiders* and the innovative human interest-oriented interview format *Kitchen Cabinet* providing analysis of, and engagement with, the leading politicians, in a variety of styles. The first three of these exemplify the normatively approved adversarial journalism expected of a public service media organisation, while *Q&A*, as the ABC's flagship public participation political program, allowed public engagement with politicians in a live studio context. The most newsworthy incident amongst this coverage occurred in an edition of *Q&A* when audience member Duncan Storrar asked a question of the panel about tax concessions. Storrar described himself as having a 'disability and a low education'. He had spent his 'whole life working [on] minimum wage', and asked the Coalition representative on the *Q&A* panel:

You're gonna lift the tax-free threshold for rich people. If you lift my tax-free threshold, that changes my life. That means I can say to my little girl, 'Daddy's not broke this weekend', or we can go to the pictures. Rich people don't even notice if their tax-free threshold lifts. Why don't I get it? Why do they get it? (ABC 2016a).

There was polite debate on the matter, and the program moved on. But Storrar's intervention exploded into a controversy in the following days and weeks, as the right-of-centre media sought to portray him as a workshy bludger. The *Herald Sun* 'exposed' Storrar as 'a thug', 'a villain' and 'drug user' (Galloway 2016). The ABC's *Media Watch* explained the appeal of the story to some outlets thus: 'with the story ticking all the boxes for News Corp – bash the poor, bash the ABC, bash Labor' (Barry 2016).

What the Storrar case also shows is how the media influences itself. The three-day coverage of Duncan Storrar is one such example of inter-media agenda setting; as are stories that might gain traction on social media that go on to influence the news agenda of established media and result in the media reporting on itself. An example of this was the Liberal Party's television advertisement featuring a tradesman criticising the ALP's 'war on the economy'. Within hours, this advertisement was trending on Twitter using the hashtag #FakeTradie. Social media users were quick to point out inconsistencies between the man's appearance with that of a 'real' tradesperson. This led to two days of speculation in the established media

about who was right, with various expert commentators highlighting that a ‘real tradie’ would not wear loose jewellery that could be caught in heavy machinery or drink from a ceramic mug that could be easily broken on a construction site. It took the *Daily Mail Australia*’s Daniel Piotrowski two days to confirm the man in the ad was in fact a real tradesman named Andrew McRae.

Turning to a more popular and ‘infotaining’ form of political culture, Annabel Crabb’s *Kitchen Cabinet* repeated its coverage of the 2013 election with editions devoted to both major party leaders, as well as the Independent Jacqui Lambie and others.

The *Kitchen Cabinet* format was developed by Crabb as an alternative to the conventional approach of ‘serious’ political media. Inspired by the success of cooking-based reality TV shows such as *Masterchef*, *Kitchen Cabinet* has been controversial, accused in some quarters of ‘dumbing down’ political discourse and of being ‘infotainment’ (where entertainment is assumed to be antithetical to a ‘quality’ public sphere). In 2015, *New Matilda* characterised the program appearance of Immigration Minister-turned-Treasurer Scott Morrison as propaganda:

This insidious spread of propaganda, soft interviews with hard-line politicians who wield enormous power over the lives of the most vulnerable, is sold as a fun, light-hearted look into the lives of the people we elect ... It completely dumbs down debate and again re-ingrains the perception that politicians are just like us, while the people their policies hurt, aren’t (McQuire 2015).

However, the huge ratings success of the format since its launch in 2011 has vindicated Crabb’s argument that there is a space for media formats that engage with politicians in ways other than the classic adversarial approach of ‘why is this lying bastard lying to me?’ As she explains the contribution made by *Kitchen Cabinet*:

My view was that the modern environment gives you lots of opportunities to do things differently, and to develop things that should complement other forms of reporting and coverage. I felt that if there was some space on a channel to see politicians differently, to interact with them differently, give people a different view apart from just the straight-down-the-barrel press conference, it couldn’t harm the process, and I think it is helpful (McNair et al. 2017: 195).

Today's Australian politicians have come to recognise the appeal of the format, and its potential role in a political culture shaped increasingly by issues of personality, trust and integrity. Both Turnbull and Shorten took part in *Kitchen Cabinet* during the 2016 election, taking the opportunity to present their political and personal histories, and talk about the things that motivate them. There is no evidence that such appearances have shaped electoral outcomes, but that politicians should participate in the personal, intimate manner of programs such as *Kitchen Cabinet* has become a routine expectation of political life, especially during elections.

## Sky News and ABC News 24

It is a notable feature of political culture in Australia (and comparable countries) that those established media outlets that provide some of the most sustained, in-depth coverage of politics are those with among the lowest audiences—the 24-hour news channels. Audiences for 24-hour news remain small, although the political coverage of these channels is very significant (McNair 2016). Sky News, in particular, as Australia's first domestically produced 24-hour news channel, and the only commercial rival to the ABC, played an important role in 2016, with round-the-clock coverage of the campaign, analysis and commentary, regular appearances by politicians of all parties and leaders' debates. These debates were central to the limited encounters between Turnbull and Shorten during the 2016 campaign, which makes the small audiences they attracted unfortunate.

The first 'People's Forum', held on Friday 13 May in western Sydney, featured Shorten and Turnbull before a selected audience of 100 members of the public. It was seen live by only 40,000 viewers, although clips and extracts could be viewed on YouTube. Next was a one-sided event in week five of the campaign, staged at the Bronco's League Club in Brisbane, jointly hosted by Sky News and the *Courier-Mail*. Shorten appeared without an opponent, after the Prime Minister declined to take part in what his office called 'a broadcaster's decree', allegedly because he had not been consulted. Sky's political editor David Speers insisted that both party leaders had been invited to attend.

The final debate, as noted earlier, was the first of its kind in Australian elections, an online collaboration between *news.com.au* and Facebook on 17 June. It reflected the increasing significance of social media in public access to political information.



Given the unexpectedly low Coalition vote on 2 July, it is noteworthy that Shorten ‘won’ the 13 May debate by 42 to 29 over Turnbull (29 were undecided) and was also declared the winner of the Facebook debate. Prior to the campaign, it had been widely speculated that the Labor leader’s poor communication style—as it was perceived by observers across the political spectrum—would be a major handicap for him and the ALP. This debate, and the coverage it generated in the following days, established a rather different narrative, in which Shorten was seen as a more authentic communicator as against the highly polished Turnbull (Grattan 2016). It seems likely that this revised public view of the Labor leader’s communicative abilities helped his party do better than expected on 2 July.

Here and elsewhere in its schedules, then, Sky News performed a valuable function in the 2016 campaign, presenting its (admittedly) small audience with unique material available nowhere else in the commercial free-to-air sector in this campaign. The ABC for its part broadcast the second leaders’ debate (ABC 2016b) on 29 May at the National Press Club, described by the *Sydney Morning Herald’s* James Massola (2016) as ‘dour’ and with no declared winner.

## Conclusion

The established press and broadcast media (including their online editions) continue to be the primary and most trusted sources of election news for Australians. But they are not without their challenges, as well as opportunities, in the digital era. The paid-for press faces the most difficulties of legacy platforms, with decreasing revenues and newsroom resources. Notwithstanding the longer-than-usual campaign of 2016, however, and fewer journalists to report it, election coverage remained prominent, particularly in major capital cities’ mastheads where it was more often front-page news.

Overall, voters appear to have ignored the almost uniform editorial stances across the country urging a Coalition vote for stability. Instead they delivered a razor-thin majority to the Coalition and a mixed bag of crossbenchers in both Houses. States where press coverage was at its most negative towards Labor, such as New South Wales (NSW), saw Labor gain five seats—Eden-Monaro, Lindsay, Macarthur, Macquarie and

Dobell.<sup>8</sup> Conversely, the Coalition, which received largely positive front-page coverage in NSW, recorded a two-party preferred 3.8 per cent swing against it (Australian Electoral Commission 2016).

In Victoria (VIC), the coverage of the CFA dispute by Australia's largest selling daily newspaper, the *Herald Sun*, was persistently negative for Labor in the final weeks of the campaign. The Murdoch tabloid might not have swayed votes with its coverage alone—indeed, record numbers had voted early and may have missed the headlines—but it certainly amplified the industrial dispute that was already politicised by Turnbull and others. The electoral result was that VIC recorded Liberals' smallest negative swing of any State (1.6 per cent) and it picked up one marginal seat from Labor in Melbourne's east (Chisholm). If press coverage did influence voters, and this remains a contentious question, its net effect potentially benefited the Coalition in VIC and Pauline Hanson's One Nation Senate candidates in Queensland (QLD).

For the broadcast sector, and the ABC in particular, the 2016 election confirmed its continuing pre-eminence as a source of election news and analysis. Sky News provided extensive and valuable coverage, albeit to small audiences. There were few controversies or criticisms of the broadcast news media in this campaign—no Coalition claims of ABC bias, for example—although, as we have seen with the Storrar affair on *Q&A*, it did provide the News Corp press with an opportunity to attack the 'liberal' left elite it sees as in control at Ultimo, and highlighted inter-media agenda setting. Sky News' collaboration with Facebook was the most innovative broadcast event of the campaign, and an indicator of things to come as the profile of social media in the public sphere increases.

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# 20

## Non-Mainstream Media Coverage

Peter Chen

From a media diversity perspective, Australia's standing as an established democracy is not strong. When compared with peer democracies, Australia has the most concentrated media system in the world (Australian Collaboration 2015). The causes of this are various, but include comparatively small market size, 'dumping' of English-language content into the Australian market and lacklustre media policy that has facilitated media conglomerates to consolidate their market share (Winseck 2008). As part of this story, the popularisation of the internet over the last two decades has been an exacerbating factor and corrective: undermining the economic basis of established commercial media and eroding domestic regulatory capacity, while at the same time providing the capacity for the establishment of 'new presses'.

This chapter focuses on the conduct and performance of these 'new presses' in the 2016 federal election campaign. While the majority of these new media groups happens to be an internet-based press, the emphasis of this chapter is not on the technological basis of supply per se, but on their relative newness into the Australia marketplace. This breaks with a traditional tendency to see 'new media' as internet-based media, an increasingly meaningless classification tool given the increasing incorporation of new technology into the established media, as discussed by Andrea Carson and Brian McNair (Chapter 19, this volume).

## Method

The primary research method employed for this chapter is the content analysis of articles published in 10 ‘new’ Australian-based<sup>1</sup> publications—each less than seven years old<sup>2</sup>—that published material during the formal election period from 8 May to 1 July 2016 inclusive. The selection was purposive, with the objective of obtaining a mix of publications, as well as publications with key differences to established media organisations.<sup>3</sup> The population was defined as all articles published about the election (using the widest interpretation of this class). Given the wide variation of output, articles were sampled randomly from each selected publication (minimum of one per day and maximum of one quarter of total output).

The selected publications are listed in Table 20.1, which includes a brief description of the publication, the number of sampled articles and the publications’ Alexa ranks for the Australian market. Alexa is an online web traffic metrics company that collects browsing data to estimate traffic flows to websites and, while having limitations in its accuracy (Kamerer 2013), provides a useful standardised measure of comparison for websites. To facilitate this comparison, a number of high-profile Australian mainstream news media websites are included in the table.

Table 20.1. Sample and comparator publications

Publication	Description	n	Alexa rank
abc.net.au*	Australian Broadcasting Corporation website	–	15
news.com.au*	News Corp website	–	19
smh.com.au*	<i>Sydney Morning Herald</i> website	–	25
theguardian.com	Established in 2013, the <i>Guardian</i> Australia website	54 <sup>1</sup>	55
<i>BuzzFeed</i> Australia	Established in 2014, a soft-news website	46	85
theaustralian.com.au*	The <i>Australian</i> website	–	108
dailytelegraph.com.au*	<i>Daily Telegraph</i> website	–	125

1 In that the publications have Australian staff and offices, even if they also syndicate content from ‘parent’ publications (e.g. the *Guardian*, *Buzzfeed*, etc.).

2 *New Matilda* has a longer lineage, but was included in the sample because it significantly changed its focus following its separation from the Centre for Policy Development.

3 Particularly those with a youth focus. As Sally Young (2011: 57–58) observes, the websites of established newspapers tend to attract an older audience (average age in the early 60s).

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Publication	Description	n	Alexa rank
<i>Vice Au/NZ</i>	Established in 2014, a youth-oriented online magazine	15	171
<i>Huffington Post (Au)</i>	Established in 2015, Australian version of the blog site	71	220
<i>The Conversation (Au)</i>	Established in 2011, non-profit academic writing	66	470
<i>New Daily</i>	Established in 2013 as an online-only newspaper	52	630
<i>Junkee</i>	Established in 2013, a youth-oriented online magazine	17	1,014
<i>New Matilda</i>	In current form, stand-alone magazine from 2010	8	1,733
<i>The Saturday Paper</i>	Established in 2014, a weekly news magazine	6	4,116
<i>Independent Australia</i>	Established in 2010 with a focus on long-form writing	29	4,389
Total / avg. sample (avg. comparator)		364	878 (58)

\* Denotes comparator

<sup>1</sup> Note that the *Guardian* produced the most context in the sampled publication set Source. Constructed by author from analysis based on content coding from selected publications (8 May to 1 July 2016 inclusive).

Table 20.1 shows:

- The quantum of published material on the election during the electoral period is variable across the sample.
- While higher levels of published electoral political material tend to be correlated with the pretensions/reputation of the publication in question (towards more serious news reporting), this is not universal by the focus of the masthead (for example, *BuzzFeed*, with a dedicated Australian political news editor, is a high producer of content). Additionally, some publications are only modest in their overall production of content (i.e. *New Matilda*).
- The sample, as would be expected with the focus on comparatively new entrants into the Australian news market, ranks far lower down the Alexa index than the websites of their established media brands, with considerable variability in their popularity.

- Those publications within this sample that rank comparatively highly are those with international parent companies, most notably the *Guardian* Australia, having a long publication history in the United Kingdom (but also including the comparatively newer *BuzzFeed* (USA), *Vice* (Canada), *Huffington Post* (USA)).

A mixed-coding process was used including the capture of both manifest (explicit) and latent (implicit/interpretative) elements. These were divided into descriptive data on the presentation of the published material (format), as well as the classification of reported content. The total sample contained an estimated 337,081 words.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, information was requested from a number of editors of the publications analysed in the content analysis.

## Description of articles

The following two tables provide a description of the material produced by the sampled publications during the election campaign. In Table 20.2, we can see the average length of the sampled articles produced. In keeping with the general orientation of the respective mastheads, magazine-style publications tend to produce longer articles on average than their 'newspaper' and blog-style equivalents. While a number of sampled publications produced fewer articles overall, there is a recognisable negative correlation between the average length of published material and the total number of articles produced during the election periods ( $-0.62$ ); indicating that the differences in attention paid to the election by the sampled publications is lower than the number of individual articles produced would indicate. In addition, length variability is more likely in magazine and blog-style publications than those more specifically emulating newspaper forms of reporting.<sup>5</sup>

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4 A direct count of text. Video- and audio-only content was tabulated at the standard rate of 130 words per minute.

5 The use of live blogging of political events, seen in established newspapers online, and by the *Guardian* in this sample, is a variation from this. This form of reporting in real time is an innovation in this federal election cycle, and reflects the capacity of media organisations with larger staff to showcase their capacity to cover longer events in detail.

Table 20.2 Length of sampled articles

Publication	n	Sampled words	Average	St. Dev.
<i>New Matilda</i>	8 <sup>1</sup>	19,176	2,397	1,281
<i>Independent Australia</i>	29	52,756	1,819	3,558
<i>Vice Au/NZ</i>	15	17,022	1,134	1,338
<i>The Conversation</i>	66	73,469	1,113	760
<i>Guardian Australia</i>	54	53,576	992	853
<i>Junkee</i>	17	11,795	693	512
<i>Huffington Post</i>	71	43,774	616	406
<i>BuzzFeed Australia</i>	46	27,091	588	471
<i>New Daily</i>	52	28,203	542	245
<i>Saturday Paper</i>	6	10,219	1,703	339
All	364	337,081	926	1,247

<sup>1</sup> *New Matilda* reports it did not increase its allocation of resources to political coverage during the election period (personal correspondence, Chris Graham, publisher/editor, *New Matilda*, 8 August 2016)

Source. Constructed by author from analysis based on content coding from selected publications (8 May to 1 July 2016 inclusive).

Turning from length to non-textual content, Table 20.3 provides a statistical description of the non-textual elements within articles (or as indicated by ‘only’ where the articles were audio or video only). Summarising this table, we can see that:

- The most commonly included non-textual elements tend towards material comparatively easily collected as embedded in the text. In order: photographs (almost universally), embedded tweets (or like content, such as Instagram posts) and embedded video content.
- While some of the most common content was unique to the publications, the majority of this was repurposed content. Stock photographs (of the human subjects of the articles in particular) were very common, the exception being the *Guardian Australia*, which has their own photographic staff. Video content was predominantly news material from other media channels (see below) or party/candidate materials (election ads). Tweets tended to divide between the observations of elites (candidates, media workers) and content from the general community. The use of tweeted content, it appears, is related to the decline in the use of ‘vox pop’ material (only 2.7 per cent of articles included collected observations or quotes from ‘ordinary voters’ worked into article text).

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- Very little of the embedded non-textual material could be described as complex additions to journalistic practice requiring the generation of non-textual material. Of this category, infographics (‘visual representations of data or information’; Krum 2014) were the most common and tended to be most likely employed by *The Conversation* and similar long-form magazine-style publications, while the use of embedded polling or data journalism (use of large data sets to elaborate or form news stories, with or without the inclusion of interactive data in the article; Gray, Chambers and Bounegru 2012: 2–3) was minimal in the sample.
- A small number of articles took the form of unique audio or video, largely interviews or panels of journalists rather than in-field reporting. The use of this type of material was spread across different types of publication.

Table 20.3. Media content of sampled articles (percentage)

Publication	Photo	Embed Tweet	Video	Info- graphic	Poll	Embed Data	Video Only	Audio Only
<i>BuzzFeed</i>	96	37	20	11	2	0	0	4
<i>The Conversation</i>	92	5	5	21	0	0	6	2
<i>Guardian</i>	96	22	15	6	0	0	0	0
<i>Huffington Post</i>	93	62	39	4	0	0	0	3
<i>Independent Australia</i>	100	86	48	10	0	0	0	0
<i>Junkee</i>	100	77	77	0	0	0	0	0
<i>New Daily</i>	100	0	12	2	0	2	0	0
<i>New Matilda</i>	100	0	13	13	0	0	0	0
<i>Saturday Paper</i>	83	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Vice</i>	80	6.7	27	7	0	0	0	20
All	95	32	27	9	0	0	2	1

Source. Constructed by author from analysis based on content coding from selected publications (8 May to 1 July 2016 inclusive).

In summary, while the sample included some variation in the presentation of content, the degree to which these new presses produced forms of electoral coverage that could be seen as significantly different in form to that of established presses was small.



## Coverage of issues and topics

Moving from form to content, in the following three sections I examine the substance of the material analysed. This analysis has three components: the comparative value of material produced in informing the readers-as-electorate, the coverage of specific issues and policy areas.

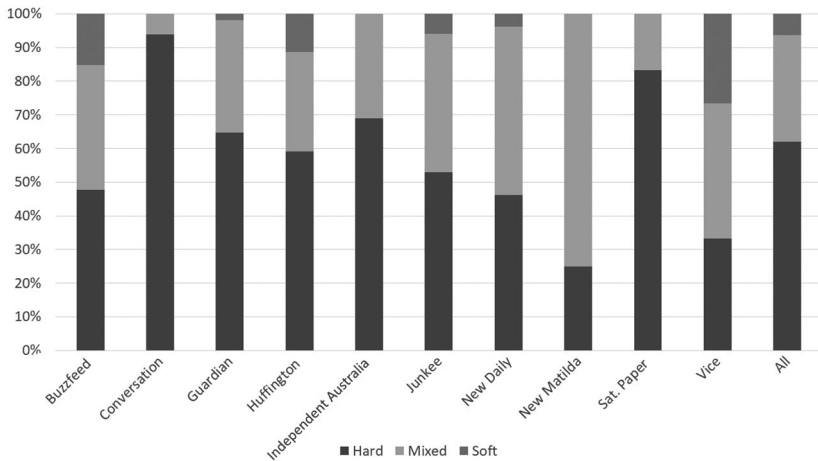
Turning first to the question of value, the content analysis of articles sorted them into three categories: ‘hard’ content, ‘soft’ content and content with a significant mix of both. This classification process employed Lance Bennett’s (2012: 24–32) relatively subjective delineation between ‘hard’ (information content the knowledge of which defines—through social construction—what an ‘informed’ person should know at any particular time) and ‘soft’ (emotional and immediate, entertainment-oriented information). In this classification process, an archetypal ‘hard’ article can be characterised as one that focused on the reporting of events or issues using the passive voice, an emphasis on facts over interpretation and without humour. ‘Soft’ articles tended towards more informal language, inclusion of slang and humour, with a higher tendency for editorialisation by the author.<sup>6</sup>

While debate continues about the value of ‘soft’ news in informing citizens, framing issues and agenda setting, it appears that the presence of ‘soft’ news can expand awareness of issues outside of core media audiences, particularly amongst traditionally disengaged audiences (Baum 2011: 5–8). What we can see in Figure 20.1 is that the new presses are quite mixed in the nature of their election coverage. This includes publications producing consistently ‘hard’ content who target more affluent and educated audiences—for example, *The Conversation*, the *Guardian Australia*, *Independent Australia* and the *Saturday Paper* (Roy Morgan Research 2014)<sup>7</sup>—than those focusing on casual news consumers (the *New Daily*, *Huffington Post*) and youth-oriented publications (*BuzzFeed*, *Junkee* and *Vice*) that are most likely to contain mixed and soft news content. The interesting outlier here is *New Matilda*, which appears to have a house style that emphasises a wryer tone than its traditional audience would suggest.

6 In extremis, this is pure whimsy, such as the article that comprised solely of a video montage (to music) of the Prime Minister’s hand movements while speaking at campaign and media events.

7 The 2016 election saw a considerable disappearance of ‘fact check’ articles from the media landscape. First introduced in advance of the 2013 federal campaign from a genre pioneered in the United States, only *The Conversation* used this format in the sample for 4.5 per cent of its election articles.

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**Figure 20.1. Characterisation of reporting, by publication**

Source. Constructed by author from analysis based on content coding from selected publications (8 May to 1 July 2016 inclusive).

Examining the substantive issues and policies discussed in the articles sampled is a more complex task, with 252 separate issue topics and policy areas discussed within the 364 articles analysed. The discussion of policy topics, often seen as an exemplar of quality reporting during elections, needs clarification in reporting on the sampled articles. While the total sample included articles with a detailed focus on policy topics, many policy references identified contained little substantive content, such as articles that listed topics discussed by a candidate or at an event without articulating the subject matter of the issue or policy proposal. Thus, using Table 20.4, we can rank publications by the tendency to discuss policy areas in greater detail. Those publications most likely to discuss policy in some detail tended to be independent long-form magazine-style publications (*Saturday Paper*, *Independent Australia* and *New Matilda*). Interestingly, youth publications (*Junkee* and *Vice*) also tended to dedicate their (shorter) articles to single policy topics, rather than omnibus reports.

The position of *The Conversation* in Table 20.4 is interesting, in that its primary focus on analysis by academics is associated with more in-depth coverage on policy topics. This figure would be 4.2 per 1,000 words if we excluded the high number of articles published by Michelle Grattan in *The Conversation* during the campaign. Grattan, a professorial fellow at the University of Canberra, was recruited to the publication in 2013, and provides material more akin to conventional political journalism (with lower levels of policy analysis) than the contributions of other academics.

In the 2016 sample, Grattan authored 31.8 per cent of *The Conversation's* election output. *The Conversation* is not unique amongst the wholly new publications sampled in adding an established political journalist from traditional media to its ranks, with the *New Daily* also recruiting longstanding ABC journalist Kerry O'Brien.

Table 20.4. Policy detail in sampled articles, average

Publication	Policy topics per 1,000 words
<i>BuzzFeed</i>	7.5
<i>New Daily</i>	7.4
All	5.4
<i>Huffington Post</i>	5.4
<i>The Conversation</i>	5.3
<i>Vice</i>	4.6
<i>Guardian</i>	4.4
<i>Junkee</i>	4.4
<i>Independent Australia</i>	3.8
<i>New Matilda</i>	3.5
<i>Saturday Paper</i>	2.2

Source. Constructed by author from analysis based on content coding from selected publications (8 May to 1 July 2016 inclusive).

To simplify the discussion of these issues and policy topics, I examine areas of commonality and difference in the sample. Tables 20.5 and 20.6 show the most commonly discussed topics (subject areas) and policy issues during the election campaign within the total sample. Key topic themes were:

- Topics associated with the practicalities of the campaign process (campaigning activity itself, polling, gaffes or perceived misconduct of candidates,<sup>8</sup> marginal seats, party unity and voting behaviour). The *New Daily*, with a greater focus on traditional newspaper-type reporting, was most likely to focus on campaigning issues than the overall sample.

8 In this regard, the media outlets predominantly focused on three Victorian candidates: for Batman, David Feeney (ALP) who failed to declare the ownership of property; for McEwen, Chris Jermyn (Liberal) who attempted to 'gatecrash' a press conference of the opposition leader unsuccessfully; and, for Calwell, John Min-Chiang Hsu (Liberal) over his ownership of a legal brothel.

- Demographic groups: women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, LGBTI people and youth. Reflecting the tendency for younger people to be more highly engaged with issues associated with same-sex marriage, youth-focused publications (*BuzzFeed*, *Junkee* and *Vice* ranked LGBTI issues more prominently than the overall sample).

The interesting outlier in this set is the inclusion of discussions of artistic practice (as opposed to arts policy), which appears at the bottom of the top third list of policy topics. The most common reference in this set was the Sydney-based artist Michael Agzarian, who is notable for his parody Obama-style posters of Australian political elites.

Following on the back of the Budget, issues of the substance of the budget and national budgetary management (including public debt and revenue) dominated the policy topics discussed. Beyond major policy areas common to most elections—the national economy, education and health—three areas of specific focus tended to also be significant in the sampled publications’ news agendas:

- Australia’s system of offshore asylum seeker detention (see Dehm and Walden, Chapter 26, this volume).<sup>9</sup>
- Medicare, following the emphasis of the ALP in raising Medicare privatisation as a key theme in the second half of the campaign (see Manwaring, Chapter 11; Elliot and Manwaring, Chapter 24, this volume).
- Climate change and the health of the Great Barrier Reef as the specific and dominant focus of the election on environmental issues, rather than broader issues about the environment (this conforms with the observations by Pearse, Chapter 25, this volume). This latter focus is significant given the extremely limited coverage given to the environment in the 2013 federal election (Lester, McGaurr and Tranter 2015).

The alignment of this news agenda with the public agenda is illustrated in Table 20.6 with the inclusion of polling data (‘March Poll’). From polling undertaken by the Essential Media Communications group, asking respondents to nominate three issues of most importance to them in the coming election, this column indicates the relative importance of issues where they were included in the poll.

<sup>9</sup> At the start of the election period this was commonly associated with the topic of party unity in the ALP (candidates ‘breaking ranks’ over ALP policy). In the second half of the election period this was more commonly associated with references to the Australian Greens.

Table 20.5. Top 15 topics, all publications

Rank	Topic	Topic (percentage)
1	Campaigning	40.1
2	Polling	17
3	Social media	15.1
4	Post-election	11.3
5	Indigenous people	8.8
6	Women	8.5
7	Art	8.2
8	Scandal/embarrass	8.2
9	Marginal seats	7.7
10	Parliament	7.7
11	Leadership	7.1
12	Debate	5.2
13	LGBTI people	5.2
14	Youth	5.2
15	Leaders debate	4.9

Source. Constructed by author from analysis based on content coding from selected publications (8 May to 1 July 2016 inclusive).

Table 20.6. Policy issues, all publications

Rank	Policy	Policy area (percentage of coverage)	March Poll* (importance of issues, percentage)
1	Budget(ary) management	25.3	–
2	Taxation	24.5	29
3	Economy	17.6	37
4	Asylum seekers/detention	16.5	7
5	Education	14.6	21
6	Healthcare	14	43
7	Climate change	11.3	12
8	Same-sex marriage	10.7	–
9	Environment	10.2	13
10	Medicare (specifically)	9.1	–
11	(Un)employment	8.2	–
12	Telecommunications	8	–
13	Great Barrier Reef	6.6	–
14	Industrial relations	6.3	8
15	Mining	5.5	–

\* From Essential Media Communications (2016)

Source. Constructed by author from analysis based on content coding from selected publications (8 May to 1 July 2016 inclusive).

The focus on topics and policy issues illustrated in Table 20.6 represents the overarching news agenda of the sampled publications. However, it is useful to highlight key variations within the sample. To do this, we have constructed Figure 20.2. This figure compares the 20 most common topics and 20 most common policy issues of each publication against the aggregated total—the ‘median news agenda’ (adjusted for each sampled publication’s *n*). The figure shows that *The Conversation*, *Huffington Post* and the *Guardian* are closest to the median news agenda, which may be unsurprising given the law of large numbers (they produced the largest number of articles). Alternatively, the most atypical news agenda was perused by an eclectic group of publications: *Junkee*, *Independent Australia* and the *Saturday Paper*.

Closest to the median news agenda    Furthest from the median news agenda	1	<i>The Conversation; Huffington Post</i>
	2	<i>Guardian</i>
	3	<i>BuzzFeed</i>
	4	<i>New Matilda; Vice</i>
	5	<i>New Daily</i>
	6	<i>Junkee</i>
	7	<i>Independent Australia</i>
	8	<i>Saturday Paper</i>

Figure 20.2. Publications’ relationship with the median news agenda

Source. Constructed by author from analysis based on content coding from selected publications (8 May to 1 July 2016 inclusive).

Each of the three outliers can be explained due to their audience characteristics and ethos—*Junkee*, for example, focuses on youth popular culture (Robin 2014). *Independent Australia*, similarly, has a tradition of following issues often neglected by mainstream coverage, while the *Saturday Paper*’s weekly long-form reporting requires it to be outside of the media news cycle.

## Coverage of individuals and organisations

While the sampled publications reported on a large number of individual people (736 unique individuals) and organisations (527 unique organisations) during the campaign, the focus of reporting was far narrower: the two major party leaders dominated references, as did the three established

parliamentary party groupings. This is illustrated in Table 20.7. The key individuals discussed tended to be party leaders, (shadow) treasurers and individuals holding key portfolios associated with policy topics of interest (as identified above). Outside of this, Nick Xenophon's perceived likelihood of securing a strong result in the Senate led to him and his team being highly ranked, but the sampled media did not pick up on the return of Pauline Hanson and the remarkable Senate successes of Pauline Hanson's One Nation (see Kefford, Chapter 15, this volume).

By and large, reporting on individuals tended to follow the propensity of online publications—as previously observed by Murray Goot (2008: 102)—to focus on a small group of mainstream political actors. However, between the 2007 election analysed by Goot and 2016, we see:

- an increased representation of Greens candidates in the sampled articles
- interestingly, of the top 15 people discussed in the articles sampled, four (26.6 per cent) are former prime ministers no longer seeking public office.

Table 20.7. Names and organisations mentioned in sampled articles

Rank	Name	Percentage	Organisation	Percentage
1	Malcolm Turnbull	53.0	Coalition/(Nationals)	68.1/(10.2)
2	Bill Shorten	42.3	Australian Labor Party	60.4
3	Tony Abbott	25.3	Australian Greens	29.7
4	Scott Morrison	13.5	ABC	16.2
5	Julia Gillard	12.1	Q&A (ABC Television)	8.5
6	Kevin Rudd	8.5	Nick Xenophon Team	7.1
7	John Howard	8.0	Sky News	5.5
8	Peter Dutton	7.1	<i>Australian</i>	5.2
9	Nick Xenophon	6.3	News Corporation	4.9
10	Chris Bowen	6.0	Australian Electoral Commission	4.1
11	Richard Di Natale	5.5	Fairfax	3.3
12	Paul Keating	4.9	GetUp!	3
13	Julie Bishop	4.7	National Press Club	3
14	Mathias Cormann	4.4	Newspoll	3
15	Pauline Hanson	4.4	<i>Sydney Morning Herald</i>	3

Source. Constructed by author from analysis based on content coding from selected publications (8 May to 1 July 2016 inclusive).

The former reflects the increasing significance of the Greens as an entrenched ‘third party’ in Australian politics,<sup>10</sup> while the latter a tendency for reasoning by historical analogy/historical comparator by political journalists, as well as the continuing presence of Tony Abbott on the political scene.

In the case of reported individuals and organisations, the variation within the sampled publications is less pronounced than coverage of topics and policy issues. This is because of the dominance of a small set of individuals (Turnbull, Shorten and Abbott) and organisations (the Coalition parties, ALP and Greens). However, the two youth-oriented publications, *Junkee* and *Vice*, were the least similar to the other publications in their coverage of organisations:

- *Junkee* committed considerable attention to the story of Duncan Storrar, an audience member on the ABCs *Q&A* show (9 May 2016) who was the subject of muckraking coverage by elements of the News Corp press following his appearance on the show (see further Carson and McNair, Chapter 19, this volume).
- *Vice* tended to report on different types of organisations, such as the Climate Change Authority, which received little attention from other publications.

## Coverage of electorates

Overall, 28 per cent of sampled articles discussed individual electorates. While this may reflect considerable local coverage for comparatively small publications, the depth of electorate-level coverage tended to be low with many electorates simply ‘name checked’ against key individuals (Wentworth, for example, the prime minister’s electorate) or included on lists of marginal ‘seats to watch’. Because of this, as illustrated in Table 20.8, few electorates are cited frequently. *Junkee* and *New Matilda* did not report on electorates at all, while the remaining publications were quite consistent in the amount of attention given to electorates.

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10 This is in terms of longevity, rather than the result of a sustained increase in primary support for the Greens from the 2007 and 2016 elections (9 per cent and 8.6 per cent, respectively, for the Australian Senate).



Table 20.8. Most commonly cited electorates

Rank	Electorate	Articles (percentage)	Contest	Margin (percentage)	Result
1	Batman	5.2	ALP v Green	10.6	Retain
2	Lindsay	3.8	Lib v ALP	3.0	ALP Gain
3	New England	3.8	Nat v Ind	19.5	Retain
4	Grayndler	3.6	ALP v Green	18.8	
5	Wills	3.0	ALP v Green	18.2	
6	Wentworth	2.7	Lib v ALP	18.9	
7	Eden-Monaro	2.5	Lib v ALP	2.9	
8	Mayo	2.5	Lib v NXT	12.5	NXT Gain
9	Melbourne	2.5	Green v ALP	5.3	Retain
10	Banks	2.2	Lib v ALP	2.8	
11	Capricornia	2.2	LNP v ALP	18.8	
12	Higgins	2.2	Lib v Green	9.9	
13	Petrie	2.2	LNP v ALP	0.5	
14	Brisbane	1.9	LNP v ALP	4.3	
15	Dobell	1.9	ALP v Lib	0.2	
16	Indi	1.9	Ind v Lib	0.3	
17	Sydney	1.9	ALP v Green	12.9	
18	Warringah	1.9	Lib v Green	15.3	

Source. Constructed by author from analysis based on content coding from selected publications (8 May to 1 July 2016 inclusive).

Adding outcome and margin data to the table above, we cannot see a strong relationship between the significance of the contest and the likelihood an electorate would be discussed in the sample publications. Of the top 18 electorates discussed, three changed hands (17 per cent). This is higher than (but not significantly) the total proportion of electorates changing hands in 2016 (11 per cent). While this may talk to an inability to align coverage with key electorates, in many cases other news values drove reporting, such as the coverage of Batman, because of its association with the campaigning gaffes of David Feeney (as discussed in footnote 8).

## Intermedia agenda setting

One significant observation about the 2016 coverage by sampled publications was the appearance of inter-media agenda setting, metacoverage and reporting on reporting within the sample (see also Carson and McNair, Chapter 19, this volume). These types of stories/story elements involve the transmission of news agendas through the media system (often focused on the role of 'elite' media agendas on tabloid media), self-referential discussions of the role of the media within the political process and the citation of other media reports as substitutes for primary sources. They are commonly seen as problematic: a satisfied and uncritical self-absorption within the media industry and a 'churnalistic' production of new content without new substance. The latter concern also reflects the accusation of parasitism by established news organisations (Young 2011: 80), but also the way in which some news sources have become reference points for political journalists working on election newsbeats (Young 2009).

Tables 20.9 and 20.10 demonstrate the extent to which the sampled articles employed content from other media as elements in their reporting, or as the focus of the articles themselves. This is divided into two observations:

- First, direct syndication of content into the new presses from established media and news agencies. Overall, less than one in 10 articles was syndicated content, but the vast majority of this was content from the Australian Associated Press and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (Table 20.9), and was found in the *New Daily*.
- Second, references to other reports or media coverage were found in one quarter of all articles in the sample, but a considerable variation existed between those publications most likely to cross-reference other publications/media organisations (*New Matilda*) and those least likely (*BuzzFeed*).

Table 20.9. Articles syndicated from other news sources or containing significant references to other publications' coverage

Publication	Syndicated content (%)	References to other media (%) (excludes syndication)
<i>BuzzFeed Australia</i>	0	15
<i>Conversation</i>	2	17
<i>Guardian</i>	0	35
<i>Huffington Post</i>	0*	17

Publication	Syndicated content (%)	References to other media (%) (excludes syndication)
<i>Independent Australia</i>	7	48
<i>Junkee</i>	0	41
<i>New Daily</i>	44	37
<i>New Matilda</i>	0	50
<i>Saturday Paper</i>	0	0
<i>Vice Au/NZ</i>	0	20
All	7	26

\* Excludes outbound links to Fairfax Media (*Huffington Post* partner organisation)

Source. Constructed by author from analysis based on content coding from selected publications (8 May to 1 July 2016 inclusive).

**Table 20.10. Syndicated content providers**

Source	% of syndicated articles
Australian Associated Press (AAP)	46
Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)	39
Futureproof 2016 conference	4
International Consortium of Investigative Journalists	4
<i>The Conversation</i>	7

Source. Constructed by author from analysis based on content coding from selected publications (8 May to 1 July 2016 inclusive).

Referring back to the data reported in Table 20.7, the primary media likely to be referenced (nonsyndicated) were (in descending order):

1. The ABC (generally), with a particular focus on events and debates on the broadcaster's popular politics panel show *Q&A*.
2. News Corp (generally), with particular reference to comments made by political candidates and Peta Credlin (former chief of staff to Tony Abbott) on the *Sky News* 24-hour news channel, and reporting in the *Australian*.
3. The National Press Club due to its hosting of key political debates and speeches by elites.
4. The *Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper.

Within the sampled articles, of the top 30 organisations cited, 50 per cent are media or polling organisations. This demonstrates the significance of polling in shaping the interpretation of electoral reporting for these

publications, making the observations of polling quality, and agenda narrowness discussed by Murray Goot (Chapter 5, this volume) and Simon Jackman and Luke Mansillo (Chapter 6, this volume), even more important in structuring the new news.

## Social sharing

The final area of substantive analysis is the extent to which sampled articles were highly rated by users on social media. To undertake this analysis, I employed the Share Tally website to determine the number of times each sampled article was ‘liked’ on Facebook (the market leader was used to avoid duplication associated with aggregating multiple social site data). The results are presented in Table 20.11, demonstrating an extremely high variation between sampled publications (comparative average and median figures) and between articles within publications (the high standard deviation).

The reasons for these variations need further investigation. The extent to which the tendency for articles to be liked on Facebook is neither correlated to their overall Alexa ranking (the ‘halo effect’—that more popular publications would get more likes) nor on the date (‘focusing event’—that more articles would get liked as the election became closer).

Table 20.11. Facebook likes for sampled articles

Publication	Average	Median	St. Dev.
<i>Junkee</i>	2,553	868	3,385
<i>Guardian</i>	957	578	1,264
<i>New Matilda</i>	460	344	431
<i>BuzzFeed Australia</i>	880	301	1,573
<i>Independent Australia</i>	173	106	204
<i>Conversation</i>	201	37	506
<i>Huffington Post</i>	276	27	607
<i>New Daily</i>	12	2	40
<i>Vice Au/NZ</i>	20	0	68
<i>Saturday Paper</i>	6	0	15
All	489	57	1,225

Source. Constructed by author from analysis based on content coding from selected publications (8 May to 1 July 2016 inclusive).

## Conclusion

In 2015–16, the Coalition government twice floated proposals for another round of media deregulation. Following the long-established and bipartisan tradition of ‘telegraphing’ regulatory changes to incumbents, this was likely to increase the consolidation of media markets, both horizontally and vertically. One justification for this deregulatory move was the ability of the new presses to provide competition and diversity and therefore limit risks associated with exacerbating the negative impacts of the existing Australian media oligopoly (Baker, Micallef and Homewood 2015).

Based on this analysis of the performance of these new presses in the 2016 federal election, it appears their performance was mixed. The new presses are mostly small, but those with international resources have rivalled their established counterparts in reach. In many areas, however, the new presses with the largest reach appear to mirror the types of reporting approaches and styles of established media actors. The focus on political topics, actors and organisations appears quite narrow, following Goot’s (2008) observations from a decade earlier. Contrary to the hopes of writers like Jim Macnamara (2014), these presses have not (yet) brought considerable innovation to journalistic practices.

Then again, the new presses have proven diverse in what they produce and who they target as their readership. In quality terms, a number of these presses have different editorial foci more akin to news magazines than newspapers, and some are working hard to form relations with underserved audiences (particularly young people) through innovation in the presentation of content, but also in the reporting of issues outside of the mainstream. Outside of *The Conversation’s* use of the university sector for information subsidies, the majority of these new presses remain limited by a political economy that has not yet found an effective commercial model to scale these publications. This drives ‘churnalism’ and metacoverage in some areas and extends the tendency of ‘dumping’ content from media organisations’ home markets into their Australian properties. With the arrival of the *Daily Mail Australia* (2014), and anticipated launch of a localised *New York Times* (Lichterman 2016), this is likely to be a deepening tendency.

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# 21

## The Election Online: Debate, Support, Community

Scott Wright, Verity Trott and William Lukamto

This chapter analyses everyday online political talk about the 2016 Australian federal election. Rather than focusing on the usual suspects of candidates' social media interactions and party websites' interactive features (e.g. Macnamara and Kenning 2014), this study addresses a 'new agenda' for online deliberation. This is the study of everyday talk about the election as it emerges in a formally non-political, online 'third space': a discussion forum devoted to parenting (Wright 2012a, 2012b; Wright, Graham and Jackson 2016). In doing this, the chapter addresses a gap in studies of Australian election campaigning, including across the previous volumes of this series, and more generally in the field of online deliberation research.

To this end, the chapter analyses three principal research questions. First: what is the discursive nature of debate about the election? This question analyses the rationality of debate; the extent to which people are engaged in debate versus stand-alone comment; the existence of negative behaviours such as 'flaming', 'curbing' and 'trolling'; and, finally, the extent to which debates are politically polarised with the left talking to the left, and the right talking to right. The second research question is: how do people talk about the election process and voting? This question looks at how people talk about the process of voting and vote choices. This includes whether people talk about the experience of voting (e.g. sausage sizzles);

their election knowledge; discussions and declarations of who to vote for; specific reasons for their vote choice; and whether they discuss political personalities, ideology or express disillusion/disappointment or praise/support for the parties. The third research question is: to what extent do people talk about key election themes? This analyses the extent to which the debate focused on themes such as marriage equality, the environment, the economy and so on. To answer the questions, the chapter provides a detailed analysis of nearly 700 comments posted in three threads that focus directly on the election. This is combined with an over-arching analysis of all participants.

## The internet and Australian federal elections

With each federal election, new hope and hype is placed on the apparent power of the internet to change electoral practice. Research has shown that political parties and politicians have been broadly following international trends on electioneering adopting, if not necessarily adapting to, new technology, but often with limited mainstream impact (e.g. Chen 2008; Flew and Wilson 2008; Gibson, Lusoli and Ward 2008; Gibson and McAllister 2008; Gibson and Ward 2008; Macnamara 2008; Macnamara and Kenning 2011, 2014). Rachel Gibson and Marta Cantijoch's (2011) comparison of the 2010 UK and Australian elections suggested communication by politicians was largely in the traditional broadcast form, with limited interaction. Jim Macnamara and Gail Kenning (2014: 13) analysed candidates' social media use during the 2013 federal election, finding that while usage increased overall, their interactive dialogue decreased from the 2010 election in favour of more broadcast communication—leading them to argue that communication remains largely 'politics 1.0'. Axel Bruns's (2016; see also Bruns and Burgess 2011) analysis of Twitter use found that the Labor Party was twice as active as the Coalition, with the Greens candidates the most active. Coalition tweets were largely from the frontbench, which was interpreted as an attempt to control the message.

The Australian 'e-lection' literature follows a similar theoretical and methodological approach to 'e-lection' literature internationally (e.g. Gibson et al. 2003; Lilleker et al. 2011; Stromer-Galley 2003; Vaccari 2008). First, much of the literature is theoretically framed by the polarising normalisation, or equalisation, approach to

understanding impact. This is unhelpful because it can warp the analysis of results, underplaying incremental change (Wright 2012a). Second, the literature has largely focused on analysing how politicians and parties engage (or not) online, and how people respond and react to them (e.g. Macnamara 2008, Macnamara and Kenning 2014). While this focus on the political elite is undoubtedly interesting and important, it ignores the vast majority of political talk that occurs between, and amongst, citizens. Thus, when scholars talk about the impact of the internet on elections, they are providing a very narrow picture of events. In an apparently web 2.0 social media age, it seems peculiar to continue to focus on these elites at the expense of everyday talk.

One helpful counterpoint here is Tim Highfield's (2016) lucid, insightful and important study of social media and everyday politics. It provides a discursive analysis and account of everyday online civic rituals during the election day, and how these sometimes clash with social media norms. This includes the 'democracy sausage' as part of the voting experience, and rules on taking photos within polling stations. However, the quantitative empirical data focuses on election hashtags such as #ausvotes. While at face value, Twitter seems to be an everyday political space, the organisational role of election hashtags may limit this because they are politically defined and widely used by the political elite and activists. In addition, Twitter has been disproportionately examined for political talk online at the cost of overlooking spaces less dominated by the political and media elite. This may still, thus, be a relatively narrow account that fails to capture the average citizen (Highfield 2016: 144).

What has largely been missing across the Australian online election literature is an analysis of how online election debates emerge beyond these politically defined spaces, such as those devoted to self-help, lifestyle or popular culture. This chapter addresses this limitation. The gap is important because the space of political talk matters. Space shapes the nature of debate. Whether it is interface design (Wright and Street 2007), moderation (Edwards 2002; Wright 2002, 2006) or the topic and structure of the space (Wright 2012b), the design of forums—like parliamentary debating chambers—matters. Following new institutionalist theory, this design is not just the formal institutional structures, but also includes the informal rules and norms of debate that shape how people interact discursively. To unpack this claim in more detail, we turn to address the nature and importance of everyday political talk in non-political, online 'third spaces'.

## Everyday online political talk in non-political spaces

Everyday online political talk encompasses a wide variety of political debate. As opposed to formal political talk, it is citizens rather than political elites that create everyday election debate. Such debate can be messy, mundane and draw on humour, and can emerge in the process of everyday conversation. We argue that everyday online political talk matters during elections. It matters because such talk helps to develop a sense of citizenship and civic identity, and is important to the microdynamics of democracy (Dahlgren 2006). But political talk is not just a contextual resource sitting in the background. Rather, more specifically, to the extent that people talk about the election, it is in this general public sphere where (typically mediated) campaign messages and debates are refracted, distilled and through which a sense of personal and public opinion can form. Thus, while people may primarily consume election material through the mediated public sphere, it is deconstructed, interpreted and reconstructed through the everyday public sphere and political talk. If it is correct that the mediated public sphere—often linked to a broader ‘dumbing down’ of politics amid attempts to package politics (Franklin 1994)—is denuding citizens of their civic capacity and social capital (Putnam 2000), can everyday political talk help to mitigate some of these concerns? Does talking about politics online, particularly in a public, community context, lead people to become more politically active (Graham, Jackson and Wright 2015, 2016; Wright 2015)? While the brief account of civic talk outlined above would suggest some hope, there are also many concerns about the contemporary state of (on and offline) political talk itself.

First, online political talk often becomes polarised, with people able to ignore those with whom they disagree, narrowcasting to a group of like-minded people as a kind of ‘Daily Me’ (Sunstein 2001) that reinforces rather than challenges views (Van Alstyne and Brynjolfsson 1997: 3–4; Smith et al. 2014). Second, people may simply choose to avoid political talk (Eliasoph 1998), or avoid talking about politics if they perceive that others hold differing views, or they are in a minority (Mutz 2006; Mutz and Martin 2001)—again, avoiding disagreement. Where this ‘norm’ is breached, people may ‘unfriend’ the people that do not adhere (John and Dvir-Gvirzman 2015). Third, political talk online can descend into aggressive ‘flame wars’ and ‘trolling’, with debates going off topic

(e.g. Davis 1999, 2005; Wilhelm 2000). Finally, online political debates are often found to have highly active minorities that dominate activity (Davis 2005; Wright 2006, 2007). This is problematic for some theories of deliberation, which typically argue that deliberation either requires broadly equal participation, or at least the opportunity to deliberate equally (Dahlberg 2001). There are, thus, many potential challenges for online deliberation. We contend, however, that political talk that emerges in certain kinds of non-political, online spaces—what we call third spaces—may have the potential to overcome these challenges.

At its most basic, a third space is an online public space that exists beyond home (first space) or work (second space), where people can come together for informal conversation and socialising. The concept of third space is built on a critique of Ray Oldenburg's concept of third place. Oldenburg's third places are place-spaced venues (such as pubs and cafés), where people can meet and interact informally, and where political talk emerges. Oldenburg argues they perform a crucial role in the development of societies and communities, helping to strengthen citizenship and thus are 'central to the political processes of a democracy' (1999: 67). However, Oldenburg argues the third place is in serious decline—in part, because of the internet. Indeed, Oldenburg is highly critical of the idea of virtual community, on which the concept of third space is based (see Wright 2012b for a detailed account). We argue that online communities can indeed be communities (following Rheingold 1993; Schuler 1996; Bruckman and Resnick 1995; Wellman 1998) and they are important to democracy. While we cannot get into all of this debate here, it is important to address how they might provide an important venue for political talk (see Wright 2012a, 2012b).

We hypothesise that political talk in third spaces will feature important characteristics of deliberation. First, we hypothesise that comments will be discursive, with people engaged in sustained debates. Second, we hypothesise that comments will generally be rational, defined as people using evidence to support claims as opposed to making unsupported assertions. Third, we hypothesise that there will be limited 'flaming', 'trolling' and 'curbing'. Such negative behaviours are a significant issue in online debate. We argue that this will be limited for a variety of reasons, including that there are strong community norms and moderation that maintain a broadly respectful tone; many participants are regulars and know each other; and the space is not politically defined, which means that people from a wide variety of political persuasions are likely to

participate. Fourth, building on both Oldenburg's positive analysis of the role of 'regulars' in third places, and the more positive analyses of the impact of frequent posters in online political debate, it is hypothesised that there will be 'regulars', or 'super participants', and they will have a positive impact on debate. Finally, while we cannot address this in detail here, we hypothesise that political polarisation will be limited in a third space. This is because the forum is not politically defined and should, thus, feature participants with a wide range of political views. Moreover, political talk can, in theory, emerge in a wide range of subforums—beyond the political and news sections of the forum—making it harder for people to avoid politics (Brundidge 2010: 695; Eliasoph 1998). In combination, this makes crosscutting (left–right) political talk more likely to occur (see Wright, Graham and Jackson 2016 for an empirical study).

## Methodology

The method adopted for this study was a manual content analysis. Data was collected from the forum using a web-scraping tool—Outwit Hub Pro—and stored offline in a database. To identify threads that talked about the election, we used a single keyword search, 'election'. We chose to select only threads that focused specifically on the election because the study is part of a broader comparative project and we found that search functions return different kinds of data, impeding comparability. This sampling method controlled for this limitation. However, this is also likely to undermine some of the key normative benefits of third spaces: political talk within a political subforum is likely to be different to a non-politically defined subforum. This is because politically defined spaces are likely to attract the already politically interested, while others might choose to ignore or avoid the political sections of the forum. This may, in turn, lead to greater polarisation and flaming. In practice, we discovered that there was limited talk about the election outside of the three threads, and that these were in an election subforum. Moreover, we observed that the moderators were moving other threads into one big election thread to maintain continuity. One single thread accounted for 95 per cent of all the posts across the three election threads. This moderation policy is likely to further impact debate.

## Content analysis

The principal method for analysing the nature of the debate was content analysis. We divided the content analysis framework into four separate sections, and they were coded in four phases to increase reliability. The coding manuals were tested and refined, and coders were trained to enhance reliability. Intercoder reliability testing was conducted using Freelon's Re-Cal platform. Reliability scores were high across the board, particularly when we consider that the sample was small and many codes were infrequently applied and that one error would heavily impact reliability (Kappa).

Table 21.1. Reliability test results

	Cohen's Kappa	Agreement (percentage)
Election codes	0.72	88.9
Topic of debate	0.85*	99.3
Nature of debate	0.87*	95.6

Note. n = 71.

\* Includes codes with 100 per cent agreement recorded as 1.0 for perfect reliability

Source. Data collected and coded by authors from an online parenting forum.

### Phase 1: Nature of debate

First, we present our method for analysing the nature of debate. Our initial step was to analyse the discursivity of debate: messages were coded as a *stand-alone comment* when they did not reply to another message; coded as a *seed* message if they were at the start of a thread; a *reply* when messages were a reply to another message; or a *reciprocated exchange* when there was a comment, reply and a further reply. Second, we analysed whether a message was a *rational claim* or an *assertion*. That is, was a claim supported with some kind of reason or evidence, or was it just a claim? For example, 'Labor's negative gearing policy is crazy because it will harm the middle class', would be coded as a rational claim whereas, 'Labor's negative gearing policy is crazy', would be coded as an assertion. Finally, we coded for *critical reflection*: a rationalised claim that directly challenges or refutes another claim in the thread or beyond. This is indicative of crosscutting political talk. The final step was to analyse for negative behaviours. We coded for *degrading* comments that attempted to lower the character, quality, esteem or rank of another participant or

the participant's claims (e.g. 'you're an idiot', 'you don't know what you're talking about', 'It is stupid to argue that climate change is real'). *Curbing* messages were attempts to suppress or restrict another participant's claim, argument, position, opinion or statements in general. This includes statements like 'you don't belong in this forum', 'shut up' and 'you need to stop posting'. Finally, *flaming* was coded in messages where people used foul language or were aggressive. We also coded for one further positive behaviour, when users *acknowledged* other users with words of encouragement, compliments, thanking and statements of sympathy such as 'you're amazing', 'great work' and 'thanks for your support'.

Alongside these codes, we also recorded whether a poster was a 'super poster' (more than 2,000 posts); the total number of posts made in the three threads by each participant; and whether the post was made by a moderator or community staff (which was clearly identified) to add granularity to the analysis and to allow us to assess the impact of super participants and the regulars (Graham and Wright 2014).

## Phase 2: Election codes

The second phase of the coding analysed how people talked about their election experience and voting in various ways. First, we coded for whether people talked about the *voting experience*. This was informed by Stephen Coleman's (2013) important study of how people perceived the road to voting. Here, coders were looking for mentions of the experience of voting, such as talk about the sausage sizzle, wait times, whether people stated that they liked/hated voting and also discussions of the media coverage of voting (as a mediated voting experience). Second, we coded for whether people stated that they had *limited political or election knowledge*. This code included statements like 'I don't know who the leader is' and 'I don't understand their policy'. Third, we coded for *vote choice talk* in which people talked about who to vote for, including statements of intention as well as debates about who to vote for. Fourth, we analysed whether people gave a reason for who they were voting for, such as 'I am voting Liberal because my parents did' or 'because I believe in low taxes'. Fifth, we coded for whether people expressed uncertainty about who to vote for. Sixth, we coded for whether people sought or provided *election help* on the process of voting, specifically focusing on technical matters such as how to vote, when polling stations were open and when was the best time to vote (discussions of who to vote for were coded as vote choice



talk). Seventh, we coded for whether people commented on party policies such as negative gearing, health and the environment. Eighth, we coded for whether people commented on political personalities including the party leaders, MPs and general comment on whether politicians were good or bad. Ninth, we coded for specific reference to political ideology (this included statements about parties lacking ideology). Tenth, we coded for expressions of disillusion or disappointment with politics and politicians, including complaints about parties, leaders or the election process. Eleventh, we coded for expressions of support, praise or happiness with Australian parties, politicians or policies. Finally, we coded for whether the posts contained personal information about the poster or their family such as discussions about their personal situation and experience.

### Phase 3: Topic of comments

Our third phase focused on what we had identified as key topics in the election, to see the extent to which they have been picked up and commented on within the forum. This is not an exhaustive list, though having read all of the comments, we believe it does cover a significant amount of all of the political talk. This was not a dominant code (in other words, if people talked about the environment and infrastructure in the same comment it would be coded twice):

- Environment: climate change, agriculture, animals, environment in general
- Asylum and immigration: 'turn backs', offshore detention, rights of immigrants, integration of immigrants
- Indigenous affairs: land rights, Indigenous education, health, equality, racism towards Indigenous Australians
- Science and technology: research, science, space, tech industry
- Education: schools, universities, childcare/preschool
- Economy: budget, deficit, growth, health of economy, who people trust to run economy, unemployment, jobs
- Housing and real estate: rental prices, negative gearing, house costs, house building, apartment block development
- Infrastructure: roads, public transport, airports, National Broadband Network and internet cabling
- Health and welfare: Medicare, Centrelink, benefits, hospitals, doctors.

## Phase 4: Political views

This set of codes analysed whether each individual participant in the thread expressed either a direct political affiliation (e.g. ‘I support the Greens’) or a general political affiliation (e.g. ‘I vote for left-leaning parties’). We used this to analyse the spread of political affiliations of users; the total numbers of comments of people from the left and right (by marking every comment from someone who said they voted Labor or left with their view); and whether people engaged in crosscutting political talk between left and right. Occasionally, people made who they voted for explicit without specifying a party or stating a left/right affiliation (e.g. ‘I believe in higher taxation and a strong welfare state and more funding for schools’, would be coded as left leaning; statements such as ‘I believe in marriage equality’ were not coded as this can apply to left or right). As this proved reliable, we included these as well as explicit left or right statements. Where people stated which party they supported or voted for, this was coded as their political view throughout. If people stated they voted in a certain direction, we checked their other posts to see if there were specific statements of support for a party. Similarly, where no political affiliation was given in the first comment of a poster, we checked their other comments to see if a political affiliation was given. Where people contradicted themselves (very rare), this would be coded as unclear. Our categories were: Left, Labor Party, Liberal, National, Green, Independent Right, Independent Left, Independent unspecified (states ‘supports Independents’ with no other clarifying information), Right (including statements such as I support the Coalition), undecided (e.g. I am still thinking, I am not sure) and unclear (where no view was given, or it was unclear/contradictory).

## Findings

### Nature of debate

The debates were highly interactive and discursive, with no evidence of people talking past each other, or just commenting without engaging—supporting hypothesis one. Within the election threads, we found that 18 per cent of posts were (single) replies (most of these occurred near the start as a series of people replied to an initial question, before it turned into a debate), with 81 per cent of posts being interactive, ‘reciprocated

exchanges’ and only 1 per cent of the posts were coded as ‘standalone comments’—typically a question starting a new debate. The default form of communication was a reciprocal debate with people often engaged in sustained interaction over a number of posts. However, interaction does not necessarily equal deliberation. Indeed, we might expect there to be more negative discursive behaviour in a highly interactive environment. Thus, we move to the content of the debates.

Figure 21.1 indicates that the quality of debate is generally high, with 47 per cent of comments coded as ‘rational’, using evidence to support claims, compared to only 15 per cent of comments coded as ‘assertions’. In addition, a further 15 per cent were ‘critical reflections’, showing that a minority of debates featured users providing counter claims that were specifically in response to another user’s argument. Furthermore, there was very limited evidence of negative discursive behaviours such as degrading, flaming and curbing, and people often acknowledged each other, indicative of a community structure.

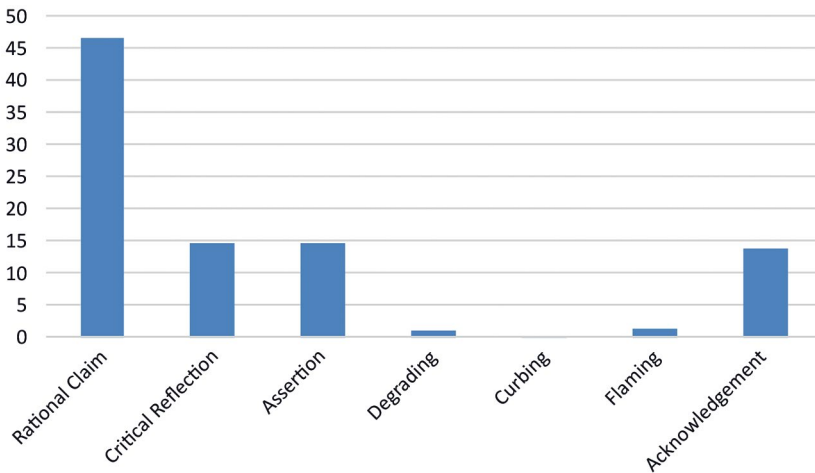


Figure 21.1. The nature of debate

Source. Constructed by authors from data collected from an online parenting forum.

A closer analysis of the content of the debates suggests users find ways to relate to other users who hold differing political alignments and attempt to find common ground with each other. Users illustrated a constructive and considerate type of engagement where they reflected and expanded upon another user’s claim rather than blatantly disagreeing with it. This is reflected in a specific debate in which some left-aligned users talk

with two liberal voters about their similar views on social issues, such as marriage equality and asylum-seeker rights. A few users expressed surprise at their shared views and further attempted to understand where their differences emerged. When we consider the topics of debates were often difficult, sensitive issues—for example, around asylum seekers—and that the exchanges were highly interactive, the results strongly suggest these debates had a deliberative character and were surprisingly high in quality, supporting hypotheses two and three.

This display of genuine and civil deliberative political discourse emphasises the value of the forum as a third space. It highlights how everyday political talk online helps individuals to construct their own civic identity while also enabling them to contextualise their own views amongst others in their community. The practice of finding common ground with each other also helps develop a sense of empathy and mindfulness with differing views, further strengthening the bonds between members of the community and provoking some of the users to consider alternative perspectives.

## Political affiliation

We identified 71 users participating within the three election threads of the forum. A user is considered a participant if she or he posts at least once. For each of these users, we further determined which parties or ideology they identified with. Table 21.2 shows that 28 participants had a left-wing affiliation within the election threads (self-identifying as left, Labor or Green). This contrasts with only 13 users identifying as conservative voters—with no Nationals visibly participating. Furthermore, 29 users were either unclear or undecided about their political alignment. This indicates that this third space has at least the potential for crosscutting political talk through which voters' views and choices have the potential to be shaped through debate. There was, however, an imbalance in participation with people from the left commenting more frequently, and one Liberal poster being the most frequent commenter overall within the threads. The comment structure within the threads was also unequal: the top 10 posters within the three threads had made 65 per cent of the comments. However, given the broadly positive findings of this research, it suggests that the regulars have a positive impact on debate (hypothesis 4). Initial analysis of polarisation indicates that the debates were not polarised, with people engaging in crosscutting political talk with significant disagreement (Wright, Lukamto and Trott 2016).

Table 21.2. Political affiliation

Political Identification	No. of posts	No. of users	No. of super posters	No. of comments by super posters
Left	194	20	8	62
Right	11	3	2	8
Labour	83	3	3	79
Liberal	131	5	2	14
National	0	0	0	0
Green	88	5	3	55
Independent unspecified	6	4	0	0
Undecided	13	3	1	11
Unclear	66	26	14	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>594</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>259</b>

Source. Data collected and coded by authors from an online parenting forum.

We also analysed the ‘super posters’ (users who had posted more than 2,000 comments on the forum) or ‘regulars’, and discovered that while there were only three super posters who were self-declared Labor voters, they were extremely active within the thread. These three Labor supporters combined were responsible for 79 of the comments within the election thread, highlighting the dominant role their voice played within the election debates. Right-leaning and Liberal-associated ‘super posters’ were infrequent posters, by comparison, with only 22 comments combined. Super posters in total contributed 31 per cent of the total number of posts, which is slightly less than the overall average for the forum. If we consider both the analysis of super posters and the most frequent participants in the thread, alongside the broadly positive findings presented here, it suggests that a group of regulars is important to setting the tone of debate (hypothesis 4).

## Election topics

As is shown in Figure 21.2, there were three key election topic themes that were prominent in the election threads. First, there was a large amount of discussion around asylum seekers and immigration (22 per cent of all posts), much of which was about revulsion for Pauline Hanson and the far right. Second, discussions about the economy were prominent (11 per cent of all posts), with users comparing the two major parties’ differing approaches to economic policy. Third, discussion around marriage equality

was quite common (9 per cent of all posts). There was ubiquitous support for marriage equality with lots of frustration over the proposed plebiscite and Malcolm Turnbull; many users voiced their desire for the bill to be passed and to stop wasting time and taxpayers' money. It was noticeable that the environment and real estate (for example, negative gearing) were barely mentioned (2 per cent and 0.3 per cent of all posts, respectively). The former is quite surprising as there were several Green supporters in the thread, but they largely debated on social issues. There was also a notable lack of discussion surrounding Indigenous affairs (only one post mentioned Indigenous issues and that was in relation to the first Indigenous woman to be elected into the House of Representatives).<sup>1</sup> The dominant role played by the three topics reflects that discursive structure of the debate: these topics were talked about at length and with multiple participants.

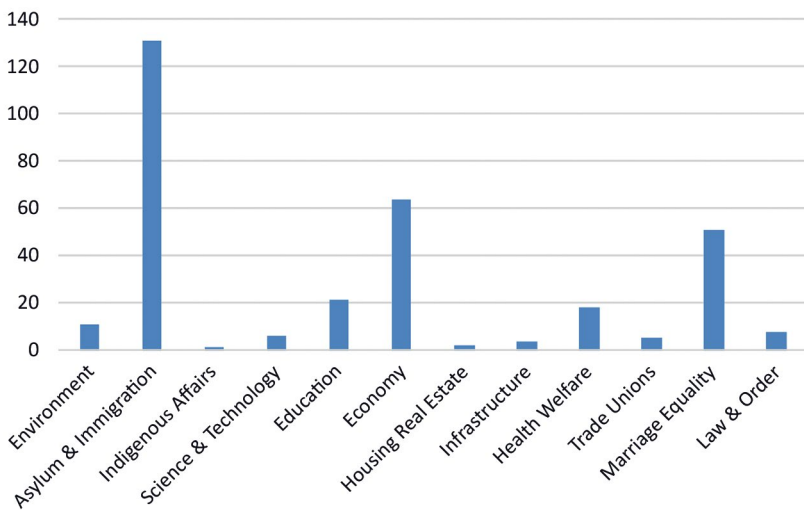


Figure 21.2. Election topics

Source. Data collected and coded by authors from an online parenting forum.

Using content analysis, we cannot determine whether the broader user base was avoiding political talk. However, the results show that the people who participated avoided neither difficult topics nor disagreed with each other (Wright, Lukamto and Trott 2016). That the debate was of a relatively high quality (in terms of rationality, discursive structure, crosscutting) is all the more surprising given the topics of debate.

<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of the discussion on Indigenous issues in the election, see Perche, Chapter 27, this volume.

## Election experience

Within our election vote codes, we discovered that there was a substantial amount of talk about political personalities (Figure 21.3), which was often accompanied by feelings of disappointment. Some of this can be attributed to the original poster raising a secondary question: who is the worst politician of all time? Users often compared Tony Abbott and Turnbull, and expressed dismay toward Hanson. However, a few users shared positive sentiments with declarations of support and praise for Penny Wong, and one person expressed support for Hanson. Within these discussions, it became clear there was a commonly shared sense of dissatisfaction with the two major parties.

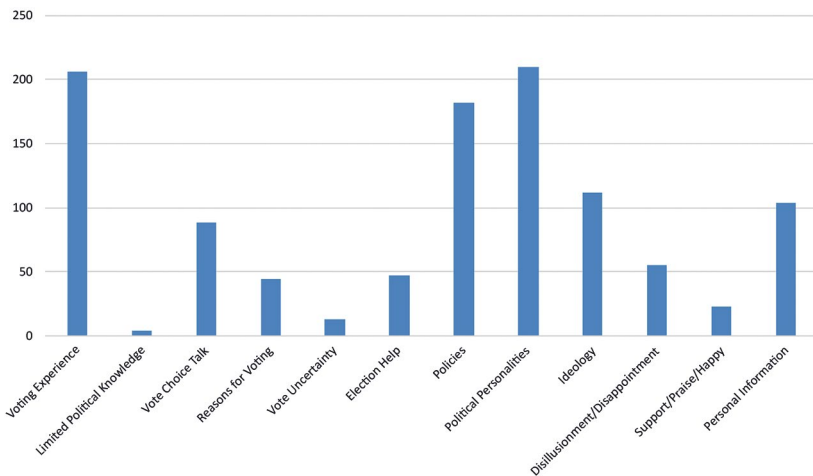


Figure 21.3. Election experience

Source. Data collected and coded by authors from an online parenting forum.

Our codes revealed that there was a lot of talk about the voting experience—this was predominately about the experience of voting at the polling booth, including queues and ‘democracy sausages’ (or sausage sizzles). People were keen to talk about the social experience of voting, including their personal experience. This can be understood as another part of the civic ritual literature to the extent that people were looking to make the experience more enjoyable, and it supports literature that focuses on how people experience the road to voting, and how authorities might enhance this (Coleman 2013; Highfield 2016). This also included people’s experiences watching the ABC coverage of the election results as votes were being counted. The conversations that surrounded the ABC coverage

were particularly interesting as they depicted a shared collective experience of users simultaneously watching and discussing what was occurring on the ABC. As more users engaged in this somewhat live commentary of the ABC, there developed a collective expectation that other users should be watching as well. Users supported each other to stay up and watch or felt compelled to justify why they went to bed and missed it. These types of conversations highlight the ways in which everyday political talk online can motivate citizens to become more politically active as they are compelled to ‘stay in the loop’ and are encouraged by others to engage further so they understand the political processes occurring.

It was also reasonably common for users to provide help about the election, including explaining the ballot papers and voting process, as well as explaining the vote-counting process and the procedure surrounding the formation of government. A few users made a point of reiterating the new voting process on the ballot for the Senate to ensure everyone was aware of the changes and would be prepared for voting on the day. In addition to the earnestness towards providing help, our findings showed that users appeared to be quite comfortable talking about who they were voting for.

## Shaping deliberative spaces

The results above depict the parenting forum as a particularly respectful third space for political deliberation with low levels of trolling and high levels of reciprocated discussions. To further understand these results, we analyse the social norms and practices that emerged and shed light on how the forum has managed to capture and maintain such genuine debate, and how we might be able to develop other sites into such third spaces.

While arguments rarely devolved into ‘flame wars’ or personal attacks, when they did happen, other users were found to quickly take up mediatory roles in resolving disputes so that the quarrelling parties were soon placated. This was done by referring to already established common ground between the two parties, or by clarifying any misunderstandings one party might hold. Through this mediation process, disputing parties were found to either ‘agree to disagree’ or apologise for any hurtful remarks and misunderstandings. This seems to be a social norm that most users—not just the ‘super posters’—adopt. Out of the three disputes found in



the sample, two were successfully mediated by users who were not super posters. In deliberative terms, consensus won out over conflict between clearly disagreeing parties.

While the reasons for how such a consensual deliberative environment was cultivated were not the focus of this study, we suggest that three factors contributed. First, as a parenting forum, users entered the debates recognising that they already share some common characteristics with other users. This common ground became a foundation for friendships and trust to be built between different users who might not support the same political party, policy or ideology. Second, the forum is built around the desire to develop a supportive space for parents where they can build a trusted community to share information, resources and experiences that loosely revolve around pregnancy and parenting concerns. Users thus enter the forums ready to give and receive support. Third, it seems likely that gender plays a significant role. While it is not possible to determine with accuracy the gender of participants as most users adopt a pseudonym, it seems likely that participants are predominantly women. Tali Mendelberg and Christopher Karpowitz's (2016: 3) overview of research provides a useful account of why this matters:

[W]omen tend to prefer making decisions through consensus and cooperation, and dislike overt conflict or competition. If women are socialized to cooperate and to seek consensus, while men are socialized to exercise agency and to win conflicts, then by implication women may be motivated to participate in decision-making situations when those situations highlight consensus seeking and avoid overt conflict.

As noted, there was a significant amount of disagreement in the forum, but this rarely became outright conflict and was successfully moderated by other users.

The key tenets of trust and support underpin much of the discourse that is present in the forum. Users were found to often freely share very personal information about themselves and their experiences associated with conceiving and parenting. The standard practice of sharing personal information is carried over into the election threads where we can see that over 100 comments contain personal information. While these bonds and norms have the potential to suppress disagreement and create political polarisation, our analysis indicates that this was not happening (see also Wright, Lukamto and Trott 2016).

## Conclusion

Overall, the political talk on the forum has deliberative characteristics, with limited evidence of negative discursive behaviours. This appeared, in part, to be because of a supportive environment with a shared interest, and many people knew each other and had trust. It also seems likely that gender plays an important role, though more research is necessary using (or combining) different methods to address this topic. The moderators did not play a significant role within the thread, though they did move other threads to this section to centralise the talk. Although participants were predominantly from the left, Scott Wright, William Lukamto and Verity Trott (2016) identify significant crosscutting political talk that often involved disagreement. Left-leaning people acknowledged participants with right-leaning views with phrases like ‘we still love you’ or ‘we shall agree to disagree’. This created a relatively supportive platform for more right-wing users to voice their opinions: it was disagreement with limited conflict let alone flaming. The topic of debate was dominated by sensitive political issues such as asylum and marriage equality, which makes the tone of the debate all the more surprising. Many people seemed happy to talk about their political views and to support people with the more technical side of voting. Finally, people talked quite extensively about the experience of voting and particularly the sausage sizzle.

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# Part Four. Policy Debates



# 22

## Economic Policy Debates

Damien Cahill and Matthew D.J. Ryan

A strong economy is one where businesses are confident of the future and are prepared to take the risk of investing, expanding and hiring. Our business tax cuts encourage small and medium businesses to do just that (Turnbull 2016).

\*

We will be a government for the fair go, fully paid for. Bringing down the deficit each and every year. Saving more than we spend over the decade. Returning the budget to balance at the same time as our opponents (Shorten 2016).

As is often the case, economic issues featured heavily in the election campaign—economic growth, job creation, infrastructure investment, business confidence, health and education funding were all key issues. The Coalition’s agenda was built around a \$48 billion business tax cut, while the Australian Labor Party’s (ALP) alternative centred on increased health and education funding. Despite these differences, the major parties professed a commitment to fiscal conservatism and elevated (at least rhetorically) the return of the Budget to surplus as an overriding imperative of economic policy. Yet, as this chapter will argue, neither side’s platform, nor much of the mainstream media coverage, acknowledged the looming clouds on the global economic horizon in the form of the ongoing effects of the 2008 global financial crisis, including the resultant sovereign debt crises and global economic stagnation.

The election was not, of course, contested by *just* two parties—indeed, a defining feature of the 2016 election was the increased share of the vote that did *not* go to the Coalition or the ALP. More than 20 per cent of voters gave their primary vote to minor parties or Independents (Landers 2016). Without a doubt, these groups are part of the economic story of the election, and Australian political economy more generally. The Australian Greens has been campaigning for reform to negative gearing, capital gains and superannuation taxation for many years, arguably shaping the discourse surrounding these issues during the most recent election. The large swings toward minor parties with nationalist positions—such as the Jacqui Lambie Network, the Nick Xenophon Team and Pauline Hanson’s One Nation—could be argued to be related to the anti-political reaction to neoliberalism (see Hay 2007). Due to the space constraints, however, this chapter limits itself to an analysis of those parties and the issues that dominated the election campaign, which entails a focus on the major parties.

First, this chapter will discuss the political economic context in which the campaign was situated, before moving on to detail the platforms of the two major parties. From here, some evaluation of the feasibility and implications of each platform will be offered. Finally, the outlook and key challenges for the Australian economy will be outlined. It will be argued that while there are differences over economic policy between the major parties, these are not of a fundamental nature, with neither party recognising the likely challenges facing the Australian economy, let alone proposing meaningful solutions.

## The economic context

The key phenomenon underpinning the Australian economy, but rarely discussed by politicians or commentators during the election campaign, is the crisis in which global capitalism has been mired since 2008. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), there is ‘a subdued outlook for the world economy—but risks of much weaker global growth have also risen’ (2016). Interest rates in the leading advanced capitalist economies are close to zero, indicating a waning ability for monetary policy to act as an effective lever of economic management. The spectre of deflation looms large.

To be sure, Australia has not experienced this crisis as acutely as many of the other advanced capitalist economies. A combination of the Rudd government's 2008–09 stimulus measures (see Wanna 2015: 313), the relative underexposure of leading Australian-based banks to toxic financial assets, a continued housing boom supporting private debt-led consumption and the favourable trading relationships between Australian-based extractive industries and Chinese manufacturers have contributed to the Australian economy not being beset by large rises in unemployment or sustained stagnant growth. Yet, the economic crisis provides the crucial context for understanding this election for several reasons.

First, the government's budget deficit, which underpins most political discourse about the economy and the spending policies of the major parties, exists as a direct result of the global economic crisis. Given the crisis, it is almost inconceivable that any Australian government could have maintained a budget surplus since 2008, irrespective of the policy measures it took. While the Rudd government's stimulus measures were historically contingent—that is, a different government could have responded to the crisis in different ways—a prolonged deficit was always likely as a consequence of the crisis.

Second, there are signs of weakness in the Australian economy, which mirror a broader global pattern of economic stagnation. Indeed, Australia's most recent year-on-year headline economic growth figure of 3.1 per cent belies deeper, structural economic problems. Real net disposable income fell by 1.3 per cent in the year ending in March 2016 (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2016). Meanwhile, average real weekly wages have fallen by 0.6 per cent since Tony Abbott's election as prime minister in 2013 (Stanford 2016: 12). Gross fixed capital formation is down 5.7 per cent on the previous year (ABS 2016), while real business capital investment has also fallen 5.5 per cent since the Coalition's previous election victory in 2013 (Stanford 2016: 8). Official unemployment stands at 5.8 per cent. However, this hides the incidence of underemployment (i.e. those who are in paid work but wish to do more). Indeed, one measure puts the combined unemployment and underemployment rates at 17.9 per cent (Roy Morgan Research 2016). While Australia's headline growth figures are buoyed by mining-led production and exports, this hardly augurs well for the much-heralded transition to a non-extractive economy, particularly as the Chinese economy, which is the destination for much of this mining product, is now growing much more slowly than was the case prior to the onset of the crisis (McCurry 2016). Moreover, the Reserve

Bank of Australia's (RBA) cash rate, which it uses to regulate private sector interest rates, stood at 1.75 per cent at the time of the election, its lowest point since the practice of inflation targeting began in the 1990s (RBA 2016). Given that continued low inflation could prompt the RBA to cut rates further, Australia could well face the prospect of at or close-to zero interest rates, signalling the waning effectiveness of monetary policy as a key lever of economic management.

Third, there are signs that the crisis is forcing a reconfiguration of public policy in Australia and elsewhere. Since the early 1980s, successive federal governments in Australia have engaged in a neoliberal reconstruction of the Australian state and economy. During this period, not only have the state and economy been reconfigured through processes of privatisation, deregulation, marketisation, tax cuts, new public management and inflation targeting monetary policy, but broadly neoliberal precepts have come to form a new state 'rationality' (Beeson and Firth 1998; Davies 2014), underpinning a broad consensus, or 'settlement', among policy elites as to the proper conduct of public policy.

Yet, the onset of the global financial crisis, and its ongoing ramifications, potentially renders this still-dominant approach to policy dysfunctional with the twin imperatives for state elites to secure conditions for capital accumulation and maintain political legitimacy. There is a problem of how certain headline neoliberal policies, which have become standard tools of economic management, are functional in the context of persistent budget deficits. Tax cuts, for example, a staple of Labor and Coalition governments from the 1980s until the present, exacerbate the gap between government revenue and expenditure, potentially offsetting any boost to aggregating the demand they stimulate (though that 'boost' is not itself a given), as governments further retrench spending to make up the shortfall. With respect to privatisation, there are now so few state-owned corporations at the national level that the capacity of this policy to produce significant revenues to government has been severely diminished. Then there are the significant government expenditure precommitments to subsidising private providers of social services—such as to the private health insurance industry and to the independent school sector—and the huge effective subsidies that flow to the already wealthy in the form of various tax concessions linked to superannuation and property ownership.

Concurrently, evidence suggests that some key neoliberal measures enjoy little popular support. In Australia, privatisation has never enjoyed majority support and survey data suggests that such support that did exist waned as the practice became more widespread (Pusey and Turnbull 2005). The marketisation of public services enjoys more mixed levels of support—generally higher than privatisation but significantly dependent upon the particular service in question and still within the context of a strong attachment to direct public provision (Wilson, Meagher and Breusch 2005). Moreover, while trade union membership density has fallen dramatically during the last two decades, attachment to existing labour-market protections remains, as was evident in the 2007 federal election, the result of which has been attributed by some scholars to a backlash against the WorkChoices policy and the radical agenda of the labour market deregulation it represented (Wilson and Spies-Butcher 2011; Spies-Butcher and Wilson 2008).

Nonetheless, there is clearly a path-dependent character to neoliberalism. National Competition Policy has effectively institutionalised neoliberal policy principles within the apparatuses of the state at every level of government (Cahill 2014). Furthermore, decades of public sector retrenchment have denuded the capacity of the state to undertake public works directly, thus creating an institutionalised bias towards outsourcing, as was the case with much of the Rudd government's Building the Education Revolution program (Parker 2013). Such factors perhaps help to explain the noticeable disenchantment with formal politics and the decline of voter attachment to the major parties in Australia. Decades of continual commitment to neoliberal processes by both major parties, despite low levels of public support and highly uneven economic benefits, have eroded faith in politics and detached parties from their traditional support bases (Mair 2013). Similar processes are evident in the victory of the 'Leave' campaign in the recent British referendum on continuing European Union (EU) membership that have sent shockwaves through the global political economy.

In this context, there is evidence that political elites, both in Australia and internationally, are rethinking the desirability of neoliberal measures. At an international level, for example, the IMF Research Department recently cast doubt on the economic benefits of deregulation (Ostry, Loungani and Furceri 2016), while the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2015) report, *In it Together: Why Less Inequality Benefits All*, recognises that inequality negatively

affects economic growth. More recently, Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) Chair, and historically staunch advocate of neoliberal measures, Rod Sims launched an attack upon privatisation because of its damaging economic effects (Hatch 2016). Domestically, some of the headline policies of each major party mark a turn away from traditional neoliberal policy commitments.

As discussed in more detail below, in the election, each major party presented an internally contradictory policy agenda to the voting public. This is indicative of a period of ‘institutional searching’ (Heino 2015) in which political and economic elites and powerful social groups search for an institutionalised resolution to economic crisis. It is a pattern observable in each of the major crises to beset the global capitalist economy. In each case, there is the reliance upon traditional, and increasingly ineffective, policies inherited from the past, even as there is experimentation with new tools of economic management.

## The platforms

The pretext for the election was the Senate’s blocking of the government’s bill to reinstate the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC) (see Taflaga and Wanna, Chapter 2, this volume). Given this, one might reasonably have expected the Coalition’s election campaign to prominently feature portrayals of Bill Shorten, and the Labor Party more generally, as beholden to trade union ‘thugs’, authorising lawlessness on construction sites and, given the recent Royal Commission into Trade Union Corruption, linking the ALP and its leader to institutionalised corruption within trade unions. Yet, such a campaign never eventuated (see Peetz, Chapter 23, this volume). Instead, the Coalition campaigned on a business tax cut worth \$48 billion, and foregrounded its ‘plan’ to create jobs and growth, while arguing that the Coalition had a proven track record of superior economic management and that Labor could not be trusted to provide stable leadership.

Labor, in contrast, campaigned on policies as potentially politically incendiary as negative gearing (the ability to claim losses incurred in generating rental income from an investment property as deductions against one’s total taxable income) and capital gains tax concessions, and in the latter stages of the campaign relied heavily on allegations that the Coalition would, if elected, seek to privatise Medicare (see Elliot and



Manwaring, Chapter 24, this volume). Despite the differences between the platforms of the two major parties, Labor still conceded the necessity of achieving fiscal balance in the medium term, and the merits of business tax cuts (albeit limited to small businesses) as a stimulatory measure. Thus, substantial similarities are evident in the broad approach to the economic policy of each major party. These comparisons are drawn out through a more detailed analysis of the platforms of the respective parties before turning to an assessment of the likelihood that either platform is adequate to cope with current and, potentially, approaching economic problems.

Table 22.1. Policy summary

Policy	Coalition	Labor
Company taxation	Cut the company tax rate to 27.5 per cent for businesses turning over up to \$10 million per year, dropping to 25 per cent for all businesses by 2026–27.	Cut the company tax rate to 27.5 per cent for businesses turning over up to \$2 million per year, but maintain existing rates for larger businesses.
Negative gearing	Keep negative gearing for all investment properties.	Restrict negative gearing to new housing from 2017, without retrospective changes.
Capital gains	No change to the current capital gains tax discount.	Cut capital gains tax discount from 50 to 25 per cent, saving a projected \$32.1 billion over 10 years.
Superannuation	Increase tax on contributions from 15 to 30 per cent for people earning more than \$250,000. In retirement, earnings on super balances over \$1.6 million to be taxed at 15 per cent, and a \$500,000 lifetime cap on after-tax contributions.	Increase tax on contributions from 15 to 30 per cent for people earning more than \$250,000. In retirement, tax super earnings over \$75,000 per annum at 15 per cent, but alternatively will consider \$1.6 million cap.
Climate change	A 28 per cent reduction on 2005 levels by 2030; continue \$2.55 billion in Emissions Reduction Fund to encourage companies to reduce emissions.	Introduce two emissions trading schemes: one for the electricity sector and one for other large emitters; a 45 per cent drop in carbon emissions on 2005 levels by 2030.
Childcare	Increase funding by \$3 billion, and overhaul sector by streamlining subsidies into one payment. Scheme is delayed until July 2018, and contingent on family tax benefit cuts.	Will keep the current system, but also commit \$3 billion extra, promising to provide relief to families from January 2017, 18 months earlier than the Coalition.

## DOUBLE DISILLUSION

Policy	Coalition	Labor
School funding	Will only fund four years of the Gonski changes; however, will provide \$1.2 billion to the states for the final two years the program was due to run.	Will fully fund the Gonski changes, including the final two years at a cost of \$4.5 billion.
University funding	Full deregulation policy ruled out, while 20 per cent government contribution cut from 2014–15 Budget delayed till 2018.	Opposes deregulation; will spend \$4 billion to lift course subsidies by \$2,500 per person; will restrict vocational education loans.
Medicare rebate freeze	Will extend existing freeze on the indexation of Medicare rebates by two years, in a measure expected to save \$925 million.	Will lift the current freeze on Medicare rebates, restoring indexed increases to account for inflation from January 2017.
Penalty rates	Will adhere to any Fair Work Commission ruling; some MPs support cutting Sunday rates to Saturday levels for some industries.	Lobby Fair Work Commission to protect rates, though not legislate to protect them.

Source. Compiled by authors from Leslie et al. (2016) and Karp and Hutchens (2016).

## The Coalition

When Malcolm Turnbull announced that he would challenge Abbott for the leadership of the Liberal Party—and, thus, the prime ministership—in September 2015, one of the key reasons presented was that Abbott was not ‘capable of providing the economic leadership our nation needs’ (Turnbull 2015). The 2016 election was Turnbull’s chance to provide the economic leadership Abbott apparently lacked. And yet, far from taking a policy platform and economic narrative to the election campaign that was significantly different from Abbott’s approach to fiscal policy, Turnbull, for the most part, offered more of the same. Take the following as summative of Turnbull’s (and the Coalition’s) economic position:

At this election Australians will have a very clear choice; to keep the course, maintain the commitment to our national economic plan for growth and jobs, or go back to Labor, with its higher taxing, higher spending, debt and deficit agenda, which will stop our nation’s transition to the new economy dead in its tracks (Turnbull 2016).

The ‘plan for growth and jobs’ to which Turnbull refers consists of a measure announced in the 2016–17 Budget, which sought to immediately cut the company tax rate by one percentile to 27.5 per cent for businesses with annual turnover of less than \$10 million, and to

progressively lower the tax rate for *all* businesses from 30 per cent to 25 per cent over a period of 10 years. Lowering business tax is entirely in line with Abbott's approach, extending changes to the effective business tax rate made in the 2015–16 Budget; the purported aversion to debt and fiscal deficit was a definitive characteristic of Abbott's approach to fiscal policy (see Ryan 2015–16: 92). Perhaps it was the unpopularity of this cornerstone tax cut (see Martin 2016), or the Treasury's untimely downgrading of employment projections (Treasury and Department of Finance 2016; Jericho 2016), which led the Coalition then to pivot to the 'small target' strategy (Taylor 2016) of 'continuity'. In the latter part of the campaign, voters were told to trust the 'experienced economic leadership' of the Coalition, while arguing that Labor would 'put at risk living standards' (Turnbull 2016), retreating from the earlier emphasis on 'jobs and growth'. Nonetheless, there was significant continuity in the macroeconomic approach of the Coalition under both Abbott and Turnbull. Two key policies where the Coalition under Turnbull *did* shift direction somewhat were the 'innovation agenda' and changes to taxes on superannuation. The 'innovation agenda' was unveiled in December 2015, and then taken to the election. It consisted of around \$1 billion of spending directed toward research, and changes in bankruptcy laws in order to encourage risk-taking (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2015). However, far from being a significant government initiative to drive the transition away from an economy based on natural resource extraction, it was partially a reinstatement of previous Coalition cuts to research funding. The proposed change to superannuation taxation first presented in the 2016–17 Budget was a more substantive departure.

These changes (initially proposed in the 2016–17 Budget, but which had not passed the Senate) looked to increase taxation on contributions to superannuation accounts from 15 to 30 per cent for people earning more than \$250,000, and to introduce a tax on earnings for super accounts totalling over \$1.6 million (Table 22.1). This policy was, perhaps, an attempt to ameliorate perceptions of Coalition economic policy as 'unfair', which have been widespread since Abbott's 2014–15 Budget (see Taflaga and Wanna, Chapter 2, this volume). Importantly, however, these changes *are* congruent with the key purported economic aim of the Coalition—namely, achieving a fiscal surplus. An oft-repeated mantra, this position was reasserted by Treasurer Scott Morrison when he stated that the purpose of the 2016–17 Budget was to 'ensure the Government lives within its means, to balance the Budget and reduce the burden of long

term debt' (2016a). These changes represent a break from the neoliberal norm (indeed, they were criticised both before and during the campaign by some Liberal Party MPs and institutional allies such as the Institute for Public Affairs), and are an example of institutional searching, as the state attempts to address the challenges arising from continued global economic crisis and resultant pressures on state revenue. Paradoxically, similar attempts at raising revenue from the Labor Party were labelled by Morrison as a 'war on growth' (2016b). A similar explanation might be brought to bear on the recent apparent focus on multinational tax minimisation—surely this can also be seen as a cash-strapped state operating autonomously from international capital in order to ensure its own fiscal sustainability? On 3 May 2016, Scott Morrison, with his Assistant Treasurer Kelly O'Dwyer, announced a new 'Tax Avoidance Taskforce' (Morrison 2016c). Far from being a departure from neoliberal norms, this \$680 billion spend only amounted to a *partial* reconstruction of the Australian Tax Office, after successive redundancies: the Taskforce consisted of 1,300 new positions, against the 4,700 redundancies during the Coalition government's previous term (Aston 2016).

## The Labor Party

Against the 'small target' of continuity presented by the Coalition, the ALP presented a broadside of policy positions (see Table 22.1), including a more tightly targeted business tax cut, a restriction on negative gearing, an increase in the effective capital gains tax and more spending in particular portfolios such as school education, tertiary education and healthcare. Under the rubric of '100 Positive Policies', Labor presented what was one of the most comprehensive (and costed) alternative fiscal positions of any opposition party in Australian history. And yet, how different was the overall fiscal position between the government and opposition? Over the short term, Labor's platform was distinctly less contractionary than the government's, adding \$4 billion to the Pre-Election Fiscal Outlook (PEFO) in 2017–18, and \$4.7 billion in 2018–19—or a total of \$16.5 billion across the forward estimates (Grattan 2016). Moreover, relative to the Coalition's planned fiscal consolidation, the ALP is certainly less austere—Labor's platform was not simply \$4 billion of debt-financed spending, but a change in the balance of taxation and redistribution, meaning that social service provision would be markedly different from the austerity-type cuts to social services proposed by the government. Despite this, however, the ALP's platform during the 2016 federal election

did *not* constitute a break from the ‘common sense’ of fiscal conservatism. Indeed, Opposition Leader Bill Shorten emphasised during Labor’s campaign launch that an ALP government would ‘not be a big spending government’, promising to return the Budget ‘to balance at the same time’, 2019–20, as the Coalition (Shorten 2016). In an apparent attempt to give substance to this rhetoric, mid-campaign, the ALP announced its intention to make cuts to higher education and to increase revenue by freezing the Medicare Levy Surcharge and Private Health Insurance Rebate, and making cuts to the Family Tax Benefit Part A for families earning over \$100,000 per year (Coorey 2016; Dziedzic 2016). All of this after Labor had earlier criticised the Coalition for funding its election promises with a commitment to reduce ‘welfare fraud’ (Dziedzic 2016).

The fact that Shorten and Labor were so adamant they would not be a ‘big spending government’, accepting implicitly the idea that budgetary surplus is an imperative medium-term goal of fiscal policy—to the exclusion of a deficit-financed Keynesian-type stimulus during a period of global downturn—shows that the hegemony of neoliberalism is still deeply entrenched (see Cahill 2010, 2014). And yet, it would be an oversimplification to suggest that the two parties are economically identical. The measures employed by Labor make their deficit a qualitatively different one.

## Evaluation

The claim that a reduction in the business tax rate will result in overall economic growth—and the assumption that such growth will necessarily result in a drop in unemployment—rests on the ‘common sense’ neoliberal belief in ‘trickle-down’ economics: that government taxing and spending is inefficient, crowds out the more efficient private sector, and thus depresses economic activity. Therefore, by reducing taxation rates those dollars will be put to more effective use, creating economic growth (see Quiggin 2010). As is often the case, this claim was made with support from neoclassical economic modelling, including heroic assumptions about unemployment and market equilibrium (Stilwell 2016). A report from Treasury suggested that for each \$1 of revenue lost, \$4.30 would be added to the economy (Kouparitsas, Prihardini and Beames 2016). This claim has been challenged with John Daley and Brendan Coates from the Grattan Institute using similar modelling to suggest the gain

would likely be much lower—between \$2.80 in the long term and \$1.20 in the short term (Daley and Coates 2016). With a four-to-one multiplier potentially dropping to as low as one-to-one, the malleability of neoclassical projections is highlighted; going further, however, some argue that Daley and Coates's critique is still unreliable. At the very least, the potential multiplier effect of tax cuts needs to be put in context, as historical evidence suggests that active redistribution and fiscal stimulus can have a much greater impact on 'jobs and growth' (Argyrous 2011). Compounding this, problems of tax evasion and leakages to firms' international shareholders mean that the strength of Turnbull's 'plan' is highly doubtful (Long 2016; Stilwell 2016).

Thus, the Coalition's leading policy—cutting business tax to 25 per cent over 10 years—is a predominantly *non-productive* expenditure. This is as opposed to Labor's combination of increasing revenue through ending concessions around negative gearing and capital gains, and increasing funding to education and health. While the net effect of Labor's policy may be to increase the fiscal deficit over the short term, this can be characterised as *productive* debt (at least in part), as these expenditures will likely increase growth in the long term. At this point, it is worth noting that the underlying cash balance of each party is misleading. The Coalition's fiscal position relies on a raft of cuts to expenditure—some of which were introduced to the parliament as early as the first Abbott–Hockey Budget—which have failed to pass the Senate, meaning their taxation expenditures are unlikely to be balanced by cuts elsewhere. Far from producing a more favourable Senate composition, the combination of a double-dissolution election, recent reforms to Senate voting regulations and widespread dissatisfaction with 'mainstream' politics has resulted in, potentially, a more recalcitrant Senate. As a result, the Coalition's claims of reaching surplus *beyond* the Treasury's forward projections (i.e. four years) are tenuous at best. Concurrently, the ALP's fiscal stance is really one of stability, rather than radical Keynesian departure, as their 'increases' in spending are, in many cases, simply reinstatements of funding to pre-2014–15 levels. This is 'paid for' largely through a smaller business tax concession, as well as other taxation changes that essentially wind back Howard-era expenditures. None of this constitutes radical change, and it fails to confront in any meaningful sense the many and significant challenges facing the Australian economy.

## Conclusion

At the outset of this chapter, the crucial role of the global financial crisis in creating the context of the 2016 federal election was highlighted. The long-term structural issues within the global economy that caused the crisis have not been resolved. The shortfall in global aggregate demand created by the great stagnation of US working-class consumption and mass unemployment across Europe was, for a time, propped up by Chinese industrial consumption. But this cannot continue indefinitely, as Yanis Varoufakis warned as early as 2011:

To buy time, the Chinese government is stimulating its growing economy and keeps it shielded from currency revaluations, in the hope that vibrant growth can continue. But they see the omens. And they are not good. On the one hand, China's consumption-to-GDP ratio is falling; a sure sign the domestic market cannot generate enough demand for China's gigantic factories. On the other hand, their fiscal injections are causing real estate bubbles. If these are unchecked, they may burst and thus cause a catastrophic domestic unwinding (Varoufakis 2011, cited in Varoufakis 2015: 244).

The implications for the Australian economy of waning Chinese demand can be seen in falling coal and iron ore prices, and decreased investment in the mining sector. For all the Coalition's talk of transitioning away from the mining boom towards an 'ideas' boom, there is little evidence to suggest that this is likely to materialise in practice. In summary, Australia faces lower global demand for its exports, growth predicated on continued increases to private (especially household) debt, increasing unemployment and underemployment and interest rates rapidly approaching zero. Such issues are unlikely to be solved through a corporate tax cut, or a meagre increase in taxation revenue from superannuants.

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# 23

## The Industrial Relations Policy and Penalty

David Peetz

This chapter examines the role of industrial relations (IR) in the 2016 election, one that featured campaigns by and about (that is, against) trade unions. I commence with a brief history of industrial relations in Australian elections over several decades, including the 2007 ‘Your Rights at Work’ (YRAW) campaign. I then discuss the parties’ positioning on IR in the lead-up to the election over 2013–15, including two major inquiry reports. This is followed by the role played by key IR issues in the double dissolution, and the subsequent 2016 campaign—union misbehaviour, penalty rates and the Country Fire Authority (CFA) dispute—including a discussion of the union campaign against the government, with an assessment of its effectiveness and what might be seen as the industrial relations ‘penalty’ during the campaign.

### A brief history of industrial relations in Australian elections

With unions being formally tied to the Australian Labor Party (ALP), conservative parties have long sought to discredit unions as a means to discredit the ALP. Indeed, the conflict between capital and labour is the core conflict within capitalism, so it should not surprise that it is also central to political conflict in Australia. Hence, IR is an area of strong

ideological conviction for Coalition members—it is the issue on which surveys show the greatest difference between Coalition and Labor Party candidates (Taft 1998). It has featured prominently, one way or another, in many elections. Through the 1950s and 1960s, communist influence in the Labor Party, via unions, was a major issue pushed by the Liberal Party. In the 1974 and 1975 elections, the unions' role in 'wages explosions' were part of the strong economic critique of the then Labor government. In announcing the early 1983 election, prime minister Malcolm Fraser justified it by reference to the oil unions' refusal to accede to his government's wage freeze, though little was heard of that issue again. Instead, the ALP's 'Accord' with the union movement, in which wage restraint would be exchanged for improvements in the 'social wage' (public expenditures that affect living standards, such as health, education, housing, public transport and family payments), aided the economic credibility of the Labor opposition. Over the next decade, that Accord's role in economic management helped keep Labor in government. In the 1993 election, the conservative opposition promised radical changes in taxation (Fightback!), health and industrial relations (Jobsback!) in the context of a deeply unpopular recession. While Fightback! received most publicity, the conservative Victorian government's radical IR reforms gave salience to Labor's campaign against Jobsback!, and Labor's seat gains in Victoria offset its losses elsewhere. The Coalition's IR policy after that was much less radical. The 1998 election provided a model for two decades later when, prior to it, prime minister John Howard promised (accompanied by a large, publicly funded advertising campaign) to introduce a goods and services tax (GST), despite having promised in 1995 to 'never ever' do that. While losing the two-party preferred vote, with the assistance of the 'sophomore surge' (Brent 2010, 2014), the government was re-elected and the GST introduced. Nonetheless, in the context of a minority position in the Senate, the Coalition remained cautious on IR policy until unexpectedly winning a Senate majority in 2004.

Treating IR reform as 'an article of faith' drew Howard into over-reaching in IR legislation less than a year later with the WorkChoices legislative agenda (Hudson 2005). Ignoring the 1998 election model, no mention was made of it before the 2004 election. Howard later said that voters should have been aware of it as their intention to overhaul the workplace 'has been very well known for a long period of time' (Coorey 2005). The main way in which WorkChoices affected workers' pay was by allowing employers to reduce penalty rates, overtime pay and shift allowances below the award safety net (Peetz 2007). Unions mobilised

an extensive opposition campaign, Your Rights at Work (YRAW), in the media and through direct communication with members (Muir and Peetz 2010). Industrial relations became, for the first and only time since the Australian Election Study (AES) started asking in 1996, the most important election issue (McAllister and Cameron 2014). An anti-union—and anti-ALP—campaign by employer organisations, featuring images of union ‘thugs’ (using actors convicted of drug offences), was of little effect (Roberts 2010; Koutsoukis, Switzer and Gough 2007), nor was an expensive taxpayer-funded government campaign (Bachelard 2007). WorkChoices was widely seen as costing the Coalition the 2007 election (Crowe 2007; Maley 2007; Morris 2007)—an assessment endorsed by statistical analysis (Spies-Butcher and Wilson 2008).

In the light of these events, the Coalition in the 2010 and 2013 elections attempted to distance itself from its WorkChoices policy. Tony Abbott said when he became leader of the opposition, ‘the phrase WorkChoices is dead. No one will ever mention it ever again’ (Uhlmann 2009). He famously extended the metaphor to say WorkChoices was ‘dead, buried and cremated’ (Curtis 2010). Unions campaigned on the issue and reused the term WorkChoices, but it received less traction as time passed. Whereas the ALP had been the preferred party on industrial relations for 53 per cent of voters in 2007, compared to 32 per cent who preferred the Coalition’s policies, by 2010 voters preferred the ALP by only 36 to 27 per cent and, in 2013, voters preferred the ALP by only one percentage point (McAllister and Cameron 2014). Unfortunately, the question was not asked in the 2016 AES (Cameron and McAllister 2016).

The strategy on IR in 2013 therefore appeared to be to follow the 1998 GST election model—something ignored with WorkChoices itself—which meant the following: being relatively silent about IR in the lead-up to the 2013 election; gaining victory in 2013 and, with it, a number of seats that would benefit from a ‘sophomore surge’ in 2016; announcing a major IR policy in the lead-up to the 2016 election; and winning the 2016 election with a mandate for major IR change thereafter. Hence, Coalition candidates, especially in Sydney, repeatedly declined interviews and public appearances, perhaps to avoid a repetition of the 2011 comment by Liberal MP John Alexander that penalty rates for working nights, weekends or overtime ‘cannot be a good thing’ (AAP 2011; Saulwick et al. 2013). Abbott explicitly likened his IR strategy to the Howard strategy on the GST when he was asked about the two, and said, ‘I have no plans’ to make major changes to workplace laws, ‘but if there is to be any change far off into the future, obviously there should

be a mandate for it' (O'Brien 2013). There were some minor glitches. One Coalition candidate for the 2013 election said that IR policies would only be put 'on the table after the election' (Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) 2013). Senior Liberals were reportedly 'aghast' that Senator Eric Abetz had been 'freelancing' on IR when he made comments about limits on wage increases, contrary to the 'agreed strategy of keeping industrial relations off the front pages of newspapers during the campaign' (Kenny and Lucas 2013). When, in the second 2013 election debate, Kevin Rudd claimed that Tony Abbott had previously said the Howard government's industrial reforms were its 'finest achievements', Abbott dismissed this with 'I'd like to see the quote'. He could have found it in Hansard, where he had begun a speech 'by reminding members that workplace reform was one of the greatest achievements of the Howard government' (Abbott 2009). Not one of these mishaps was fatal to the 2013 election campaign.

## Positioning on industrial relations over 2013–15

A major policy announcement on IR for 2016 would require a persuasive justification, in light of the planned silence in 2013, and the Coalition laid the groundwork for this with two major inquiries: the Productivity Commission, a market liberal government agency, was asked to report on the workplace relations framework; and conservative former jurist Dyson Heydon was hired to lead a royal commission into corruption and governance in trade unions. The former was promised in May 2013, four months before the 2013 election (Liberal Party of Australia and National Party 2013), and the latter was announced several months after it. Both inquiries could serve a concrete and important purpose—to provide 'third-party endorsement' for the policies the Coalition preferred to enact. The other requirement for a 2016 policy package was that it would need to be as effective as WorkChoices, but much more attractive. So it would need to place less emphasis than in 1996–2006 on directly reducing employee entitlements, and instead rely on directly attacking trade unions, whose power ultimately enabled employees to protect and boost their pay and conditions. This idea would build on the belief that voters had little faith in the honesty of the union leaders (Roy Morgan Research 2014), but perhaps underplayed the popular acceptance of unions' role in society (Peetz 2002, 2010).



By 2014, many Coalition politicians still held strong views on IR and came to believe that WorkChoices had been ‘neutralised’ as an issue (Massola 2014). In 2015, as prime minister, Abbott was unable to resist advocating unspecified changes to penalty rates as he had trouble finding alcohol on religious holidays (Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) 2015; Taylor 2015). Nonetheless, political considerations had dictated that, if it won a majority in the House of Representatives, but not control of the Senate, a new Coalition government could not reintroduce WorkChoices in the same form as previously. And already it was having second thoughts about IR, exemplified by the frustrations of Liberal Senator Zed Seselja who called on the government to have the ‘courage’ to argue a cut in weekend penalty rates for hospitality and retail workers, in support of a Productivity Commission recommendation along those lines (AAP 2015).

What prompted these second thoughts was the failure of opinion polls to live up to expectations, undermining the earlier political strategy. Instead of enjoying a long ‘honeymoon’ period in the polls, as Howard and other new governments had experienced—a precondition for advancing a radical policy before its first re-election campaign—the new Abbott government soon found itself trailing (see e.g. Bowe 2015). There were several reasons, but one was the outcomes of promises made before the 2013 election yet broken, many in the 2014 Budget (in health, education, ABC funding and other areas), which greatly reduced trust in the government (ABC 2014; Hartcher 2014; *Sydney Morning Herald* 2014). The government could not guarantee re-election even with its existing policies, let alone with the addition of radical IR changes (Fisher 2014).

The Employment Minister retained his enthusiasm for doing *something*. In a speech appropriately titled ‘Industrial relations after the 30 years war’, Senator Eric Abetz (2014) made the controversial and widely reported claim that ‘we risk seeing something akin to the “wages explosions” of the pre-Accord era, when unsustainable wage growth simply pushed thousands of Australians out of work’. In other circumstances, strange talk of a wage explosion might have been excused as a rush of blood to the head. However, this was no off-the-cuff remark; it was the centrepiece of a carefully scripted speech. Indeed, there was nothing new about unsubstantiated talk of wages explosions; News Corp papers had run numerous stories and regularly editorialised on a forthcoming wages breakout that never materialised (*Australian* 2010a, 2010b, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; McCrann 2008). By the middle of the decade, wages growth was falling to ‘record’ lows (Janda 2016).

As it was, even those legislative changes to industrial relations that the government attempted to introduce were mostly blocked in the Senate. One was a proposal to make it easier for employers to avoid prosecution for individual flexibility arrangements (a pseudo-substitute for Australian Workplace Agreements, introduced in Labor's *Fair Work Act 2009*) that were substandard. It would also have allowed non-monetary benefits to be taken into account in assessing whether workers were better off, leading to claims that employees could be paid in pizza (Price 2014). Another bill—to block that wages explosion—would have given the Fair Work Commission (FWC) a role in determining whether a claim was 'manifestly excessive' or whether it would 'have a significant adverse effect on productivity' before allowing a protected action ballot to occur (Fair Work Amendment (Bargaining Processes) Bill 2014). This proposal would have essentially returned wage bargaining to a situation like that existing over two decades earlier. The Coalition, which for many years sought to 'prevent unwarranted interference by third parties in agreement making' (Abbott 2002), proposed in government to promote such interference.

By September 2015, Abbott had become so unpopular that he was deposed by his party. The change of prime minister had an impact on IR, but action on the issue remained constrained by the opinion polls. While Abbott was renowned for an extremely conservative social philosophy, he was one of the few ministers later asserted to be hesitant about the direction of WorkChoices (Gawenda 2014). Turnbull showed little evidence of his being less enthusiastic than Abbott about lowering pay or conditions; he described the reduction of penalty rates as inevitable (Bourke 2015).

Abbott's close supporter, Abetz, lost his position in the ministry, having achieved very little as minister in charge of industrial relations. Abetz was replaced by Michaelia Cash. Her approach was two-fold: she focused on demonising trade unions, through highlighting some preliminary findings of the Heydon trade union royal commission; and she talked up the importance of the Senate passing legislation re-establishing the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC). These lines of argument became almost indistinguishable, and soon Cash linked the ABCC legislation to the Heydon inquiry (Doran and Dzedzic 2016).

Labor's spokesperson on IR issues in the lead-up to the election was Brendan O'Connor. He had held various ministerial responsibilities during the Gillard–Rudd years, was in Cabinet for Labor's last 18 months in government and had been Labor's employment and workplace relations spokesperson from when Bill Shorten had become leader. He had a background as a union official, but only spent a few weeks as employment minister in the final Rudd ministry. He did not have a high profile, but the key thing for a Labor opposition spokesperson in this area to do was not to stuff up. O'Connor was expert at that. The temptation for Labor (and the unions) had been to label each snippet of insight into government policy as 'WorkChoices revisited'. Neither the Coalition's 2013 policy, nor the recommendations of the Productivity Commission could be accurately described that way. Whether better or worse, they were demonstrably different. Still, even in early 2013, half of voters claimed to think that, if they won the next election, Tony Abbott and the Liberals would try to bring back industrial laws similar to WorkChoices (Woods 2013). That said, as more people entered the voting population without a vivid memory of the 2005–07 campaign, recollection of WorkChoices faded. No small part of O'Connor's challenge became to find a way of communicating the problems with the government's plans in a way that was both resonant and persuasive.

## Election issues: Union misbehaviour

The Heydon Commission issued an interim report in December 2014 and a final report in December 2015 (Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption 2014, 2015). The first substantive thing the reader encountered in volume two of the final report was an unattributed poem—about blackmail. Written before World War I, it was seen as an argument against peace with future enemies. By placing it here, Commissioner Heydon consciously likened unions, particularly the Maritime Union of Australia, to Viking raiders, saying that if you give in to union demands once, they will keep coming back until you finally defeat them. It was hardly an unbiased view of trade unions in twenty-first-century Australia. Nor was it the only hint of bias in the report or its behaviour (Ackland 2015; Conroy 2015; Crowe 2015; Grattan 2015; Karp 2016; Long 2015). Such bias was hardly surprising. Although royal commissions 'attract public confidence as being impartial, non-political and independent' (Ransley 2015), a royal commission is not

a court, it is an arm of the executive government, or what Heydon called an ‘administrative inquiry’ (Long 2015; Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption 2015). A royal commission report is like a huge, and very expensive, consultancy report, in that both provide ‘third-party endorsement’ of a policy for which the policymaker requires ‘distancing’ (Peetz 2017).

Seeking the return of the ABCC was the government’s immediate response to the Heydon recommendations. The policy link, however, was not clear. The key issues to be dealt with as a result of the trade union royal commission were about proper union governance. Whatever the merits of the Heydon findings, the ABCC legislation did not principally address the issue of union governance. The ABCC’s original rationale and justification was to improve productivity (Econtech 2007). That rationale was subsequently discredited, when it was found the original claims (\$3 billion in productivity gains and rising) were based on spreadsheet errors (Allan, Dungan and Peetz 2010). Yet that rationale was still being used almost a decade later (AAP 2016a).

Legislation re-establishing the ABCC was twice rejected by the Senate. The second time it was introduced, the Heydon Commission report was the rationale mostly emphasised by the government, though union corruption was not an argument used in the earlier second reading speeches. Likewise, the government reintroduced its Registered Organisations Bill, establishing a new body separate from the FWC with responsibility for oversight of union governance issues and imposing obligations on paid and unpaid union office holders and delegates similar to those applying to company directors. After both these bills were rejected for a second time, Turnbull used these as the basis for the double-dissolution election. So industrial relations were a central issue at the beginning of the election campaign, and portrayed as an issue of union corruption.

Opinion polls suggested that the ABCC legislation had more support than it had opposition, but attracted little interest overall. In four Essential Research polls in 2016, support was in the range 32–36 per cent, opposition 16–18 per cent, neither 23–28 per cent and ‘don’t know’ 22–27 per cent (Essential Research 2016c). While 35 per cent thought it was important, 40 per cent thought it was ‘not important’. There was much higher support (around 60 per cent, compared to 13 per cent opposition) for Labor’s policy of a royal commission into the banking and financial services industry (Essential Research 2016b). If the ABCC Bill

was intended to capitalise on the unpopularity of unions, it was of limited value. Public opinion of unions had improved steadily from 1979, when 82 per cent of voters had thought unions had too much power. By 2016, this number was only 47 per cent, well down even on the 69 per cent in 1990, though up from 37 per cent in YRAW's 2007 election. More voters (74 per cent in 2013) thought big business had too much power. The proportion of voters thinking there should be stricter laws on unions had fallen from 68 per cent in 1990 to 42 per cent in 2007, but rose to 55 per cent by 2016 (Cameron and McAllister 2016). While polls had long suggested voters had little trust in union leaders, similar to MPs (Roy Morgan Research 2014), it did not follow that they gave priority to eviscerating unions. A 2015 Essential Research survey had shown that 43 per cent of voters considered that overall workers would be better off 'if unions in Australia were stronger', while only 26 per cent thought they would be worse off, figures similar to 2014 (Essential Research 2015a). In another question, 62 per cent considered that unions were important 'for Australian working people today', and just 28 per cent said they were 'not important' (Essential Research 2015b).

## Election issues: Penalty rates

If the government wanted to make union misbehaviour the focus of industrial relations debate, the ALP and unions themselves wanted penalty rates (premiums for working unsociable hours, mainly nights and weekends) to play that role. Coalition members had often railed against penalty rates, and recommendations by the Productivity Commission to cut penalty rates attracted more attention than any other aspect of its report, though some parts proposed more radical changes (Peetz 2016a). When the government commissioned the report, it anticipated it could promise major changes to employment relations at the 2016 election. The Productivity Commission would provide critical third-party endorsement for radical change. The poor showing in opinion polls changed that, but such a change in political circumstances was hard to accommodate. It was not possible to simply suppress the Productivity Commission report. Nor did the government want to argue against cutting penalty rates. Instead, it passed responsibility to the FWC, which was holding its four-yearly review of modern awards, with a special focus on penalty rates in the retail

and hospitality industries. It was in these industries that the Productivity Commission focused its recommendations for a cut in Sunday penalty rates, consistent with employer arguments.

The salience of penalty rates as an issue was blunted a little by the Labor Party's behaviour. It made a submission to the FWC case, arguing against cuts to penalty rates, but probably mainly to embarrass the government by consolidating the many instances of Coalition support for cutting penalty rates (Australian Labor Party (ALP) 2016). However, Labor hesitated to commit to legislative action. This is partly because it did not want to appear to be undermining the 'independent umpire', as legislation would do, though Labor's own *Fair Work Act* created a set of legislative obligations, the National Employment Standards, on matters that previously had been the sole prerogative of the FWC (AAP 2016b). More valid would be concern about how legislation could be worded. Different awards set different penalty rates. A single legislated formula for penalty rates would leave some workers better off and some worse off. Alternatively, legislation could entrench existing penalty rates, but could not have been passed before the commission brought down its decision in the retail and hospitality case. It might further highlight Sunday penalty rates in the objects of the Act (as part of the current mention of weekend rates), but that would still be no guarantee current levels would be maintained or affect the FWC case. Labor committed to intervening in the case after the election, to support penalty rates, following a precedent of at least symbolic value set by the Whitlam government (Shorten 2016). However, its support was seen as less full-blooded than that of the Greens, who vaguely promised a legislative fix.

Public opinion was strongly with the idea of penalty rates. Three Essential surveys between 2013 and 2015 asked, 'Do you think people who are required to work outside of normal hours – like night shifts, weekends or public holidays – should receive a higher hourly rate of pay?' In each, 81 per cent said 'yes', and 12 or 13 per cent said 'no' (Essential Research 2015c). In a later survey, 32 per cent approved, but 54 per cent disapproved, specifically of the Productivity Commission recommendation to cut Sunday penalty rates in retail and hospitality (Essential Research 2016a). The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) mobilised a campaign on this and other issues, discussed below, with penalty rates forming a motivating rallying cry for union members. We turn to this next.

## The union campaign

The union campaign was focused on a limited number of seats and with messages targeted to issues that appeared salient in those electorates. Unlike in 2007, when WorkChoices was the target, the emphasis was not on a single industrial relations issue. While penalty rates featured prominently, other issues more connected to the social wage were also heavily used—in some seats more significantly than penalty rates. It was not the first time since 2007 that unions had organised campaigns for the federal election; indeed, in both 2010 and 2013 the unions had also campaigned in the federal election, looking to build on the success of 2007. In both years, a key message had been to warn voters of the dangers of a return to WorkChoices, but the messages had been blunted by the Coalition's insistence that it had no such plans, and that WorkChoices was 'dead, buried and cremated'. In 2013, union members' enthusiasm for campaigning would have been undermined by the near certainty of a Labor defeat. In 2016, however, Labor was competitive in the polls, penalty rates had emerged as a potential issue around which workers could be mobilised, and a range of social wage cutbacks in the 2014 Budget gave unions a much broader platform from which they could campaign. Resources allocated by the ACTU to the campaign were increased—by raising the campaign levy on unions above its 2007 level (Colman 2016)—and a quite sophisticated campaign strategy was drawn up.

The union campaign was coordinated by the ACTU, with 22 seats targeted for 'full' campaign capacity and another 12 receiving lesser attention (comprising eight with a secondary campaign effort and four with relatively low campaigning). In each of those 22 seats with 'full' campaigning, an organiser was located for 12 months before the election, cross-union activists were encouraged and a coordinated work plan was drawn up. Campaigning involved protests, door knocks, phone calls (some even from 'call centres' in activists' homes) and other one-on-one conversations, for which activists received training. The issues focused upon were centred on the 'build a better future' theme decided upon at the ACTU Congress in 2014, and included rights at work and jobs, Medicare and health, education (the 'Gonski' reforms for school education and the future of higher education), secure retirement and 'a fair go for all' (based around the idea of everyone paying their fair share of tax). A minimum of three high-visibility weekly activities were planned for each seat (for example, in Brisbane a choral parody of the

*Twelve Days of Christmas* about items Malcolm Turnbull ‘took from me’), but the vehicles for activities depended on the character of the electorates (for example, in seats with high public transport usage, transport hubs were targeted, while other locations were the focus in seats with less public transport use). Issues were tailored for the electorate based on polling and modelling, and progressed serially, rather than simultaneously. Alongside this local targeting were national campaigning or events at various times, also focused on particular issues such as penalty rates or health. Separately, the Australian Education Union ran a campaign specifically on the Gonski reforms, targeting 12 marginal seats with organisers and coordinated activity, but alongside and with the support of the ACTU organisers and union activists.

In those seats with secondary or partial campaigns, organisers were typically shared or operated for a shorter period, or there were phone calls, but no other activity. In some marginal seats, no union resources were deployed at all. In total, over the last three months of the campaign, some 47,000 ‘conversations’ with union members were had in 27 targeted electorates (McManus 2016). That represented around 3 per cent of all union members in Australia, probably around one fifth of union members in many of those electorates.

There were some interesting contrasts with the 2007 YRAW campaign (Muir and Peetz 2010), aside from the differences in messaging mentioned above. The YRAW campaign went for a longer period—over two years, after the Howard government’s intentions became apparent, compared to 12 months for the 2016 campaign. However, there was tighter organisational control by the ACTU in 2016, whereas in YRAW participating unions had more autonomy and less accountability for their actions. Changes in technology, as well as in organisational capacity, facilitated both the large number of calls in a short period in 2016 and the more centralised monitoring and control in the later period. That said, some affiliates still ran their own campaigns, under the broad agenda, particularly unions representing workers in the retail and hospitality industries targeted by employer campaigns on penalty rates. Around 11 electorates, therefore, were the subject of ‘blitzes’ (intense campaigns by individual unions) on penalty rates. Resources were sometimes withdrawn from what looked like unwinnable seats and directed into vulnerable ones as circumstances warranted.



After the election, the ACTU reviewed the effectiveness of its campaign through a ReachTEL survey of 1,800 voters (split evenly between ‘persuadables’, ‘committeds’ and a random control group), analysis of electorate-level swings (conducted by Shaun Wilson of Macquarie University) and interviews and discussions with many participants. Through regression analysis (n=150 seats), Wilson estimated the union campaign added 2.8 percentage points to the swing to Labor in 22 seats where it was targeted (after controlling for State, some demographics and several political characteristics of seats). That evaluation also showed the effectiveness of ‘one-on-one’ conversations with ‘persuadable’ union members. Amongst union members at least, these conversations appeared more influential than political party campaigning, whether via mass media, social media or direct contact.

To assess the impact of the ACTU campaign separately, I undertook polling booth-level analysis, using data obtained principally through psephologist William Bowe and multiple regression techniques. Bowe had previously published a regression analysis of the determinants of swing in the 2016 election (Bowe 2016), and I largely followed his model, but with some additional explanatory variables and using unweighted rather than weighted ordinary least squares techniques. There were 6,677 observations corresponding to polling booths in the 136 electorates that ended in a two-party preferred contest between the ALP and the Coalition. The regression (shown in Table 23.1) had controls for States, urban versus rural areas, age, mean family income, education and allowed for ‘sophomore’ and ‘retiring member’ effects arising from new members and the loss of sitting members. Equation 1 also had a separate dummy variable to cover the two extraordinary electorates of Macquarie and Macarthur, in which very large swings were registered, and a control for the effect of the GetUp! campaign (which was concentrated in a much smaller number of seats—Bass, Dickson, Dawson and New England). The minimum estimated effect of the ACTU campaign in the 22 ‘full campaign’ seats was that it boosted the ALP two-party preferred vote by 1.7 percentage points. The effect of the GetUp! campaign was, however, likely to be grossly exaggerated by this equation (it failed miserably in New England, not included in this dataset), and part of the unusual swing in Macarthur and Macquarie may have reflected the union campaign there (such as their Medicare campaigns), though there were likely to be local factors at work regardless of the union campaign (such as candidate quality and airport issues). Excluding those variables brings the estimated swing due to the union campaign to 2.0 percentage points. This range for the likely

effect of the union campaign (1.7 to 2.0 percentage points) is lower than that which Wilson estimates (above), but nonetheless it is significant both statistically and politically. A swing effect in that range would have made the difference between the ALP winning and losing in Herbert, Hindmarsh, Cowan, Longman and Lindsay, and accounted for a majority of the margin in Macquarie, Braddon and Eden-Monaro. This swing range is also comparable to the range of estimates of the YRAW campaign in 2007, in which the swing against the government was estimated to be 1.3 to 2 percentage points higher in electorates where local YRAW campaigns had been run (Spies-Butcher and Wilson 2008). The critical difference between the two campaigns is that in 2007 the Coalition government was defeated; in 2016, it was not. In that important sense, YRAW was the more successful campaign.

The equation also shows that the swing to Labor was higher in booths in census districts with higher proportions of less educated voters, households with mortgages, lower income households and younger voters (albeit weakly significantly). State and capital city effects were also controlled for, as was the 'sophomore' effect.

Table 23.1. Regression equation predicting two-party preferred swing to the Coalition, 2016 election

Equation no:	1
(Constant)	-0.069 (-15.487)
Age	0.0000 (1.949)
Median weekly family income	0.000004951 (2.657)
Speak English at home	-0.006 (-1.235)
Completed high school (percentage of adults)	0.062 (10.405)
Mortgaged dwellings	-0.041 (-7.542)
NSW regional	0.017 (5.726)
Melbourne	0.022 (8.876)

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Equation no:	1
VIC regional	0.034 (9.916)
Brisbane	0.017 (5.522)
QLD regional	0.023 (7.401)
Perth	0.003 (0.787)
WA regional	0.021 (5.114)
Adelaide	0.002 (0.608)
SA regional	0.013 (1.065)
TAS	-0.007 (-1.601)
ACT	0.018 (2.982)
NT	-0.022 (-2.814)
Sophomore (Liberal gain in 2013)	0.008 (6.449)
ALP loss	0.019 (6.834)
ACTU targeted seat [22]	-0.017 (-7.414)
GetUp! targeted seat [4]	-0.033 (-6.489)
Macarthur or Macquarie	-0.019 (-3.02)
N	6,677
F significance	0.000
r <sup>2</sup>	0.10

Note. Default category is Sydney, not a sophomore, not an ALP loss, not a targeted seat Sources. Compiled by author from: data on swings from Australian Electoral Commission; data on demographic characteristics of collector districts from Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011 census (both of the above provided to the author by William Bowe); data on targeting by ACTU from McManus (2016). Regressions undertaken by the author using SPSS22.

For unions, the campaign was a modest electoral success. It also built up skills amongst those who participated. In a survey of 76 national and State union secretaries, conducted as part of the ACTU's post-election review, 81 per cent said their members learnt new skills, while 76 per cent of 246 activists involved in the campaign, and who were subsequently surveyed, also said they had learnt new skills. What was not clear was how much these skills translated into union organising capacity. One former ACTU official claimed unions focused on 'electoral politics because it's easier than talking about and doing real organising, and certainly easier than beginning fundamentally to transform unionism', and added, 'the election hasn't, and couldn't, change the fundamental position of unions. As institutions, unions are in a state of profound crisis' (Lyons 2016). The debates about the role of unions in electoral politics is too big for this chapter, but a strong union effect in an election campaign is not the same as a strong effect from an election campaign upon union power, even though the laws any government brings in clearly can have a major effect on union power, and elections determine who makes those laws (Freeman and Pelletier 1990; Rose and Chaison 1985). Some other issues concerning unions—such as whether they would have benefited from a more proactive, visible stance on union corruption—are also beyond the scope of this chapter (Peez 2016b).

## Election issues: The Road Safety Remuneration Tribunal and the Victorian Country Fire Authority

Leading up to the election, the government focused on two issues that provided an opportunity to attack unions and Labor. The first was the Road Safety Remuneration Tribunal (RSRT). It had been established by Labor to deal with the problem that low pay for owner-drivers contributed to the industry having amongst the longest working hours and the most deaths—especially bystander deaths—of any industry (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2014; Quinlan 2016; Safe Work Australia 2015). The road transport industry was based on 'hierarchical contracting'—a variant of the model used in franchising—a model in which top firms avoid accountability, but retain control and extract profit, making collective organisation hard, transferring risk to workers (and contractors) at the end of the supply chain and concentrating profits at the core. Using the

corporations power in the Constitution, and following examples in the apparel industry in Australia and internationally (Kaine and Brigden 2015; Reinecke and Donaghey 2015), the RSRT set minimum pay rates for distances and for hours of owner-drivers. It met resistance from the top of the supply chain (where profits were threatened) and some contractors (who faced a loss of income from empty ‘backloads’). Three months before the election, the government demonised the RSRT (Greenwood and Cash 2016), greeted and addressed protesters at a ‘convoy to Canberra’ and then abolished it (Retail Council 2016). Although Labor opposed its abolition, the issue did not subsequently feature prominently in the election campaign itself.

The same could not be said about the Victorian Country Fire Authority (CFA), which was magnified as an issue in the last weeks of the campaign. The CFA employs 800 firefighters and coordinates 60,000 volunteer firefighters. In 32 of its 1,186 fire stations, paid and volunteer staff worked alongside each other (that is, they were ‘integrated’ stations). The CFA had been in stalled negotiations with the United Firefighters Union, with which it had ‘toxic’ relations, for a new enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA). A FWC recommendation had been to limit the EBA’s application to employees and integrated stations, not volunteers, and prioritise the discretionary powers of incident controllers when public safety was concerned (Teicher 2016). The CFA board had secretly commissioned a report recommending it hire firefighters on individual or non-union contracts and ‘erode public confidence in the union agenda’ (Toscano and Willingham 2016). The Victorian Labor government sought to end the dispute by accepting the FWC recommendations, but the minister resigned, and shortly thereafter the Victorian government sacked the CFA board. Federal government ministers, including Veterans Affairs Minister Dan Tehan from rural Victoria, saw an opportunity to use this to attack unions and a State Labor government (Patrick 2016). Two weeks before the election, Turnbull promised to overturn the EBA and legislate to prevent any agreement affecting volunteer firefighting (Keen 2016).

The issue had no salience outside Victoria, but was seen as influencing the vote in that State. The swing to Labor in Victoria (VIC) was the lowest of all States, but that State had not performed strongly for Labor in the April–May 2016 Newspoll either. Analysis by Matt Cowgill revealed that there was a small, weakly positive correlation between the two-party preferred swing to Labor and a booth’s distance from the nearest integrated station,

again suggesting no CFA effect (Cowgill 2016). That said, Labor lost the seat of Chisholm and failed to pick up La Trobe or Dunkley, though they had not been strong prospects anyway. The most plausible assessment is that the CFA dispute cost Labor one seat it would otherwise have held.

## And non-issues

Just as noteworthy as the issues that made it to the electoral agenda are some that did not. One obvious example was of worker underpayment. A series of media investigations uncovered a pattern of wage theft at a major retail franchise, 7-Eleven. In a majority of franchises, staff were paid below the award, with one franchise agent saying, ‘nobody pays their staff full wage, man’ (Ferguson and Toft 2015), and the estimated cost reportedly totalled \$100 million (Ferguson and Danckert 2016). Despite the franchise model lending itself to this exploitation—it is designed to transfer risk from the corporate franchisor to the franchisee (Kellner et al. 2016)—issues of systemic weakness did not make it to the political agenda. Similarly, there were several exposés of underpayment and other exploitation of migrant workers (e.g. Schneiders and Millar 2015; Vines 2015). Underpayments are so common among restaurateurs that when one was caught, the excuse used would be ‘everyone is doing it’ (Marin-Guzman 2016). Government policies aimed at reducing union power would potentially worsen this evasion. The government response to revelations of further 7-Eleven breaches during the election campaign was to promise to increase the powers of the Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO) to investigate corporations at the top of franchise chains and increase powers for the FWO to compel answers to questions (Cash 2016). There was no employer outrage at these encroachments on employer prerogative, suggesting the likely cost would be small, or that those increased powers could also be used against workers—the FWO had previously launched investigations into journalists who walked off the job after Fairfax announced more redundancies (Toscano 2016). However, using such powers in that way after the election, without obtaining a mandate beforehand, would be a risky strategy and so the attempt to embody them in the subsequent legislation was rejected by the Senate (Marin-Guzman 2017; Patty 2017).

The government was more reticent about its response to the Productivity Commission report. Almost nothing was revealed, avoiding the danger of controversy in return for removing any prospect of a mandate for major

IR changes in the 2016–19 term. As it was, the thin majority in the House of Representatives, and the lack of majority in the Senate almost guaranteed no rerun of the WorkChoices experience in the term to come.

## Conclusion

IR was in a sense the sleeping giant of the election. Both sides attempted to waken it on their terms, but keep it asleep on the other side's terms. Neither side engaged strongly with the other's agenda, and this made IR less visible in the media. As to its effects, perhaps the question is: in an election in which penalty rates featured, albeit intermittently, who paid that penalty? The answer is not clear, but overall IR was probably a net positive for the ALP, especially compared to Coalition expectations. Labor probably lost a seat in Victoria as a result of it, but picked up at least five, possibly more, due to the union campaign. That made the difference between a tenuous and a comfortable margin for the government.

The government's attempts to develop 2016 as an election about union corruption and misbehaviour were not very effective. In that sense, 2016 was more like 1983, or 2007, than 1998, but not really like any other year—union misbehaviour was a stronger issue in 2016 than in the wage-freeze election of 1983, and industrial relations, as an issue, was less powerful in switching government than in 2007.

Legislative efforts to weaken unions can be expected over the coming three years. Yet one of the enduring problems for the government is now that its unwillingness to reveal a program of IR reform in the lead up to the 2016 election leaves it without a real mandate for radical reform in the forthcoming term. While this may run counter to the deep instincts of Coalition politicians, the slender majority in the House of Representatives and lack of a majority in the Senate would militate against any radical program anyway. It would be a courageous Coalition that sought to bring in radical changes in those circumstances.

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## Legislation

*Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth).

Fair Work Amendment (Bargaining Processes) Bill 2014 (Cth).

# 24

## ‘Mediscare!’: Social Issues

Amanda Elliot and Rob Manwaring

In the election campaign, one social issue dominated all others—the Australian Labor Party’s so-called ‘Mediscare’ campaign. This chapter offers a critical survey of how social issues played out during the election campaign. It sets out some initial context for social policy in Australia, and then briefly examines the critical debates around health, education, poverty, housing and related social policy.<sup>1</sup> Overall, while there was a strong focus on Medicare and health policy, social policy did not feature strongly at the election, for a range of reasons we explore at the conclusion of this chapter. Most crucially, we find a worrying lack of imagination and debate about a range of critical social policy issues facing Australia.

At the 2016 election, all the major political parties, and many of the minor ones, released a range of social policies, albeit with varying degrees of detail. Damien Cahill and Matthew Ryan in their chapter in this volume helpfully set out the positions and costings for a range of policy areas (see Chapter 22, this volume, Table 22.1). Yet, as is common at Australian federal elections, only one or two social issues tend to achieve widespread media coverage and debate. There are parallels here with the previous 2013 election (Manwaring, Gray and Orchard 2015), when discussion of the paid parental leave scheme overshadowed other social policy issues. Moreover, both major parties, especially the Australian Labor Party (ALP),

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1 Indigenous policy issues are covered by Diana Perche (Chapter 27, this volume).

have long shied away from eye-watering policy promises since Hawke's speech in the run-up to the 1987 election that 'no Australian child will be living in poverty' by 1990 (see Balogh and Bramston 2014).

Figure 24.1 sets out the frequency of media reporting of a range of social issues, including education, housing, poverty, health and unemployment for the four-week 'short' campaign prior to the election. As was widely reported, Labor's focus on Medicare and health policy dominated the news agenda. Earlier in the year, Bill Shorten (2016) had promised to try and make the election a 'referendum' on Medicare. However, as explored below, to a large extent, the ALP's use of this issue was predominately driven by electoral and instrumental concerns, rather than a richer rethinking about the range of issues facing the wellbeing and health of Australians. If Medicare was the 'big bang' issue, then other social policy issues *did* appear during the campaign, but, like a cheap sparkler, they tended to fizzle out quite quickly and were rather unmemorable.

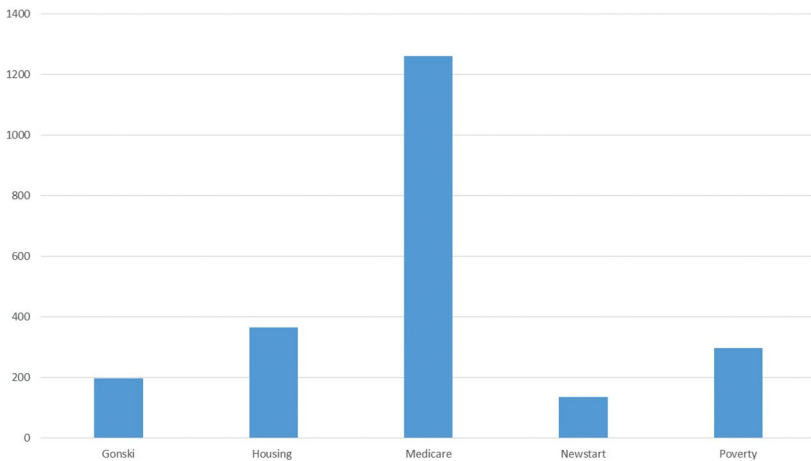


Figure 24.1. Media coverage of social issues at the 2016 election (number of articles)

Source. Compiled by authors from Factiva; search dates 3 June 2016 – 1 July 2016.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Data compiled from Factiva searches using the terms 'Gonski', 'Education Funding', 'Housing Affordability', 'Homeless', 'Homelessness', 'Medicare', 'Health Policy', 'Newstart', 'Youth Allowance', 'Poverty' and 'Social Inclusion' for all the major Australian newspapers from 3 June – 1 July 2016.

In the concluding section, we discuss why social policy does not often feature prominently during election campaigns, and why the paucity of this debate is problematic. Here, we outline the coverage of the key social policy issues that played out in the 2016 election.

## Health

### 'Mediscare'

The future of Medicare, Australia's nationally funded health insurance system, dominated the final weeks of the campaign. Despite this, neither party offered policies outlining a plan for reforming Medicare. The ALP largely rested on its perceived electoral strength and their history of reform, while the Coalition attempted to repeat its 2013 small-target approach to health policy. The campaign around Medicare can be summarised in brief as follows: the ALP claimed that the Coalition was planning to privatise Medicare, while the Coalition claimed it had no such plans. The Coalition named the ALP claims a scare campaign and it came to be referred to by them and more widely in the media as 'Mediscare'. Given that the Coalition had offered no clear policy proposal to cut Medicare, it is one of the more interesting aspects of the 2016 campaign that the future of Medicare featured as a dominant policy issue and resonated with voters. So much so that in his election night speech, unable to claim victory, Prime Minister Turnbull blamed the ALP's 'Mediscare' campaign for the close election result, claiming that they had run 'some of the most systematic, well-funded lies ever peddled in Australia' (*Herald Sun* 2016). Later, in a post-election commentary, Turnbull reluctantly acknowledged that there had been some fertile ground in which concern about the future of Medicare was sown amongst the electorate (Hunter 2016).

The potential effect of a campaign centred on the future of Medicare was largely underestimated by the Coalition as was the fact that Medicare was always likely to feature as a key policy issue in the campaign. This is surprising given that the ALP had flagged Medicare as a key election battleground in early 2016, even more so given that debate about healthcare has traditionally been a centrepiece of federal elections since the 1940s. The history of health policy in Australia is crucial in understanding why: healthcare has traditionally been an area of significant divergence between the two major parties. Between World War I and 1975, the Coalition,

and the Liberal Party in particular, campaigned against the introduction of a nationally funded, universal healthcare system. When in office from 1975 to 1983, the Coalition unravelled Medicare's predecessor, Medibank. However, since returning to government in 1996, the Coalition have had policy platforms that have included keeping Medicare, although often positioning it as a safety net while promoting and investing in private health insurance (Elliot 2006).

The long history of healthcare policy in Australia provides some of the context for Medicare's ongoing dominance as an election issue. This is not, however, only an historical problem. Since regaining office in 2013, the Coalition has experienced several health policy missteps. During the 2013 election campaign, Tony Abbott promised voters there would be no cuts to healthcare funding. However, in the 2014 Budget the government cut funding for public hospitals and scrapped the National Preventative Health Agency. Also, proposed in this budget were a \$7 general practitioner (GP) copayment, a \$5 increase in the cost of pharmaceuticals for non-concession card holders, a \$7 fee for GP-like emergency department visits in public hospitals and a tightening of the Medicare Safety Net. While some of these, such as the \$7 GP copayment were later discarded, others, such as increasing the cost of pharmaceuticals and tightening of the Medicare Safety Net, had not passed through the Senate. Despite this, they have been retained as policies and are part of the much-discussed suite of so-called 'zombie measures'. The 2016 Budget also included plans to extend the Medicare Rebate Freeze until 2020. Both the remainder of the zombie measures and the extension of the Medicare Rebate freeze were thus fresh in voters' minds when the election was called.

Moreover, throughout the first half of 2016, the government had faced increasing pressure about the proposed privatisation of the Medicare and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) payment systems. In February, the *West Australian* reported that a privatisation task force had been established to consider the issue and that changes might be announced in the 2016 Budget. These were both later confirmed by Health Minister Sussan Ley (Probyn 2016). The proposal was criticised on several fronts, including concerns about privacy. There was the potential that such a move would lead to the loss of public-sector jobs overseas and that the private sector would be driven by profit motives rather than public-sector values in the delivery of a national public service. An Essential Report poll conducted at the time showed that there was widespread voter opposition to outsourcing with 64 per cent of respondents (55 per cent of Coalition

voters and 74 per cent of ALP voters) disapproving of the plan (Essential Research 2016). Notwithstanding these criticisms, others recognised the need to modernise what had become an antiquated payment system and the opportunity to draw on the existing capacity offered by private-sector providers in managing complex payment systems.

Despite recognising that the payment system needed to be updated, and having explored the option of private-sector involvement themselves, the ALP promised to fight the plan at the next election, arguing that this was part of the Coalition's traditional resistance to Medicare and the first step towards full-scale privatisation (Kenny, Lee and Gartell 2016). While ultimately not included in the 2016 Budget, the question of the privatisation of some or all of the backroom functions of Medicare continued to be fuelled by the government's own actions. In April 2016, Treasurer Morrison provided the terms of reference for a Productivity Commission Inquiry into Human Services that prioritised the exploration of the application of the principles of competition in the area (Productivity Commission 2016). Perhaps more crucially, there was some mid-campaign obfuscation by the government about whether a proposal regarding the Medicare payment system had ever gone to cabinet (Doran 2016), providing fuel for voter concerns that the Coalition was not being upfront about their plans for Medicare.

Despite this early focus on the Medicare payment system and widespread acknowledgement that it is inefficient, we saw little informed debate about the proposal and only a half-hearted defence of it by the Coalition. Health Minister Sussan Ley was largely absent throughout the campaign and it was left to Prime Minister Turnbull, Treasurer Morrison and campaign spokesperson Mathias Cormann to deny and eventually rule out that they were going to privatise any part of Medicare. Arguably, without someone well versed in the portfolio, the Coalition was unable to effectively counter growing public concern and the ALPs intensifying campaign.

Of course, outsourcing is not the only way to privatise Medicare, nor does it pose the most significant challenge to the principles that underpin it (Duckett 2016). Since the election of the Howard government in 1996, numerous scholars and commentators have argued that a range of policies pursued by the Coalition that increase out-of-pocket costs for patients or limit access to services (such as copayments for bulk billing and pharmaceuticals, incentives for private health insurance or sanctions on those who do not have it and reducing funding for public hospitals) are

also forms of privatisation (see, for instance, Boxall and Gillespie 2013; Duckett and Jackson 2000; Elliot 2012). Considered in this broader context there was indeed 'fertile ground' for the ALP to propagate the claim that the Coalition was likely to privatise healthcare.

The ALP capitalised on this by reminding voters that Abbott had privatised Medibank Private (Durkin and Gardner 2016) and by focusing on the potential sale of the payment system as part of a larger 'privatisation' agenda. Their campaign gained significant traction with the recruitment of former prime minister Bob Hawke for an advertisement (ALP 2016a). The ad first reminded viewers of the Coalition's traditional opposition to Medicare, 'In 1983 the Hawke/Labor government introduced Medicare. The Liberals were totally against it', and warned that 'you don't set-up a Medicare privatisation taskforce unless you aim to privatise Medicare'.

Initially destined for an online-only release, the commercial received significant coverage in the mainstream media and was eventually recut and aired as a TV ad. Additionally, third-party advertising and social media campaigns reinforced the ALP's message with issue-related campaigns around Medicare. The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) handed out replica Medicare cards across marginal seats (see Halpin and Fraussen, Chapter 17, this volume) and at major public transport hubs as part of its 'put the Liberals last' campaign (ACTU 2016a), building on work begun in February 2016 (ACTU 2016b). The Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU), amongst others, published several Save Medicare memes via twitter (AMWU 2016). Rather uniquely, the Australian Medical Association (AMA) and the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP), both traditionally strongly aligned to the Coalition, ran campaigns against the proposed extension of the Medicare Rebate Freeze (see Halpin and Fraussen, Chapter 17, this volume). While Michael Gannon, the newly elected AMA president, criticised the ALP for equating the privatisation of the Medicare payment system with the privatisation of Medicare (Koziol 2016), the AMA's campaign against the Medicare Rebate Freeze provided added authenticity to the ALP's claims.

Ultimately, the focus on Medicare did not win the ALP the election. However, it is likely that it had some positive electoral impact for them. Perhaps more importantly, the campaign enabled the ALP to reassert itself as the defender of Medicare and will set the stage for health and other reform in the next parliament, with the Coalition now politically constrained in what it can propose regarding the outsourcing of government services such as Medicare.



## Beyond 'Mediscare'

Despite the attention to Medicare in the final weeks of the campaign, the actual differences between the two major parties on their stated healthcare policies were minimal. In the areas of Medicare and Private Health Insurance, they were largely in keeping with the traditional leanings of the ALP towards public provision and the Coalition of supporting the private insurance sector. As already noted, the Coalition proposed extending the Medicare Rebate Freeze until 2020, while the ALP promised to end it. Likewise, the Coalition proposed abolishing bulk-billing incentives for pathology (blood and tissue tests) and radiology (X-rays and MRIs), while the ALP promised to retain them. Both sides promised further funding for public hospitals, with the Coalition committing to \$2.9 billion and coverage of 45 per cent of increasing costs, the ALP committed to \$4.9 billion and to cover 50 per cent of increasing costs.

Both major parties made commitments to expand funding for mental health services, each giving significant space to their mental health policies in their election campaign launches. These included the funding for the expansion of existing youth services and suicide prevention. The ALP made one of the few significant commitments to delivering specific outcomes by committing to halving the national suicide rate in 10 years. The Greens also offered significant policies in the area of mental health, committing to a \$1.4 billion investment including funding for the Primary Health Networks for mental health services and the maintenance of existing youth mental health programs. The expanded funding and increasing political focus on mental health over the past 10 years can be attributed to two key factors. First, improved data collection and analysis has resulted in the increased awareness of mental illness amongst policy makers as a leading contributor to the burden of disease in Australia (third behind cancer and cardiovascular disease) and the leading cause of non-fatal disability burden, accounting for an estimated 23.6 per cent of all years lived with a disability (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2016: 3). Second, the sustained advocacy and activism of numerous actors has increased political awareness of suicide and mental health disorders and helped to highlight the costs associated with a failure to act in this field. Both improved data and increased advocacy have drawn attention to health funding and service delivery in mental health, which, in turn, resulted in a major review of the mental health sector in 2014 (National Mental Health Commission 2014). While no party

proposed a full implementation of the review's recommendations, the commitments by all three parties were widely considered, by those in the sector, to be moving in the right direction.

The policies offered by both major parties on chronic disease management were perhaps the most innovative of those offered through the campaign, although there is little substantive difference between the Coalition's Health Care Homes, to which they committed \$21 million, and the ALP's Your Family Doctor initiatives, to which they committed \$100 million. Both offer additional payments to GPs for providing both GP services for those with chronic illnesses and case managing their interactions with other healthcare providers. These policies are both designed to promote continuity of care with the aim of decreasing hospitalisation. The Greens have a more substantial commitment to the reform of primary care, and this was reflected in their commitment to \$4.3 billion in funding to strengthen the role of the Primary Health Network and promote continuity of care and access to allied health services.

While the ALP committed to establishing a permanent Health Reform Commission tasked with exploring innovative ways to improve the Australian healthcare system (including, it is worth noting, the Medicare payment system), this was not a policy proposal that was highlighted through their campaign. Rather, their Medicare campaign offered a defensive commitment of the existing system while forcing the Coalition into a similar commitment. The Coalition had at any rate offered little by way of a broader narrative on healthcare provision, not helped by what was largely regarded as the absence of the Health Minister from the campaign and the failure of the major parties to agree to a National Press Club debate on health policy between Ley and Catherine King, the shadow minister. Such debates have become a regular feature of the past five federal elections and it was noteworthy that in a campaign dominated by Medicare there was no such debate.

Notwithstanding these policies, for a campaign that came to be dominated by health policy, neither of the major parties offered much by way of a coherent narrative on the future of a health system facing significant pressures as the population ages, the disease burden shifts towards chronic conditions and we continue to struggle with significant and enduring inequalities in access and outcomes. The Australian health system continues to be plagued by cost shifting and inefficiencies, its focus continues to be on acute care and there is poor investment in preventative

health and chronic disease management. The focus on defending Medicare by both the major parties drew attention away from the lack of policy development and commitment on these broader issues. Time will tell whether it has also diminished the political capacity for innovative health reform over the term of the 45th Parliament.

## Welfare policies

Early in the eight-week campaign, it appeared that debate about inequality and poverty might become central. In an episode of the ABC's *Q&A*, audience member Duncan Storrar questioned the Small Business Minister, Kelly O'Dwyer, on the Coalition's Budget announcement and campaign promise to lift the tax threshold for those earning over \$80,000:

I've got a disability and a low education, that means I've spent my whole life working for minimum wage ... If you lift my tax-free threshold, that changes my life ... Rich people don't even notice their tax-free threshold lift. Why don't I get it? Why do they get it? (*Q&A* 2016).

O'Dwyer struggled to respond to the question, and when she finally did it was to push the Coalition's proposed company tax cut outlining how buying a \$6,000 toaster would enable a small business to possibly create a new job. O'Dwyer and Australian Industry Group CEO Innes Willox offered a defence of trickle-down economics, and argued that the company tax cut would provide jobs for Storrar's children (see Peetz, Chapter 23, this volume, for a further discussion of the relationship between company tax cuts and employment creation). Little attention was paid to the fact that O'Dwyer effectively suggested that those children could look forward to 'minimum wage' jobs in cafés. As Andrea Carson and Brian McNair (Chapter 19, this volume) note, Storrar was subjected over the following days to attacks on his character and background, clearly positioning him as one of the 'undeserving' poor. While a successful crowd-funding campaign was launched to help Storrar, this also redirected attention away from the systemic economic and social policy issues raised by his question, encouraging individual charity (and predictable debate about whether the money would be used 'responsibly') rather than policy deliberation. Weeks later, Eva Cox (2016) highlighted that both major parties had been largely silent on the question of inequality and Australia's income support system. Likewise, a timely audit by a range of Australian scholars (see Academics Stand Against Poverty 2016) explored the paucity of debate and policy on poverty throughout the campaign.

While rarely dealing directly with the distribution of wealth and opportunity, the two major parties did offer voters broader economic narratives that touched on these issues. The Coalition argued throughout the campaign that employment, and thus the opportunity to improve individual wellbeing, would be driven by corporate tax cuts, investment in the private sector and savings in government spending (see Cahill and Ryan, Chapter 22, this volume). In this sense, Turnbull, in particular, attempted to make clear his case that economic growth would promote employment growth and opportunity; however, these claims remained largely abstract or reliant on ‘growing the pie’ metaphors. This message was also subject to critique throughout the campaign with various scholars and commentators arguing that the trickle-down economics promulgated by the Coalition deliver very few benefits to those who are disadvantaged and in fact can be linked to increasing inequality (see for instance Bradley 2016; Dennis 2016).

The ALP (2016b) had released ‘Growing Together’ in March, a document offering an agenda for dealing with inequality and poverty and the future of paid work. However, this document chiefly outlined a series of policy principles and proposed reviews of income support, employment and social services rather than a clear plan of action in any of these areas. Nonetheless, Shorten did offer voters a narrative regarding the ALP’s approach to economic growth through social investment. In contrast to the Coalition, he argued in a range of forums that government investment in education and training, transport infrastructure, high-speed internet and new industries is the best way to promote employment growth and the equitable distribution of opportunities (see Cahill and Ryan, Chapter 22, this volume).

Coalition policies that focused specifically on income support were largely concerned with making savings on social security payments and income transfers, and there was little that was new. Some, such as the removal of the Energy Supplement from new recipients of Newstart, had been announced in the 2016 Budget, while others, often referred to as the ‘zombie measures’, dated back to the 2014 Budget. These included cuts to the family tax system (which would then be used to fund the Coalition’s proposed \$3 billion childcare package), increasing waiting periods for receipt of unemployment benefits and increasing the age of retirement.

On the direct issue of employment, the Coalition’s primary focus was young people. Announced as a centrepiece of the 2016 Budget, and part of its Helping Families Get Ahead campaign platform, the Youth

Jobs PaTH (Prepare-Trial-Hire) program proposes to offer internships in the private sector to young, unemployed people. However, with no requirement for businesses to employ interns, confusion over whether interns would be covered by occupational health and safety (OH&S) and concern that young people were being encouraged to work for below award wages, the program received widespread criticism in the days following the Budget announcement, but little critical attention throughout the campaign (Walsh 2016). Likewise, the ALP launched several youth employment programs, ranging from increased funding for apprenticeships to six-month job placements (on award wages) for long-term unemployed youth. Notwithstanding these youth employment programs, neither party offered a tangible policy framework for tackling unemployment, underemployment or any specific job-creation programs in their platforms, although this is to some extent about nomenclature. Both parties committed to infrastructure spending often in specific electorates, or States, all of which would lead to some level of job creation.

While much of the rhetoric of the party leaders spoke to the question of social wellbeing, their social policy platforms failed to flesh out how this might be improved and distributed. Debate about broader reform of the tax-transfer system, the distribution of wealth and the transformation of employment was largely missing from the campaign and subsumed into motherhood statements about economic growth.

## Education—schools policy

When education policy did reach the public consciousness during the election campaign, it was largely set within the parameters of the Gonski reforms initiated under the Rudd–Gillard Labor governments.<sup>3</sup> At the 2013 election, both parties were on a broad 'unity ticket' to implement the Gonski reforms, albeit with some significant caveats. Yet, in office, then Education Minister Christopher Pyne faced a significant backlash against his attempt to backtrack on the funding commitments (ABC 2013). At the 2016 election, the Coalition, somewhat chastened by Pyne's efforts to pull back from the Gonski reforms, committed to four of the six years of funding, approximately \$1.2 billion from 2018–20. In contrast, the

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<sup>3</sup> This chapter focuses only on schools' education policy, and not higher and further education policy. Some of this debate is covered in Cahill and Ryan's chapter on economic policy in this volume (Chapter 22).

ALP committed to funding the full six years at a cost of \$4.5 billion. The difference in two years is critical because the largest bulk of funding is due to come from the Commonwealth government in those final two years.

While not attracting the same coverage as health, there was some debate about education funding during the campaign. For the ALP, the Gonski reforms were bound up with the party's other spending commitments and there was an effort by the Coalition to portray this 'big spending' as unaffordable (Aston and McIlroy 2016). Yet, a clear difference between the sides was that not only was the ALP committed to Gonski in full, it was prepared to run deeper deficits than its Coalition counterparts. This issue of funding also caused some disquiet in the Catholic schools' sector, fearing that the ALP and the Greens' policies would 'disadvantage' them (Aston 2016; Cook 2016). It is worth noting that while education policy did garner some attention, this also had the effect of *narrowing* the debate about wider education issues. As Louise Watson and Charlotte Liu (2014) point out, there is a significant and ongoing set of problems within the education system that are largely due to the negative impact of neoliberal reforms. Moreover, the focus on the Gonski funding model marginalised debates about inherent tensions within this approach (see Goss 2016).

## Housing

Given what is widely recognised as a growing housing affordability 'crisis' in Australia, and particularly in the major capital cities, it is perhaps surprising that housing policy did not achieve wider prominence during the campaign (Smith 2016). Housing *almost* caught light as an issue following an off-the-cuff remark by the Prime Minister during a radio interview. Bantering with the host, he suggested that the host should 'shell out' to enable his children to get on the property ladder (Bourke 2016). Bill Shorten immediately seized upon this, calling Turnbull 'out of touch' on the issue, and it was further evidence of Peta Credlin's framing of Turnbull as 'Mr Harbourside Mansion'. Yet, despite this incident, the issue did not ignite further.

Strikingly, but not unsurprisingly, the Coalition had no distinct housing policy. Coalition housing policy settings were cemented in the Howard era, where the primary drivers of housing policy are tax instruments—specifically the use of interest rates to enable a nation of mortgage owners, linked to tax concessions for investors (especially negative gearing).

The Coalition approach is linked to other piecemeal strategies such as further land release, largely a State government matter, and transport/infrastructure projects. In the Turnbull Cabinet, there is no separate portfolio for housing. In contrast, the ALP were applauded—and criticised—for taking political risks in this area, as attention focused on their proposals to restrict negative gearing to new homes from 2017, and to halve the capital gains tax discount on new investments. Labor's housing plans received some attention. One report issued during the campaign suggested that property prices might fall by 15 per cent, and rents increase as a result of the ALP's proposed changes (Massola and Duke 2016). In a contest of evidence-based policy-making, Labor countered with two separate reports supporting their claims that they would stimulate further housing supply (Maher 2016). Labor's policy attracted a range of comment, some modest support from the Reserve Bank, for example, but clear opposition from bodies such as the Real Estate Institute (McCauley 2016).

Whilst Australian voters did see this as an important issue, as reflected in a national 'values' survey, it received little coverage during the campaign. Interestingly, some analysis of social media trends suggested that housing concerns were a standout issue for millennials compared to other demographic groups (Williams 2016). This might actually prove to be a 'sleeper' policy issue for the next federal election, and may play out differently across the nation (see Martinez i Coma and Smith, Chapter 9, this volume).

Overall, in common with other social policy areas, neither major party deeply or imaginatively engaged with housing or homelessness issues. As documented elsewhere, a reliance on market-based mechanisms has left a problematic legacy (Orchard 2014). The dominance of the economic narrative throughout the electoral campaign also narrowed the debate about the provision of public goods. The housing policy debate is also shaped and filtered through dominant voices, especially the private-sector peak agencies. This gives lie to a pluralist view of power dispersed across the Australian polity. While a number of Australian charities called upon the major parties to halve homelessness within a decade, they had little impact (Australian Associated Press (AAP) 2016). The dominance of the economic lens and the relative weakness of the community sector (heavily reliant on government contracts) means that there is sufficient influence to reshape housing policy.

## Conclusion

In the 2016 election, in common with other recent federal election campaigns, social policy was a second-order issue. It is worth suggesting at least three key reasons why social issues—aside from Medicare—had little significant impact.

First, in Australia, like many other advanced industrial countries, economic issues tend to be prioritised over social issues. The dominance of the economic over the social is echoed in polling data. Polling company Roy Morgan regularly ask a sample of Australians about the issues most important to them, and these data support the salience of economic issues (see Figure 24.2). In the May 2016 poll, 42 per cent of respondents rated economic issues as most important to them, with only 13 per cent so placing ‘social issues’ in first place. If we aggregate responses for human rights (and related issues), social issues and the environment, the total is 36 per cent, which is still less than for economic issues. The dominance of the economic in the public’s mind does reflect a consistent trend. That said, we might be a little circumspect in overstating the sway of economic over social issues, since debates about them are often related (for instance, the affordability of welfare).

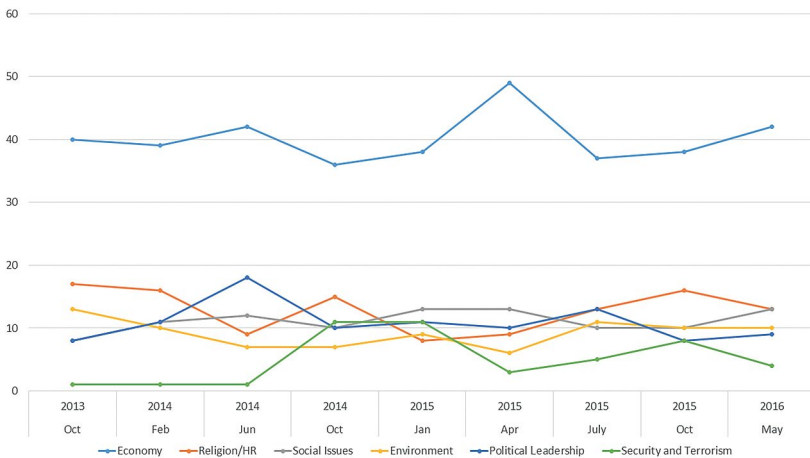


Figure 24.2. Issues most important to Australians, 2013–16

Source. Constructed by authors using data from Roy Morgan Research (2016).



The primary election pitch of both the major parties was on their economic credentials. Malcolm Turnbull's economic strategy was shaped by the 'jobs and growth' narrative. As a result, the Coalition's social policy program was not distinctive, and was subsumed under the umbrella of 'Helping Families get Ahead' (Liberal Party of Australia 2016). There were some notable policies—not least a distinctive focus on tackling domestic violence—but none of these received any significant attention.

A second factor that also accounts for why social issues did not receive a great deal of attention relates to the ALP's social policy program. Traditionally, and as Australian Election Study (AES) data consistently supports, the ALP tends to be viewed as having stronger social policies. At the 2013 election, the ALP outpolled the Coalition by at least 10 per cent as 'most preferred party' on health and education (McAllister and Cameron 2014: 22–23). Yet, a key factor in perhaps explaining the lack of prominence of social policy during the campaign was that the ALP, while rich in policy detail, was largely operating in terms of 'incremental' policy settings. By and large, the most significant social policy innovations were developed by the Rudd–Gillard governments, notably the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and the 'Better Schools' needs-based funding model—better known as the Gonski reforms. The ALP used these social policy issues to differentiate itself from the Coalition. However, given that these were not 'new' reforms and the public was largely familiar with the overall contours, they did not feature prominently.

A third factor that might explain why social policy tends not to feature too highly during Australian election campaigns is that Australia has not often been a notable social policy innovator. For example, some claim that Australia has been intellectually and institutionally 'slow' to cultivate its third sector (see Althaus, Bridgman and Davis 2007: 19; Lyons and Passey 2006). In recent times, the last significant 'big picture' policy social agenda was the Rudd–Gillard 'social inclusion' initiative—which had been adopted first by a range of Australian Labor State governments, and other countries including the UK (Manwaring 2016). Similarly, in 2012, the ALP established the Australian Charities and Not-For-Profits Commission (ACNC) to regulate the sector. While the Coalition initially attempted to abolish the ACNC, it is now part of the social policy infrastructure in Australia. But, in both cases, Australia was a late adopter. So, although there is a claim that Australia's welfare state is distinctive (Wilson 2013), on social policy more generally there has been a lack of innovation.

A striking case of a lack of social policy innovation is the ‘debate’ in Australia about same-sex marriage. While this issue received some coverage during the election, in part driven by Coalition policy to promise a plebiscite on the issue, Australia remains a laggard here, with same-sex marriage legalised across most of Europe, as well as in other comparable countries, including New Zealand. More broadly, this is not to suggest that social issues are unimportant to Australians, or that the parties lack policy detail. Rather it is that elections tend to reinforce the second-tier status of social policy.

Overall, this wider lack of engagement with social policy—especially during election campaigns—leaves two interrelated problems. First, there is a distinct lack of a new ‘social imaginary’ by either of the major parties on social policy (Cox 2016). This reflected a risk-averse dimension to both major parties’ campaign strategies. Second, neoliberal reforms and thinking continue to shape and define many of the social policy debates. Across many of the policy areas surveyed here it has left, at best, a problematic legacy.

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# 25

## ‘Continuity and Change’: Environmental Policy and the Coming Energy Transition

Rebecca Pearse

Environmental policy debate barely featured in the election of 2016. This absence is best understood with regard to the recent political history of partisan conflict in federal parliament over climate change and energy issues. Carbon pricing has been a central object of debate since Kevin Rudd won the 2007 election. What followed was a deeply divisive contest between the Australian Labor Party’s (ALP) and the Australian Greens’ high-minded resolve to ‘price carbon’ versus the Coalition’s populist push against Rudd and Julia Gillard’s emissions trading schemes. Neither of the major parties, nor the Greens, have emerged from this conflict with clear-cut victories on climate policy.

In the wake of climate policy failure, new arenas of political conflict over mining and energy market reform have opened up. Drawn out local battles over the federal government’s role in approving major new coal and gas mines were a backdrop to the 2016 election. Threats to the Great Barrier Reef from mine-related development, agriculture and climate change were the most salient environmental issues that featured in the election. Both the Coalition and ALP promised more money for environmental management programs and research, but neither party shifted policy positions supporting major fossil fuel developments in North Queensland and elsewhere.

Much more subterranean was the persistence of carbon pricing in both Coalition and Labor policies and new differences between the parties on energy policy. The climate and energy policies taken to the 2016 election illustrate the theme ‘continuity and change’ that Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull inadvertently borrowed from the US political satire *Veep* (Hunt 2016). Carbon pricing has quietly persisted. The election went by without any scrutiny of the little-advertised transformation of the Coalition’s Direct Action Plan (DAP) into a carbon offset scheme (a form of emissions trading). The Labor leadership did not spend a lot of effort campaigning on their new climate and energy policy package, but the content of the party’s policy signalled a shift. The ALP proposed two sectoral Emissions Trading Schemes (ETS). However, in a departure from their previous focus on carbon pricing, Labor proposed a larger suite of climate and energy measures, with a greater emphasis on renewable energy, electricity grid reform and enhanced federal oversight of land use.

This chapter proceeds as follows. The major themes in recent conflicts over environmental issues in Australia are briefly described, with a focus on the directions in public opinion and in government strategies to manage climate and energy issues. I then outline key policies taken to the election by the two major parties and the Australian Greens, offering a brief evaluation of the most detailed climate and energy proposals. Reflecting upon the limitations and political tensions surrounding these policies, I speculate that in future federal elections, ‘direct’ regulation of energy transition, not carbon pricing, will be the focal point of debate.

## Environmental issues in context

In the lead-up to the 2016 federal election, an unprecedented coral bleaching event devastated the Great Barrier Reef, a toxic algal bloom spread across the Murray River, land-clearing rates in Queensland (QLD) were revealed to be at record highs and the Cape Grim monitoring station recorded carbon dioxide measurements above 400 parts per million for the first time. These critical events are signs of an emerging global environmental crisis with serious implications for Australian society and economic productivity. However, as has been proven many times before, the weather does not predict political outcomes.

In the first instance, the relative silence on environmental issues in the 2016 election reflects the nation's environmental history. Since white settlement, Australia's economic development has been largely insensitive to the unique and fragile ecologies of the Australian continent. The European developmentalist vision for Australia emerged through institution-building projects during the 'long boom' of the eighteenth century. By the nineteenth century, developmentalism fortified as a shared ideology between conservatives and Australia's labour movement (Walker 1999). The centralisation of state power contributed to the transformation of the biophysical environment. This included, for instance, the provision of drought assistance, state-subsidised infrastructure and market bodies for grain and mining operations. Through the twentieth century, federal and State governments fostered further development of extractive industries through continued subsidisation and enabling laws such as those governing the allocation and distribution of mineral rights.

State governments play primary roles in the facilitation and regulation of extractive industries. However, as environmentalism emerged as a social force in Australia and following international environmental treaties, federal governments have been pushed to develop national environmental laws. For instance, after pressure to stop construction of the Franklin Dam in Tasmania, the newly elected Hawke government passed the *World Heritage Properties Conservation Act 1983*, which made provision for the protection of World Heritage sites, effectively prohibiting the Tasmanian State government's plans to dam the Franklin River.

In the late 1990s, following environmental campaigns across the country focused on forestry and mining, the Howard government instituted the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act), which is now the centrepiece of federal environment legislation. Contestation over the federal government's approvals for major mine developments under the EPBC Act have become common in recent times. After the 2013 election, the Abbott government unsuccessfully sought to devolve federal powers under the EPBC Act to the States, claiming the extra layer of federal environmental approval created unnecessary 'green tape'. After failing in the Senate, and a change in leadership, the Turnbull Coalition government has not pursued the legislative change further.

At the international level, the Coalition has been criticised for failing in its obligations to protect the Great Barrier Reef, which is a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)–listed World Heritage site. The Great Barrier Reef is the world’s largest coral reef; its diverse species and complex ecosystems make it a globally unique site. The Reef has been negatively impacted on over decades by sediment, nutrient and pesticide pollution from agriculture, fishing practices, industrialisation and port expansions, and, most seriously, climate change (Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) 2014). In March 2016, the most severe coral bleaching event on record occurred, due to elevated sea temperatures, drawing the public’s attention to successive governments’ mismanagement of the issues.

In the lead-up to the federal election, the UN World Heritage Committee met in Germany to consider a draft decision to add the Reef to an ‘in danger’ list. In late July, the Committee announced it would not—on the basis of the Coalition’s Reef 2050 protection plan. In addition to this attention, the salience of the Reef during the 2016 election resulted from ongoing environmental campaigns against the federal government–approved Carmichael coal mine (including two court cases waged by environmental groups) and the Abbot Point coal terminal expansion, which will exacerbate risks to the Reef from pollution and climate change.

Apart from attention to the Reef, there was very little discussion about climate change and other environmental issues during the 2016 election. This is best understood in light of the recent history of difficult political contestation over climate and energy policy. After a bitter campaign against Labor’s ETS, the Coalition went to the 2013 election declaring its determination to abolish the ALP government’s carbon tax. The Coalition, led by Tony Abbott, released its 2013 election policy platform ‘Our Plan: Real Solutions for all Australians’ (Liberal Party of Australia (LPA) 2013). A Coalition government would immediately abolish ‘the world’s biggest carbon tax’, remove the tax on mining company profits, suspend the operation of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC) and cut ‘green-tape’. After its election, the Abbott government also successfully moved to decrease the ambition of the Renewable Energy Target (RET). The ETS was repealed in 2015. However, the Coalition’s preference for dismantling the CEFC and devolving federal environmental powers was opposed by the crossbench.

Importantly, the repeal of the ETS was not a clear-cut victory for the Abbott government, which quickly began sliding in the polls. More fundamentally, popular and long-term climate change legislation has been very difficult for parties of all stripes to agree upon and secure. Party leaders have lost their positions in the midst of climate policy debate. Since the peak of public support for government action on climate change in 2006, public concern has declined steeply, and only in recent years has public concern climbed again (Oliver 2016). In the heat of the debate about carbon pricing, support for the carbon price was very low at between 28 and 34 per cent (see Figure 25.1), as was support for the Direct Action Plan at 22 per cent (The Climate Institute (TCI) 2014: 15), and public opinion on climate change and other environmental issues polarised (Tranter 2011, 2013).

The causes of difficulties in climate policy reform are many and varied. Common reasons put forward include the breaking of the millennium drought in 2009, which blunted the sense of urgency on climate change; the financial crisis, which took the wind out of concern for climate action; organised opposition from fossil fuel companies; strategic errors made by the Rudd government; communication errors made by Gillard who (rightly) called the ETS an effective tax; and the successful counter movement launched by Abbott in 2009, persisting all the way through Gillard's prime ministership (e.g. Bailey et al. 2012; Chubb 2014; Crowley 2013). Further, there are ongoing challenges in building a progressive political movement for climate change action (Rosewarne, Goodman and Pearse 2014). Environment-movement activists and policy advocates have struggled to build popular legitimacy for carbon pricing—a technocratic market instrument that has proven difficult to communicate (Lohmann 2008; Pearse 2016).

The difficulties for the ALP, the Greens and their supporters in civil society seeking to legitimate the carbon price run deeper than whether or not Gillard 'lied' about the ALP's intentions to institute a carbon tax and deeper than the 'framing' of the carbon price as an emissions trading scheme or a carbon tax. The most recent episode in a long-running climate policy debate in Australia shows that contrary to the advice frequently offered by economists and other climate policy advocates, a political resolution about how the state should act on climate change has not been realised via carbon trading—the most favoured style of emissions regulation. And importantly, the Liberal–National Coalition's Direct Action Plan was in disrepute from very early on and continues to be contested.

DOUBLE DISILLUSION

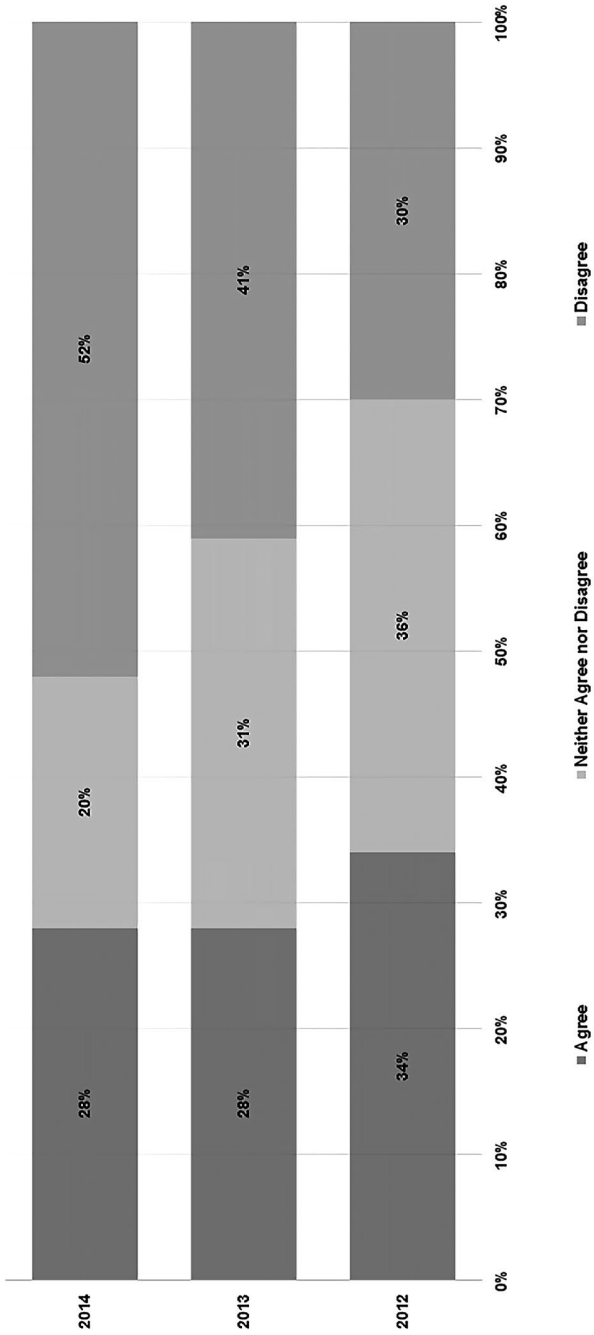


Figure 25.1. Support for the carbon price, 2012–14

Source. Constructed by author from data in The Climate Institute report (TCI 2014: 15).

Meanwhile, energy transition in the emissions-intensive political economy will require a much more fundamental set of reforms than either the ETS or DAP. At the heart of the climate crisis is a question about whether and how states might limit the availability of fossil fuels and land ecosystems for emissions-intensive production and consumption without sparking major conflict with business and affected communities, and/or risking recession. The opinion poll data suggests the public understands the serious consequences of climate change for society, and has little faith in any climate policy platform offered so far.

General public pessimism about the major party climate policies persists. The 2016 Climate Institute pre-election polling found that only 17 per cent and 20 per cent of voters believe the Coalition and Labor have effective plans for dealing with climate change respectively (TCI 2016a). The poll illustrates that even among Coalition and ALP voters, views about their preferred party's climate policies reflect low confidence (31 per cent and 40 per cent, respectively). Very few uncommitted voters believe the major parties' climate policies will be effective (see Figure 25.2). In light of data establishing broad public concern about climate change, it seems major political parties continue to struggle to convince the electorate of their credentials in responding to the challenge of climate change.

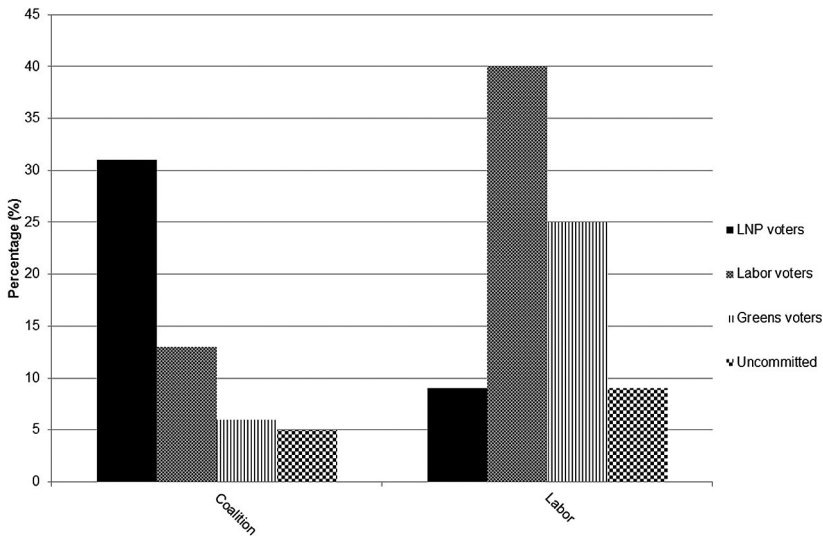


Figure 25.2. Views on Coalition and Labor climate change plans by voter groups

Source. Constructed by author based on data taken from the Lowy Institute report (Oliver 2016) and The Climate Institute report (TCI 2016a: 2).

Meanwhile, there are transformations in energy markets underway that have reconfigured the climate and energy policy debate. The breakthrough of rooftop solar, advances in battery storage technologies and the boom and bust of coal and gas mine developments have shifted the politics of climate change. Ongoing turbulence in global and national energy markets poses significant challenges to the federal government, not least because environmentalists have developed long-term campaigns seeking to halt major coal and gas mine expansions, and to boost energy market reform in favour of renewable energy expansion.

There is some evidence to suggest that along with a broad concern about climate change, there is support for government action to guide an orderly energy transition. Renewable energy technologies, and supporting policies, are consistently popular (TCI 2014, 2016b). The 2016 Climate Institute Poll found that 72 per cent of respondents agree that 'it is inevitable that Australia's current coal fired generation will need to be replaced' (TCI 2016b: 4). And there is some recognition that energy transition warrants a decline in Australia's export coal production. The 2016 Lowy Institute Poll (Oliver 2016) queried respondents' views on fossil fuels. A majority of people (88 per cent) agree that 'the use of fossil fuels is in decline and Australia should invest more in alternative energy sources'; many agree (79 per cent) that 'we should reduce our reliance on fossil fuels to help combat climate change'. At the same time, a majority support continuing exporting coal from Australia 'to developing countries, to help them grow and reduce poverty' (66 per cent) and 'to keep our economy strong' (53 per cent) (*ibid.*: 17).

On topics related to coal and gas mining, public opinion runs in different directions. When posed a question about (export) coal vis-à-vis Great Barrier Reef protection, views support a limit on coal. The Fairfax Media Your Vote survey of 63,000 people found that 79 per cent of respondents 'strongly agree' or 'agree' that the health of the Great Barrier Reef should be prioritised over coal mining (Hasham 2016). Concerns about coal seam gas (CSG) development are significant. The ABC Vote Compass survey of 250,000 people found that 67 per cent of respondents disagreed with the statement 'There should be fewer restrictions on coal seam gas exploration', with the largest opposition to relaxing CSG regulation in regional NSW (75 per cent), regional Victoria (VIC) (70 per cent) and the Hunter/Illawarra region (69 per cent) (Smail and Blumer 2016).



The strongest opposition to relaxed CSG regulation came from Greens voters unsurprisingly; though among Nationals, voter opposition has increased 7 per cent since 2013 (*ibid.*). Electorally, community concern about CSG has made more difference to State elections compared to federal elections. For instance, the 2015 New South Wales (NSW) election saw Ballina, a historically Nationals seat, go to the Greens. The O'Farrell and Baird governments have gone to elections with policies to limit CSG exploration and exploration licence cancellations in 2015.

In the 2016 election, the most nationally prominent debate about coal mining in local electorates was in the seat of New England, where Nationals leader and Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce ran against Independent Tony Windsor (see also Cockfield and Curtin, Chapter 14, this volume; Curtin, Chapter 16, this volume). A key theme in the contest was Windsor's opposition to two major open-cut coal mines proposed for the Liverpool Plains. Joyce was also on the record opposing these mines, but had disappointed some in the electorate for not doing enough to make the case against the mine within the federal government, which had just approved the Shenhua Watermark mine subject to a federal review of the water management plan. Joyce comfortably won the seat, with a margin of 19.5 per cent but with a swing against him of 4.7 per cent. The case of New England demonstrates that local conflicts over mining have not been decisive in most regional electorates, where a strong base of Nationals voters continues.

Overall, it is clear that there is considerable public concern about environmental issues, particularly climate change, mining and energy transition. However, this trend of awareness is not presently shifting votes or the priorities of the major parties at present. There are, however, signs of change alongside continuities in the election platforms of the major parties.

## Policies taken to the 2016 election

A closer look at the environmental policies taken to the 2016 election reveals signs of what is to come if public concern and pressure for the federal government to address climate and energy issues grows in the future. Interestingly, the details of the major parties' 2016 environmental

policy platforms illustrate two emerging trends: a convergence on carbon offset policy; and a divergence on energy policy and environmental protection laws. Taken together, these trends stand in contradiction to one another. Carbon offsetting displaces environmental action away from carbon-intensive industries (e.g. electricity, mining), whereas ALP/Greens proposals to reform the National Electricity Market and the EPBC Act are a more direct, and potentially more effective, means to limit fossil fuel dependence and facilitate energy transition.

The policy platforms of the Coalition and ALP with regard to both environmental protection policy and climate/energy policy were as different as they ever have been, albeit with significant and often unrecognised commonalities. The policy platforms of the Coalition and ALP illustrate the continuation of major party support for 'market-based' emissions policies; for example, emission trading and carbon offset programs. Below, I illustrate that the apparent distinction between the Coalition's preference for 'direct action' versus a market mechanism is a rhetorical difference only; the substantive policy similarities in the climate and energy arena are at odds with the points of difference major parties emphasise.

The same can be said of the ALP's and Coalition's proposals for managing impacts on the Great Barrier Reef from land use, coal developments and climate change. In the arena of federal environmental protection law, there are more considerable departures. The Coalition unsuccessfully campaigned to remove 'green tape', whereas the ALP and Greens have gone to the election with proposals to strengthen provisions under national environmental legislation.

Table 25.1. Parties' environmental policy positions

Policy area	Coalition	ALP	Greens
Climate change	<p>Emissions targets: 5% reduction on 2000 levels by 2020 26–28% reduction on 2005 levels by 2030 No new mitigation policies announced. Continuation of Emissions Reduction Fund</p>	<p>Emissions targets: 5–25% reduction on 2000 levels by 2020 45% reduction on 2005 levels by 2030 'Net zero pollution' by 2050 Ensure 50% of the nation's electricity comes from renewable energy by 2030, with Commonwealth becoming direct purchaser of renewable energy (\$152 million) Establish a Just Transition Unit inside Department of Environment (DOE) to coordinate actions to meet obligations under UN Paris Agreement Create 10 Community Power Hubs across Australia (\$99 million), and Community Power Network (partnership with States and Territories) Electricity Modernisation Review of National Electricity Market by end of 2016 Introduce a federal 'climate trigger' to regulate land clearing 'Cap and offset' scheme (phase 1, 2018–20), full ETS from 2020 (phase 2), with 100% access to international carbon credits Mandatory light vehicle standards phase in 2020–25 (105g CO<sub>2</sub>/km) Retain Climate Change Authority (\$17.4 million)</p>	<p>Emissions targets: 60–80% reduction on 2000 levels by 2030 100% reduction on 2000 levels by 2040 No new coal or gas \$1 billion Clean Energy Transition Fund Reinstitute a carbon price Remove subsidies on diesel fuel Thermal coal export levy (\$3/t) At least 90% of the nation's electricity from renewable energy by 2030 Establish the RenewAustralia Authority to oversee phase out of coal-fired power. Reform National Electricity Network, including establish force write down on network assets, set a clear fee structure, a time frame for commercial and domestic connections Community Energy Powerhouses Start-Up Fund, two years operational funding for 50 projects (\$150 million) Tax exemptions on profits made by community renewable project investors (\$4.3 million) Solar Communities fund (\$103 million) for local communities and institutions to invest in storage Sustainable Schools Program (\$192 million) Solar Ombudsman within Clean Energy Regulator to facility 'right to solar' for renters.</p>

Policy area	Coalition	ALP	Greens
Great Barrier Reef	Establish the \$1 billion Reef Fund, providing finance for energy and water-quality projects, to be administered through the Clean Energy Finance Corporate (CEFC) No commitment to legislate a cap on water pollution	\$500 million Reef Plan, administering recommendations of the Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce report No direct commitment to legislate a cap on water pollution	Strengthen the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (\$91 million) Stricter standards on shipping to protect marine life, and double Australian Marine Safety Authority emergency response preparedness fund (to \$30 million) Overturn the federal approval for the Abbot Point coal port expansion <sup>1</sup>
Federal Environmental Laws	Longstanding policy to devolve federal power under EPBC Act to the States	Introduce 'Climate Trigger' to EPBC Act Introduce National Parks Trigger to EPBC Act, so that any developments in national parks threatening biodiversity will need federal approval (\$15 million)	Install new generation of federal environmental laws and establish independent authority, the National Environment Protection Authority
World Heritage areas	2015 proposal to remove tracts of the Tarkine rainforest from Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area listing	Investigate and nominate three areas for World Heritage Listing: Cape York Peninsula; the West Kimberley region; and the Daintree Rainforest (expand to recognise Indigenous values)	Extend boundaries of Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area to include the Tarkine \$63 million for World Heritage Areas and Ramsar wetlands Re-establish \$2 billion Biodiversity Fund

<sup>1</sup> The Greens list some of their key climate and energy policies as part of their 'Living Reef, Dying Coal' package e.g. no new coal or gas, reinstitute carbon price (Australian Greens 2016).

Source: Constructed by author from (ALP 2016a, 2016b; LPA 2016; Australian Greens 2016).

## Climate and energy

A main point of difference between the two major parties on climate policy was their respective long-term emissions reduction targets. The short-term targets of both major parties are the same: the Coalition and ALP both have unconditional targets of a 5 per cent reduction on 2000 levels by 2020. The Coalition announced no long-term emissions target in the election, whereas the ALP confirmed a policy of 45 per cent reduction on 2005 levels by 2030 and 'net zero pollution' by 2050. Both parties went to the election with a form of 'baseline-and-credit' emissions trading in their policy platform, with additional financial commitments for Great Barrier Reef protection. Where the ALP stood out was on energy policy. In this policy arena, Labor has moved much closer to the Greens (see Table 25.1).

The Coalition went to the election intending to continue with the DAP—the federal government's flagship climate policy. The DAP is a voluntary competitive grants scheme through which participants submit proposals to the government for projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and propose a cost for the abatement undertaken. The scheme uses a reverse auction to allocate payments from an Emissions Reduction Fund (ERF). Entities submit sealed bids for funding to implement registered emissions reduction projects. The government then chooses projects on the basis of their being 'least cost' means for emissions abatement (measured in relation to the lowest bids per unit of notional abatement).

Successful applicants enter into a contract with the federal government to undertake project/s and produce Australian Carbon Credit Units (ACCU), defined as representing a volume of greenhouse gases (measured as tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO<sub>2</sub>-e)) below a baseline. The first two auctions were held in 2015, and a third in 2016, with \$1.7 billion spent so far on 143 million tCO<sub>2</sub>-e. The largest project contracted under the DAP in April 2016 is the Catchment Conservation Alliance—Great Barrier Reef Initiative, a public–private partnership between commercial resource management firm Terra Carbon and the QLD government. The contract commits to purchasing 15 million tCO<sub>2</sub>-e. Terra Carbon has won more than a third of all ERF contracts for 52 million tCO<sub>2</sub>-e.

Through a staggered process of design since 2013, the DAP has taken shape as a type of emissions trading. The DAP now involves rules for a baseline-and-credit carbon offset scheme, wherein liable entities who

emit above a set baseline are required to purchase credits (ACCUs) in order to meet their obligations under the DAP Safeguard Mechanism. The DAP creates carbon credits for purchase, albeit without tradability or linkage to international carbon markets. The *Australian* journalist Alan Kohler picked up on this, observing:

The interesting question is why no one is talking about any of this. Obviously the 150 companies involved know about it, and it's all described in full on the department website, but the fact that Australia has effectively legislated an emissions trading scheme is virtually a secret (Kohler 2016).

The DAP was redesigned in this way because of criticisms of the scheme's lack of environmental integrity. Since being announced, the DAP has been under question, in particular with regard to its cost and whether or not it can reduce emissions. The Coalition committed a capped figure of \$2.55 billion to the ERF. Experts, non-government organisations (NGOs) and political commentators have criticised the DAP (e.g. Burke 2016; Kohler 2016; Reputex 2013; TCI 2013), with key arguments being the DAP wastes public funds on ineffective carbon abatement projects; the additionality of ERF-funded projects cannot be guaranteed; the DAP effectively operates as an ETS; and the Safeguard Mechanism does not guarantee limits on fossil fuel production.

In a very low-key manner, the ALP announced two ETS as part of its larger climate and energy policy package. Labor's Climate Change Action Plan is the broadest set of climate and energy policy reforms a major political party in Australia has ever proposed. The ALP election platform included a renewable energy target of 50 per cent by 2030; community power network for small-scale renewables; creation of a Just Transition Unit within the Department of Environment focused on the electricity sector; a review of the National Electricity Market; two ETS (one in the electricity sector and the other in heavy industries) with full access to domestic and international carbon offsets for emissions intensive firms; and a 'Climate Trigger' to regulate large-scale land clearing under EPBC Act (ALP 2016a; 2016b).

This suite of climate and energy policies demonstrates the influence of environmentalists and communities affected by coal and gas. The ALP Climate Action Plan reflects an agenda advocated within the party by the Labor Environment Action Network, which has campaigned since 2013 for a stronger policy platform (Lloyd 2016). The Climate Trigger is modelled on the Water Trigger developed by Windsor when he was

in federal parliament, acting in the interests of landholders in the New England electorate affected by coal and gas mine proposals. The Water Trigger (legislated in 2012) introduces more scientific oversight on federal approvals for coal and gas mines where water resources are at risk.

In a similar vein, the Climate Trigger will instigate independent scientific review of broad-scale land clearing (which is historically managed by the States) that has an 'impact on Australia's ability to meet its agreed climate change commitment to keeping global warming well below two degrees Celsius' (ALP 2016a). Since changes to State land-clearing laws in QLD, a resurgence in the clearing of native vegetation has been recorded, which is likely to further reduce water quality in the Great Barrier Reef and undermine the national climate targets if clearing continues to increase (Maron et al. 2016).

Further, the ALP's climate and energy policy program mirrors the Greens' platform strongly. Both parties, for instance, propose reform to the National Electricity Market and programs to ensure a 'just transition'; a goal recognised in the United Nations climate negotiation text in Paris 2015. The main point of difference between the ALP and Greens in the energy policy arena relates to proposed limits on coal and gas extraction and production. The Greens' longstanding policy is that no new coal and gas mines should be opened (including expansions on existing mines), with an immediate ban on unconventional gas mining. Further, the Greens' greenhouse gas goals and renewable energy production targets are more ambitious (Table 25.1).

Importantly, the limitations of the DAP are mirrored in the Labor's ETS, which is heavily weighted toward the unlimited use of domestic and international carbon offsets. Labor has made a point of allowing unlimited availability of international offsets in a bid to ensure 'flexibility' for emissions-intensive firms. In reality, offsets undermine the environmental integrity of any ETS (Lohmann 2009; Pearse and Böhm 2015). Carbon offsets share the same problems as the project and reverse auction–funding arrangements under the DAP. The problems of non-additional 'anyway' projects are the same in carbon offset schemes. For instance, offset projects funded under the Clean Development Mechanism have been shown to be non-additional (Victor 2009) and displace the costs of responding to climate crisis from the North to South (Bryant, Dabhi and Böhm 2015).

## Great Barrier Reef

Both major parties included promises to manage ongoing threats to the Great Barrier Reef, but neither made commitments to stop coal mining and port developments damaging the area. Since the 2013 election, there have been ongoing conflicts over the federal government's approval of the Abbot Point coal terminal expansion and the Adani Carmichael mine in the Galilee Basin. Environmental groups have opposed the mine and related port and railway developments. These sustained campaigns combined with controversy over the World Heritage Committee review have successfully connected the Great Barrier Reef, coal mining and climate change in the public's minds (Hasham 2016). In response, both the Coalition and ALP developed policies for reef management going into the election.

The Coalition promised additional funding for Great Barrier Reef protection through a \$1 billion Reef Fund, providing finance for energy and water-quality projects, to be administered through the CEFC. This announcement came off the back of the Coalition's unsuccessful attempts to abolish the fund when it repealed the ETS, a failed directive for the CEFC to cease its operations in 2013 (Taylor 2013) and an attempt to prohibit CEFC investment in wind power and rooftop solar (Henderson and Tlozek 2015). Whether the CEFC can be used to fund the proposed Great Barrier Reef projects is an open question, with most experts suggesting it will not be possible given that the legislated purpose of the CEFC is to facilitate investment in clean energy technologies (Slezack 2016). Beyond (questionable) funding for these projects, the Coalition has announced a program to tackle illegal fishing (a threat to dugongs and turtles in the Marine Park), but has no commitment to legislate a limit on water pollution from agriculture flowing into the Reef area.

The ALP went to the election proposing a \$500 million fund to resource CSIRO research (\$100 million), environmental management programs (\$300 million) and reef management (\$100 million). Of this commitment, \$377 million was new investment plus a reprioritisation of \$123 million by the government in the 2016–17 Budget. Labor has pledged to work with the QLD government to implement the Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce report. However, the party has not made a direct commitment to legislate a cap on agriculture-related water pollution, nor has the ALP developed a plan to deal with illegal fishing.



## Conclusions

The recent history of Australia's climate and energy policy debate is a story of deep divisions in federal politics, and there is evidence that the electorate has little faith that the major parties have an effective plan to deal with the problem. It is no wonder then that in the 2016 election both major parties largely neglected climate and energy issues when communicating their campaign pitches.

There is, however, continuing public concern about climate change, and various polls have found public support for renewable energy policies and regulatory limits to coal and gas industries. While trends in public opinion about energy transition and mining did not translate to electorally significant public pressure in the election, we have cause to think it may in the future. Difficulties associated with changing energy markets will continue, as will the impacts of coal and gas mining, and of climate change on World Heritage sites like the Great Barrier Reef, society and the economy. In light of these changes, and the new directions of ALP and Greens policy, we can anticipate the next federal election will see more concerted debate about energy transition.

As this shift happens, we should hope that the continuity of flawed emissions trading and carbon offset schemes like the Coalition's DAP and Labor's ETS will be replaced with further change. The broadening of Labor's Climate Change Action Plan to focus on a suite of measures aimed at energy market reform and transition is a welcome step towards a more productive national climate debate in future.

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## Legislation

*Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth).

*World Heritage Properties Conservation Act 1983* (Cth).



# 26

## Refugee Policy: A Cruel Bipartisanship

Sara Dehm and Max Walden

Facing the media after a reported 5.6 per cent swing against him in the Brisbane seat of Dickson, Australian Minister for Immigration and Border Protection Peter Dutton defiantly declared that the Coalition was ‘a victim of our own success’.<sup>1</sup> ‘The fact that we stopped boats and got children out of detention’, Dutton asserted, meant the ‘issue’ of ‘border protection’ and people arriving in Australia unauthorised by boat to seek asylum ‘had gone off the radar’ (quoted in Hutchens 2016). The minister’s assertion was certainly provocative, if a little misleading. While Australia’s policies towards refugees and asylum seekers did not appear to feature prominently in the 2016 election campaign, this was largely due to a confluence of circumstances, not all of which were of the Coalition’s making. These circumstances primarily included the bipartisan support for the three key pillars of Australia’s increasingly draconian deterrence model (namely, boat turn backs, regional processing and the mandatory detention of certain asylum seekers) and the exceptional government censorship of information from inside immigration detention centres and the official secrecy surrounding the implementation of Australia’s military-led Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB). This meant that the Coalition and Labor had both orchestrated a situation where there seemed

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1 At the time that Dutton faced the media, a 5.6 per cent swing was reported. The final result was a 5.12 per cent swing away from the minister.

to be little political mileage to be gained from foregrounding the issue of Australia's refugee laws and policies during the campaign. Instead, the election contest predominantly played out across more traditional issues of economic and social policy, such as job creation and the funding of healthcare. Despite being a highly volatile political issue, refugee policy could rarely be seen to determine the outcome of elections—perhaps with the exception of the Coalition's major 2001 electoral victory in the wake of the Tampa affair. Since 2004, fewer than 10 per cent of surveyed voters have ranked the issue of 'refugees and asylum seekers' as the 'most important non-economic issue' in federal elections (McAllister and Cameron 2014: 21).

Despite the lack of prominence given by the two major political parties to the issue of refugee policy relative to previous election campaigns, it nonetheless surfaced at key moments to reveal its political potency. For example, some minor political parties, certain media outlets and community activist groups were particularly vocal on the issue. This chapter argues that these moments attest to both the anxious nature of Australian nationalism and multiculturalism, and the increasingly prominent deep discursive linkages between asylum seekers, terrorism and the securitisation of migration and borders.

## International and domestic context

In the lead-up to the 2016 election, political conditions appeared ripe for the issue of Australia's refugee laws and policies to feature prominently in the federal election campaign. Globally, the number of refugees, asylum seekers and forcibly displaced people had reached a peak of 65.3 million in early 2016, amounting to a humanitarian crisis on a scale not seen since the aftermath of World War II (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 2016). Domestically, Australia's laws and policies towards refugees and asylum seekers—specifically those people who are categorised under Australian law as 'unauthorised maritime arrivals'—have featured as a divisive but not necessarily determinative issue in almost every federal Australian election since the 1970s. In this section, we posit that four important factors shaped the appearance of the issue of Australia's refugee policies in the lead-up to the 2016 federal election. These are (1) the rise of a politics of border security as a frame for understanding the unauthorised arrival of asylum seekers by boat in



Australia's waters and the reintroduction of regional detention and offshore processing arrangements since 2012; (2) the deteriorating conditions for people held in Australian-run onshore and offshore immigration detention centres; (3) the heightened domestic and international scrutiny of Australia's detention regime including through legal challenges; and (4) a revitalisation of transnational activism to challenge Australia's refugee deterrence paradigm since early 2016. While the latter three factors would appear to give momentum to an increased visibility of the issue of refugee policies in the lead-up to the 2016 election, ultimately the nature and dominance of the first factor proved to be the most decisive. We thus argue that the uneasy bipartisanship between the Coalition and the Australian Labor Party (ALP) around the adoption of an increasingly punitive deterrence model towards people travelling unauthorised to Australia by boat to seek asylum played a key role in marginalise the issue during the election campaign.

First, the Australian government's adoption of a heightened deterrence paradigm towards asylum seekers arriving unauthorised in Australian waters by boat since August 2012—and the subsequent implementation of OSB under the previous Abbott government (2013–15)—had seen the intensification of a politics of border security and practices of border securitisation and militarisation (Grewcock 2014). This paradigm entailed the turning back of boats carrying asylum seekers to source countries such as Vietnam or transit countries like Indonesia, increasing the capacity of the two offshore Regional Processing Centres (RPCs) in Papua New Guinea and Nauru, and reintroducing Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) for certain refugees in Australia in the period leading up to the election. Moreover, in framing the phenomenon of people travelling to Australia by boat to seek asylum as a 'national emergency' and inaccurately deeming them 'illegal maritime arrivals' since 2014, such policies have further contributed towards the perception that refugees and asylum seekers should be seen as a potential threat to the 'security' of the Australian nation-state (Glendenning 2015). Praising the successes of OSB in 'regaining control over Australia's borders' would be central to the Coalition's campaigning on refugee issues during the election, allowing the Coalition to repeatedly invoke the threat of a future crisis while also defending their current policies and track record.

Since assuming government in 2013, the Coalition had sought to use refugee policy to make the ALP look weak and divided, despite supporting Labor's reintroduction of a model of regional offshore detention and

processing in August 2012. In particular, Tony Abbott's adoption of the practice of turning back boats carrying asylum seekers en route to Australia remained a controversial policy in the early years of his government, not least because of Indonesia's vocal opposition to it. When Bill Shorten took over as Opposition Leader in October 2013, he actively sought to 'neutralise' the issue. This included successfully urging the party at the ALP national conference in July 2015 to endorse the Coalition's practice of turning back asylum seeker boats. As a result, much of the ALP's rhetoric in the lead-up to the 2016 election and during the campaign increasingly echoed that of the Coalition. For example, when challenged in relation to divisions within his parliamentary party on refugee policy during the campaign, Shorten reiterated Labor's support for both the policy of boat turn backs and offshore processing and declared that if elected the ALP would not 'put the people smugglers back in business' (Massola 2016).

The militarised approach for dealing with people seeking asylum adopted under OSB was accompanied by heightened secrecy around the implementation and effects of refugee policies by early 2016. Key legislative reforms, such as the adoption of the *Australian Border Force Act 2015* (Cth), which was passed with bipartisan support but was opposed by the Greens, restricted the ability of certain professionals working in Australia's immigration detention regime to lawfully voice their concerns about the effects of Australia's refugee policies on people subject to the regime or to criticise the policies themselves. Indeed, these legislative changes drew sharp criticism from legal experts and human rights advocates for their suppression of whistleblowers. Under the then Act, contracted workers like doctors, teachers or other personnel in RPCs faced up to two years in prison for speaking publicly about the conditions or treatment of asylum seekers (Fleay 2015).<sup>2</sup> Despite this alarming lack of transparency and silencing of professionals, there was still a number of exposés, in the form of testimony from whistleblowers or official documents obtained under freedom of information, in the lead-up to the 2016 election.

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2 Subsequent to the 2016 election, the Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) amended a legislative instrument in September 2016 ahead of a High Court challenge to exempt 'health practitioners' from the definition of 'Immigration and Border Protection workers' under the *Australian Border Force Act 2015* (Cth). See also DIBP, *Determination of Immigration and Border Protection Workers—Amendment No. 1*, 30 September 2016. Further significant legislative changes to the Act passed both Houses of Parliament in October 2017.

Second, the lead-up to the election saw mounting evidence of the worsening treatment of people seeking asylum or found to be refugees in Australian-run onshore and offshore immigration detention centres, and in the region more generally. Reports emerged of negligence and abuse by contractors operating within the RPCs and of the high levels of self-harm among refugees and asylum seekers. For instance, in January 2016, internal Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) documents obtained under freedom of information showed that self-harm within both the onshore and offshore immigration detention centres had reached ‘epidemic levels’ (Koziol and Hasham 2016). A few months later in April 2016, the ABC’s *Four Corners* program reported that senior doctors with experience of working in immigration detention were speaking out to highlight the ‘dangerously inadequate’ medical care in the Manus Island RPC (Thompson and Harley 2016). In response to such criticisms, the Australian government simply deflected its responsibility by repeatedly claiming that the Manus Island and Nauru RPCs were managed by the governments of PNG and Nauru respectively, under local laws, albeit with Australian support. Further media stories kept the issue of Australia’s treatment of refugees and asylum seekers in the national spotlight, including evidence that the Royal Australian Navy had paid people smugglers to return asylum seekers to Indonesia. Regionally, in the years leading up to the 2016 election, Australian taxpayer-funded immigration detention centres across the Indonesian archipelago had also become desperately overcrowded and unhygienic, with claims that detained asylum seekers were being beaten and tortured (Missbach and Sinanu 2013).

Meanwhile, the Australian government adopted the dual tactics of pressuring people held in the Nauru or Manus Island RPCs to either return to their country of nationality or participate in third-country resettlement schemes. In September 2014, Australia signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Cambodia that enabled people found to be refugees in the Nauru RPC to voluntarily resettle in Cambodia on a permanent basis. The UNHCR criticised the \$55 million arrangement, labelling it ‘a worrying departure from international norms’ and asserting that ‘it’s crucial that countries do not shift their refugee responsibilities elsewhere’ (UNHCR 2014). By 2016, it was clear that this arrangement proved to be ‘a failure’, with only five people opting to participate in the resettlement scheme, all but one of whom would eventually opt to ‘voluntarily’ return to their home countries (Murdoch and Koziol 2016).

In Australia, many asylum seekers and refugees faced an increasingly precarious existence, largely because of the increasingly punitive government measures to limit people's rights to work and to family reunification (Fleay and Hartley 2016). The reintroduction of TPVs and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEVs) in December 2014 as the only visas available to people considered part of the so-called Asylum Legacy Caseload—a collective term for the approximately 30,000 people who arrived by boat between 2012 and 2014 and who were at the time yet to have their refugee claims processed and living in Australia on Bridging Visas—meant that any person who was subsequently found to be a refugee, but who had arrived in Australia unauthorised by boat, was unable to sponsor family members to join them in Australia (Crock and Bones 2015). Moreover, the Abbott government's adoption in December 2013 of a Code of Behaviour meant that asylum seekers living in the Australian community were subject to additional surveillance and the possibility of severe punishment for minor infractions (Methven and Vogl 2015).

Third, in the lead-up to the election, Australia faced increased domestic and international scrutiny of OSB and its offshore detention and processing arrangements, including through judicial challenges. Several reports from UN agencies found that Australia's policies constituted breaches of international laws, including the prohibition on subjecting people to torture, inhuman and degrading treatment (United Nations Human Rights Council 2014). For example, the riots in the Manus Island RPC in February 2014 had spurred the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ravina Shamdasani, to criticise Australia and urge the Australian government to change its offshore detention and processing policy, or at the very least take 'steps to investigate, redress and punish human rights abuses by third parties' (quoted in Cumming-Bruce 2014). Domestic inquiries also called for policy change, with the Australian Human Rights Commission's (AHRC) inquiry into children in detention tabled in Parliament in February 2015, asserting that the 'mandatory and prolonged detention of children was a clear violation of international law', and issuing a recommendation to end to the mandatory detention of children and their families (AHRC 2014). The recommendations of both the UNHCR and the AHRC fell on deaf ears. Then prime minister Abbott instead defiantly responded to the Special Rapporteur's report by declaring that Australians were 'sick of being lectured to by the United

Nations' (quoted in Cox 2015), and launched an all-out personal attack on the AHRC President Gillian Triggs, accusing her of publishing a 'stitch up' and publicly calling for her resignation.

A significant challenge to Australia's deterrence regime came in the lead-up to the 2016 election in the form of a legal case within Papua New Guinea's (PNG) legal system. On 26 April 2016, the PNG Supreme Court, the highest judicial body in PNG, decided that the detention of asylum seekers in the Manus Island RPC was illegal as it breached the right to freedom of movement under the PNG Constitution. The Court thus ordered both the PNG and Australian governments to take 'all steps necessary' to end the illegal detention of the approximately 850 people in the Manus Island RPC (*Namah v Pato* [2016] SCA 84 of 2013 (PNG)). While the PNG decision provided an opportunity for the Coalition government to end the much-criticised and harmful policy of offshore detention and processing, the government staunchly refused to do so. Rather, Dutton vowed that the PNG decision would not change Australia's policies and that no one from the Manus Island RPC would be resettled in Australia (Tlozek and Anderson 2016). The government also again rejected an offer from New Zealand to permanently resettle a portion of the refugees, thus offering little alternative for resolving their legal obligations under PNG and international law and prolonging the suffering and uncertainty for the people interned on Manus Island.

Finally, the period leading up to the 2016 election saw the emergence of revitalised transnational activism from both within Australia's RPCs and the Australian community. Refugees and asylum seekers held continuous protests within both the Nauru and Manus Island RPCs as a way of highlighting the conditions of their incarceration and demanding proper pathways to permanent protection. In the middle of the election campaign in June 2016, the protests within the Nauru RPC passed 100 consecutive days. The photos and videos of these protests were shared by concerned Australians on social media and covered by some mainstream media outlets (Michael 2016).

At the same time, a mass social media campaign emerged in Australia during February 2016 under the slogan of #LetThemStay, following a failed High Court challenge to halt the deportation of a pregnant Bangladeshi woman back to the Nauru RPC. This High Court decision meant that 267 asylum seekers and refugees who had been transferred from a RPC to Australia for medical treatment could be legally deported

back to a RPC (see *Plaintiff M68/2015 v Minister for Immigration and Border Protection* (2016) 257 CLR 42). In response to such activism and community concern, Victorian Labor Premier Daniel Andrews, supported by then New South Wales Liberal Premier Mike Baird, prominently called for a ‘better’ solution to asylum-seeker policy than offshore detention and processing, and expressed a willingness to host refugees, particularly children and their families, so that they would not be returned to a RPC. The movement gained some further success, when medical staff at a Brisbane hospital refused to discharge 12-month-old ‘baby Asha’ in defiance of the government’s position, with her family subsequently being settled in community detention in Australia. Further protests from professional, faith-based and community groups generated new political momentum for policy change, with over 100 churches offering sanctuary to those affected by the High Court decision. By April 2016, approximately half of the 267 asylum seekers at the centre of the Let Them Stay protests had been granted Bridging Visas that allowed them to remain in community detention in Australia (Oriti 2016). These protests gave increased national prominence to both the harmful effects of the current deterrence regime on people seeking asylum and articulated increasingly vocal calls for reform from within and beyond the refugee sector, and from the affected refugees and asylum seekers themselves.

## The election campaign

Despite the confluence of circumstances that could have prompted a more prominent place for the issue of Australia’s refugee policies in the 2016 federal election campaign, there instead appeared to be a peculiar shift away from the two major political parties foregrounding this issue. As noted previously, this was primarily because of the increasingly bipartisan support for the three key pillars of Australia’s increasingly draconian deterrence-oriented model regarding asylum seekers in Australia. These pillars are the mandatory detention of people seeking asylum, the implementation of offshore processing and the practice of turning back asylum seeker boats en route to Australia. Nonetheless, in remaining more of an undercurrent in the election campaign, we argue that the issue of Australia’s refugee policies did still appear at discrete moments during the campaign. As we discuss below, these moments involved contests around the ‘appropriate’ numbers of people to be admitted under Australia’s ‘offshore’ humanitarian program; attempts to emphasise internal party divisions and instability

within Labor; and, finally, appeals to maintaining the ‘integrity’ and control of the ‘Australian border’—an end that has increasingly been infused with a rhetoric of instrumental humanitarianism that purports to be concerned with ‘saving lives at sea’.

By and large, the increasing bipartisan support for a deterrence paradigm toward people attempting to seek asylum in Australia in recent years has meant that the main difference between the Coalition and Labor policies during the election campaign was in relation to the offshore resettlement component of Australia’s humanitarian program. Here, the difference between the major parties appeared to be a contest over the number of people to be admitted under the offshore resettlement program and how to rhetorically frame this program. In their election campaign material, the Coalition’s policy on refugees and asylum seekers appeared under the heading ‘Protecting our Borders’, and promised to maintain Australia’s current annual humanitarian intake of 13,750 people, rising to 18,750 people in 2018–19. This number did not include the Abbott government’s announcement in September 2015 that it would accept a one-off intake of 12,000 refugees displaced by the Syrian and Iraq conflicts. In contrast, Labor titled their policy ‘A Humane and Compassionate Approach to Asylum Seekers’, and pledged to eventually double the number of people resettled in Australia under the offshore resettlement program, amounting to an increased annual intake of 27,000 people by 2025. Labor also committed to abolishing the use of TPVs that had been reintroduced under the Abbott government in December 2014. The Greens, as a third force in Australian politics, positioned themselves as a direct alternative to the Coalition and Labor’s bipartisan deterrence paradigm, and strongly advocated for a rights-based approach of the processing of asylum seekers and refugees in Australia. Entitled ‘A Better Way’, the Greens’ policy promised an increase of Australia’s annual offshore humanitarian intake to 50,000 people. They also proposed adopting a new Skilled Refugee Visa program for 10,000 people, a measure that had long been called for by the Refugee Council of Australia (RCA) (see Table 26.1).

Interestingly, there was an implicit acknowledgement across all three of the major parties’ policies that it is desirable to increase the number of places available annually in Australia’s offshore humanitarian resettlement program over time, although neither the Coalition nor Labor advanced an explicit argument as to the basis of this decision. On a more fundamental level, the contests over these figures reveal an underlying dynamic of what Ghassan Hage has termed ‘numerological racism’ (2014: 233). For Hage,

this denotes a racism of numbers in which discussing the admission of non-citizens to Australia ‘always comes with the category of “too many”’; that is, a sense that Australia currently takes or could take ‘too many’ refugees to the detriment of the national collective, and that the task for the Australian government is to find the appropriate numerical intake. Writing in the context of Pauline Hanson’s anti-Asian racism in the late 1990s, Hage (1998: 186–89) suggested that such sentiments rely upon a ‘fantasy of domination’ in which the white sovereign decision-maker has the primary responsibility of controlling how many people deemed to be the ‘Other’ are to be admitted into the Australian nation, thus seeking to either restore or maintain a ‘proper’ balance to multicultural diversity. For Hage, such a dynamic reveals the insecure and anxious nature of Australian nationalism and the foundational norms underpinning practices of Australian multiculturalism (see also Hage 2003).

Table 26.1. Overview of major party refugee policies

	Coalition ‘Protecting our Borders’	Labor ‘A Humane and Compassionate Approach to Asylum Seekers’	Greens ‘A Better Way’
<b>‘Offshore’ resettlement program</b>			
Proposed annual intake	18,750 people in 2018–19	27,000 people in 2025	50,000 in 2016
<b>‘Onshore’ program for people travelling unauthorised to Australia by boat to seek asylum</b>			
Mandatory detention of asylum seekers	Yes, unlimited	Yes, unlimited	Yes, for a maximum of 30 days
Offshore processing of boat arrivals	Yes	Yes	No
TPVs for people already in Australia	Support TPVs	Abolish TPVs	Abolish TPVs
Boat turn backs	Yes	Yes	No
Reform of offshore processing	No change	Expedite processing of claims Allow media access to RPCs	Close RPCs
Children in immigration detention	No change	Introduce an independent child advocate Mandatory reporting of child abuse	Initiate a Royal Commission to investigate

Source. Compiled by authors from the election campaign materials of the Coalition (Liberal Party of Australia (LPA) 2016a), Australian Labor Party (ALP 2016) and Greens (Australian Greens 2016).



During the election campaign, the competing figures around Australia's offshore humanitarian resettlement program became the subject of controversy following the appearance of Minister Dutton on a Sky News program as a guest of conservative host Paul Murray. Responding to Murray's outrage at the Greens' proposal to increase the size of Australia's humanitarian program, Dutton stated that refugees admitted under Australia's offshore humanitarian resettlement program were prone to unemployment and thus contributed to the government's spending on social security. The minister's remarks played on a long-held public misconception that asylum seekers receive greater welfare payments than members of the overall population (Phillips 2015). It is worth quoting Dutton's remarks at length for their contradictory framing of refugees as at once dependent upon social security and also 'taking Australian jobs':

For many people, they won't be numerate or literate in their own language let alone English ... These people would be taking Australian jobs. There's no question about that. And for many of them that would be unemployed, they would languish in unemployment queues and on Medicare, and the rest of it. So there would be a huge cost (cited in Bourke 2016).

Yet, despite the seeming contradiction in Dutton's remarks, at the heart of his comment is a representation of refugees as 'extractive' beings: as taking things to which Dutton suggests refugees should not be properly entitled (see Figure 26.1).

Commentators were quick to note that Dutton's incendiary comments, in constructing refugees as both a financial burden on the Australian taxpayers as well as a threat to the livelihood of 'Australian workers', misconstrued official data that demonstrates a majority of refugees resettled in Australia *are* in fact literate in their own language, understand spoken English on arrival and bring a net benefit to the Australian community and economy in the long run (Maddison 2016; Voon and Higgins 2016). Yet, interestingly, both Dutton's remarks and the outraged reactions to them engaged in the same rationalist calculation in which the legitimacy of the presence of refugees and asylum seekers within Australia is framed as a question of the 'burden' or 'benefit' that they bring to the nation. As Danielle Every (2008) has argued, such rationalist calculations reflect a dialectic within liberal humanitarianism that oscillates between foregrounding either of the opposing considerations of 'costs to self' or 'duty to others'.

The following day, in defence of his comments and further labouring the idea of refugees as fiscal burdens, Dutton claimed that the Greens' policy would cost \$7 billion over four years while Labor's proposals would cost \$2.3 billion over the same period (Baxendale 2016). Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull too, in coming to Dutton's defence as an 'outstanding immigration minister', claimed that Dutton's remarks merely reflected the fact that people resettled under Australia's offshore humanitarian program came from 'dreadful, devastated, war-torn regions of the world' (quoted in Keany and Anderson 2016). Opposition leader Shorten in turn seized on Dutton's remarks, labelled the Immigration Minister's comments 'xenophobic', 'offensive' and 'deeply divisive'. Claiming that the Coalition was seeking to 'undermine the migrant contribution to Australia because they don't want this election to be about the issues that matter to Australians', Shorten demanded that Dutton apologise for his remarks (quoted in Keany and Anderson 2016). While no apology was issued, it is telling that the main election campaign controversy pertaining to refugee policies was over a ministerial remark, rather than over the substance and effects of Australia's hardline deterrence policies.



Figure 26.1. Refugees and the 2016 election

Source. Cathy Wilcox, 'Those invaluable refugees', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 May 2016. Reproduced with the permission of Cathy Wilcox.

Throughout the campaign, the Coalition repeatedly used the question of refugee policy to suggest deep internal divisions within the Labor opposition. In his address to the federal campaign rally in late June 2016, Turnbull claimed that during their time in government, Labor had ‘failed Australia at the border’ by dismantling Howard-era refugee policies (LPA 2016b). Turnbull warned that the electorate could not risk a return to Labor given that 50 Labor candidates, Members of Parliament (MPs) and Senators allegedly did not currently support the government’s deterrence model towards people arriving unauthorised by boat to seek asylum. To bolster this claim, the Liberal Party hosted an online website with a collage of images and quotes from Labor politicians and candidates who had come out in support of the #LetThemStay campaign or who had opposed the ALP adoption of a policy of ‘boat turn backs’ (Whatlaborreallythinks 2016). Rather than embracing the fact that there existed a diversity of views within his party, Shorten responded by framing the issue of dissent as one that had disappeared after the Labor Conference in 2015, insisting that the ALP now had the same deterrence policy as the Coalition. Yet such a proposition occluded the ongoing contestation about these policies within both the ALP and, to a lesser extent, the Coalition. This was evident, for example, in a minor controversy that occurred in the early weeks of the campaign, where Labor’s candidate for the seat of Melbourne, Sophie Ismail, publicly stated that she had grave concerns about the policies of offshore processing and turning back asylum seeker boats en route to Australia. It is unclear how much traction the Liberal website, *whatlaborreallythinks*, actually received. What is clear is the government’s perception that it could still make refugee policy into a partisan issue, despite Shorten’s best efforts to neutralise it, and that years of positioning the Coalition as tough on the issue of ‘border protection’ had seemingly shaped voter judgement about the parties. For example, a poll conducted by Essential Vision in late May 2016 found that only 28 per cent of poll respondents believed Labor would keep the Coalition’s policy on asylum seekers arriving by boat (Essential Vision 2016).

Finally, the election campaign saw the issue of refugee policies largely framed within the context of ‘border security’, with both Turnbull and Shorten using their respective refugee policies to present themselves as ‘strong’ leaders committed to ‘protecting’ Australia’s borders. This was most apparent early in the Coalition’s campaign when Turnbull visited an Australian Border Force (ABF) vessel docked in Darwin on 17 May 2016. Standing in front of the ACV *Cape Jervis*, Turnbull declared that

the ‘protection of Australia’s borders is a political issue’. Praising the professionalism of the ABE, Turnbull appealed to his government’s track record and commitment in ‘keeping our borders secure’. He added that:

There are currently 1,400 people in Indonesia right now who came to Indonesia during the period of the Labor government in the hope that they would be able to get on a people smuggler’s boat and come to Australia. And they know that they can’t get through because of the commitment of my government; my government’s determination to stop the boats and turn them back when we intercept them at sea. And that’s why there’s been no more boats. That’s why it’s been over 600 days without any unauthorised arrivals (quoted in Koziol 2016).

Dutton promoted this conflation between border protection, national security and asylum-seeker policies in a last-minute effort to gain voter confidence. The day before the federal election, Dutton explicitly linked the unauthorised arrival of asylum seekers in states with the occurrence of terrorist acts, suggesting that the political violence in parts of Europe was the product of countries having ‘lost control’ of their borders. On the Labor side, Shorten sought to regain ground in the area of national security following claims of criminal syndicates and people smugglers rorting the Australian visa system in late June. However, these allegations, coming late in the election campaign, failed to generate much political controversy or inflict political damage on the sitting Coalition government.

A further example of the Coalition’s willingness to politicise the issue of refugee policy came a little over a week out from the election, when the Turnbull government announced that it had rerouted a boat with 21 asylum seekers en route to Australia back to Vietnam. The Coalition attempted to use this as further evidence that ‘the challenge of people smuggling is greater than it has ever been’ and that Labor’s policy of abolishing TPVs would send an ‘invitation’ to people smugglers to resume their trade in human lives (ABC Radio 2016). Labor, given their support of the boat turn-back policy, was left with little room for criticising the actual action, opting to instead question the delayed timing of the announcement given that the boat had been intercepted and returned earlier in June. Shorten responded by labelling border security the Coalition’s ‘break-glass issue’. This instance revealingly demonstrated the Coalition’s readiness to disregard their prohibition on discussing ‘on water operational matters’ for the sake of political expediency.

Tellingly, the bipartisan deterrence paradigm was increasingly infused with a humanitarian rhetoric throughout the 2016 election campaign. For example, during his appearance on the national *Q&A* program on ABC television, Turnbull framed the issue of the indefinite detention of people in RPCs as one of a resolute determination to combat people being exploited by people smugglers, and to ensure that no person drowns at sea while attempting to reach Australia by boat (Boochani 2016). Turnbull's comments were in response to a question asked via video from the Manus Island RPC by Behrouz Boochani, a Kurdish Iranian journalist who has spent more than three years in PNG. Turnbull remarked:

We have learnt the tragic truth that when the very strict and clear border protection policies of the Howard government were ... undone by Kevin Rudd, we had 50,000 unlawful arrivals, we had 1,200 deaths at sea of which we know. It was a catastrophe. Now we have been able to secure the security on the border. The people smugglers are out of business. They would love to get back into business. They are itching to get back into business ... We have had no unauthorised arrivals ... for well over 660 days ... It is a tough policy, I grant you that (quoted in Boochani 2016).

Turnbull's response here advances a form of instrumental humanitarianism that posits that denying people arriving without authorisation access to asylum and incarcerating others is not only good for Australia as a nation, but also serves as a humane and justified means of preventing loss of life and human exploitation. Yet as Maria O'Sullivan (2016) has argued, Australia's policies that prioritise formal resettlement schemes while preventing and penalising anyone who seeks asylum outside the parameters of such schemes is ethically unacceptable. For O'Sullivan, such an approach risks denying individual agency to refugees to decide their mode of accessing asylum and comes at an 'extremely high cost to the individual rights of other persons who receive punitive treatment for not using a planned process' (2016: 256). This form of instrumental humanitarianism then bolsters rather than displaces the securitisation of migration and seeks to delegitimise the asylum rights of people travelling to Australia without authorisation.

Commentators dispute what is driving the bipartisan policy towards refugees. Polls released during the 2016 election campaign suggest that most Australians do not fully support the bipartisan hardline approach towards people seeking asylum. For example, a poll surveying 1,400 people commissioned by the Australia Institute (2016) found that 63 per cent of respondents opposed the bipartisan policy that did not allow refugees

who have travelled without authorisation by boat to settle in Australia. A further poll for the Lowy Institute (2016) claimed that 57 per cent and 58 per cent of respondents regarded 'immigration' and 'refugees and asylum seekers' as very important issues for Australia, respectively; however, such statistics fail to reveal the particular values placed upon the issue. The Australian Election Survey (AES) has shown declining support for the practice of turning back asylum seeker boats over the last 15 years, with 62 per cent of respondents supporting the practice in 2001 compared to 49 per cent in 2013 (McAllister and Cameron 2014). In contrast, the 2016 Lowy Institute survey showed that 63 per cent of Australians appear to support the controversial policy of asylum seeker boat 'turn backs'. It also found, however, that 73 per cent of those surveyed agreed that immigration has a positive impact on the Australian economy (Lowy Institute 2016). These mixed poll results support the findings of Murray Goot and Ian Watson (2011), who observed that the outcome of polls concerning immigration often depended upon the particular way in which the question was asked. For example, survey polls reporting high levels of opposition to refugee and migrants appeared to encourage such responses through the particular wording of the question.

Despite both the Coalition and Labor's overall reluctance to elevate the issue of refugee policy to the status of a major party platform or to a key election slogan, it did receive notable coverage in the mainstream media. The Murdoch-owned News Corp press appeared particularly willing to cover, in an incendiary manner, the issue of people arriving unauthorised to Australia by boat. For example, during the second week of the campaign, News Corp's *Herald Sun* (Australia's highest circulating newspaper) ran the headline 'Shorten Holed on Boats', with the subtitle of 'Seven Labor Candidates at Odds with Opposition Leader on Asylum Seekers' (Harris 2016). As discussed in Andrea Carson and Brian McNair (Chapter 19, this volume), data monitoring of print and online media during the election campaign indicates that asylum seeker issues repeatedly appeared among the top five issues discussed within the mainstream media in a given week. This prominence is also reflected in analyses of alternative media and social media platforms (see Chen, Chapter 20, this volume).

## Legacies of the 2016 election

Undoubtedly, the bipartisan nature of the three main tenets that make up Australia's current policies towards people seeking asylum—mandatory detention, regional processing and boat turn backs—meant that there was little to distinguish the campaign policies of Labor and the Coalition. When Labor was prepared to concede that differences existed between the two parties' policies, it was differences in procedure rather than substance. For example, the ALP promised to expedite the processing of claims in RPCs and to facilitate increased transparency by pushing for journalists to have access to these centres.

One legacy of the election campaign has been the success of new electoral tactics adopted by several prominent refugee and human rights advocacy organisations. While many NGOs appeared reluctant to push directly for a discussion of Australia's refugee policy during the election campaign for fear of a 'race to the bottom' between both major parties, some organisations still encouraged voters to consider the issue of refugee policy at the ballot. The RCA, for example, released a briefing paper that compared the policies and measures of the two major political parties and the Greens in the hope of promoting national dialogue and voter awareness of the issue (RCA 2016). The most successful of these campaigns was that coordinated by the non-party affiliated progressive organisation GetUp!, who adopted the strategy of targeting seats held by the conservative right wing of the Liberal Party on the basis that such politicians were 'standing in the way of progress' on key issues such as climate action (see Vromen, Chapter 18, this volume). Most notably, this strategy included targeting Dutton in his Brisbane electorate of Dickson, a seat held by Dutton for the Liberal-National Party (LNP) since 2001. After the 2013 election, Dutton had a comfortable 6.7 per cent margin. Following the 2016 election, this margin was reduced to 3.2 per cent, resulting in LNP fears that Dutton may lose his seat in what eventually amounted to a 5.12 per cent swing against him on a two-party preferred count (more than double the national average swing against the LNP). Dutton himself cited GetUp!'s campaign as a reason why he had had a 'very tough campaign' marked by continuous protests. Indeed, the GetUp! campaign, titled 'Time to Ditch Dutton', had seen over 28,291 calls made to voters in Dickson and 294 volunteers on the ground in the electorate engaging in a range of activities from door knocking in the

weeks leading up to the election to handing out leaflets on election day.<sup>3</sup> This mobilisation constituted one of the largest campaigns run by GetUp! in any of the electorates that they targeted during the election campaign (GetUp! 2016).

A second legacy of the 2016 election has been the return of Pauline Hanson's One Nation (PHON) to the Australian Parliament on an explicitly anti-immigration platform. The party managed to claim four Senate seats, most notably two in QLD, and is set to be a decisive force in the current Australian Parliament. In the context of refugee policy, PHON ran on an overtly nationalist platform of endorsing the system of TPVs for refugees, abolishing the bipartisan policy of multiculturalism that has been in place in Australia since the 1970s and placing a ban on Muslim immigration to Australia, including banning Muslim refugees. This latter policy echoed the open xenophobia and Islamophobia of right-wing populist movements elsewhere in the USA and Europe, most notably seen in Donald Trump's presidential election campaign and the current policies of his administration.

The return of Pauline Hanson's One Nation to the Australian Parliament is certainly troubling for the future direction of Australia's refugee policies. However, the policies advocated by PHON need to be seen as consistent with, rather than a challenge to, the key principles of deterrence, exclusion and incarceration that have come to underpin Australia's refugee policies since the early 1990s, further coupled with recent articulations of Islamophobia in western democracies. Although it may be easy to attribute the strong return of One Nation to rising xenophobia in some sections of the Australian public, other factors have had a considerable influence on the election outcome. Tim Colebatch, for example, has argued that the lower threshold for Senate seat quotas in a double-dissolution election as well as the senate voting changes were responsible for the seats gained by PHON (Colebatch 2016).

## Conclusion

The 2016 election may not have been decided on the issue of refugee policy, but this issue is almost certainly set to remain prominent on the Australian political agenda. This is particularly the case as Australia's

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3 These figures have been sourced from an email with GetUp! (on file with authors).



hardline bipartisan approach comes under increased scrutiny and pressure from a range of actors including international organisations like the UNHCR, domestic judicial bodies such as the High Court, networks of refugee advocates and activists, as well as, most importantly, the people who have been the subject of these changing policies, either on Manus Island and Nauru or living on the Australia mainland. In the aftermath of the 2016 election, Australia's refugee policies again became the subject of sustained national and international attention because of the 'one-off' Australia–US refugee resettlement deal signed between the Turnbull government and the departing Obama Administration in November 2016. Under the terms of the agreement, the US agreed to permanently resettle in the US up to 1,250 refugees currently on Nauru or Manus Island, with priority given to women, children and families. In return, Australia agreed to resettle refugees from Central America currently being held in Costa Rica. Yet, despite US President Trump in February 2017 publicly questioning the deal and labelling it 'dumb', the arrangement has remained in place. US immigration officials interviewed people in RPCs in late 2016 and the first group of 52 refugees arrived in the US for resettlement in September 2017 (Anderson and Belot 2016; Tlozek 2017). While this resettlement scheme will provide a durable solution for a small number of people to start new lives in a safe country, its ability to provide a means of redressing the policy failures and human costs of Australia's offshore processing approach remains doubtful.

The 2016 election demonstrates that the two major parties appear unwilling to depart from their bipartisan support of the three key tenets of Australia's deterrence regime towards people travelling to Australia to seek protection—namely, the regional detention and processing deterrence model, the turning back of asylum seeker boats and the mandatory detention of people seeking asylum in Australia. Moreover, key moments during the 2016 election revealed the disturbing pervasiveness of the discursive construction of refugees and asylum seekers as a threat to Australia's security and identity. Nevertheless, the harmful effects of Australia's policies towards refugees will continue to pose an ongoing political and ethical impetus for a change to this troubling bipartisanship. It may well be that the issue of Australia's refugee policy will assume an increased visibility at the next federal election if this bipartisanship can be shifted but, in 2016, it did not.

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# 27

## ‘Ignore Us at Your Peril, Because We Vote Too’: Indigenous Policy

Diana Perche

Indigenous affairs rarely receive substantial attention in mainstream political debates in Australia, beyond occasional moral panics or the routine, grudging acknowledgement of the lack of progress in overcoming Indigenous disadvantage. The 2016 election campaign was no exception to the rule: the leaders of the major political parties gave relatively little of their time to Indigenous-specific policy announcements, and the media responded in kind. However, the perspective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people presents a striking contrast. The relatively low prominence of Indigenous issues on the national political agenda masks a growing disenchantment with the government’s policy choices, and criticisms of the lack of genuine engagement by the Commonwealth government have intensified in recent years. For some Indigenous leaders, relations between government and Indigenous people have reached an ‘all time low, a kind of dead end’ (Pearson 2016), and policy failure is blamed on ‘a failure of bureaucracy and a failure of the politicians’ (Calma in Sales 2016).

The demands for genuine engagement, consultation and respect from government by frustrated Indigenous leaders and communities sparked very different responses from the parties standing for election. This chapter will argue that, for the first time in over a decade, the 2016 election has revealed a substantial divergence between the major parties

on Indigenous policy, in response to a more organised and articulate Indigenous leadership. It will also show that Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has been unable to escape the legacy of his predecessor.

The chapter will begin with a brief review of the previous term of government relating to Indigenous affairs, under the leadership of former prime minister Tony Abbott. This will be contrasted with his successor Turnbull's agenda, before examining the Indigenous-specific policies of the Coalition, the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and the Greens that were revealed in the campaign. It will then consider the Redfern Statement, released by a powerful coalition of advocacy and non-government organisations working in the Indigenous sector, and evaluate its impact on the parties. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the ongoing debate around constitutional change, recognition and treaty, and a brief analysis of the election results.

## Tony Abbott: Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs

When the Coalition government under the leadership of Abbott was elected in 2013, federal politics was marked by deep policy and ideological divisions across many issues; however, in Indigenous affairs, the two major parties had established a relative bipartisanship (Manwaring, Gray and Orchard 2015). The previous Labor governments under Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard continued the Howard government's radical 'Intervention' in the Northern Territory (NT), and indeed extended it under the banner of 'Stronger Futures'. Abbott continued to support the former Labor government's 'Closing the Gap' program for addressing Indigenous disadvantage, supporting the intergovernmental commitments made through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

By the time he assumed office, Abbott was already well known for his personal interest in Indigenous issues and his widely publicised annual visits to remote communities, particularly supported by the prominent Indigenous leader from Cape York, Noel Pearson. Abbott announced with enthusiasm that he would be the 'Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs', supported by his Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Nigel Scullion, who would be in cabinet. As part of the machinery of government changes that followed, all 2,000 public servants working on Indigenous affairs across

several Commonwealth departments were relocated in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC). This was a dramatic move, and while the restructure guaranteed high-level attention to Indigenous issues from the prime minister and senior public servants, it also resulted in the loss of a substantial amount of corporate memory and portfolio expertise, hindering policy development and implementation (Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee (SFPARC) 2016).

Abbott was selective in his engagement with Indigenous leaders. He distanced himself from the elected representative body, the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, which had been established in 2010 under Rudd, and his government overturned the three-year \$15 million funding commitment made to the National Congress by the Gillard government. Instead, Abbott followed the example of former Liberal prime minister John Howard and established an Indigenous Advisory Council, a hand-picked body of advisors chaired by Warren Mundine.

The Abbott government's notorious 2014 Budget included a cut of \$534 million dollars over five years in Indigenous affairs (Australian Government 2014). It also introduced the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS), which was a complete overhaul of the funding mechanisms for Indigenous service delivery, in line with recommendations made by the government's National Commission of Audit. The IAS was designed to replace over 150 Indigenous-specific programs funded by government with five broad priority areas, in the name of reducing red tape and duplication. The priority areas were defined as 'jobs, land and economy; children and schooling; safety and wellbeing; culture and capability; and remote Australia strategies' (DPMC 2014). Organisations seeking funding support were required to apply for grants through a competitive selection process.

The implementation of the IAS attracted scathing criticism from Indigenous leaders, community organisations and the media (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner 2015). The short time frame allowed for applications, the lack of information provided to applicants and the opaque selection criteria created considerable anxiety among Indigenous organisations, and the funding outcomes were even more disappointing when it became clear how many Indigenous-owned and managed organisations had missed out on funding in favour of mainstream city-based organisations such as the Red Cross, the Australian Football League, Rugby League and Rugby Union, Surf Life Saving,

and Associations of Independent Schools (Aikman 2015). Substantial amounts of funding were also granted to universities, the CSIRO and government departments (DPMC 2015a). Following an inquiry into the IAS tendering process by the Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee, the final report expressed concern and disappointment at the mismanagement of the IAS by the DPMC, declaring that ‘the price paid by the Indigenous communities for implementing the unreasonable timetable was too high. This would appear to be a case of goodwill being hard to gain and easy to lose’ (SFPAC 2016: 62).

Abbott’s approach to addressing Indigenous disadvantage through ‘Closing the Gap’ was characteristic in its adoption of simple slogans (‘getting children to school, getting adults to work and making communities safer’) which neglected the complex array of challenges across many different portfolios, and hinted that the continuing failure to improve Indigenous wellbeing was due to failures within Indigenous communities themselves (Abbott 2015). Abbott introduced a new target in the ‘Closing the Gap’ agenda—closing the gap in school attendance rates within five years—and he concentrated substantial resources in the Remote Schools Attendance Strategy (RSAS), known to many in the Northern Territory as the ‘yellow shirts program’ (Oaten 2016). This initiative paid for community members in over 70 communities to assist in supporting and motivating local children to attend school, with relatively modest improvements in attendance rates compared to communities where the RSAS was not in place (DPMC 2015b).

Another featured policy introduced by the Abbott government was the Community Development Program, which was an adaptation of ‘work for the dole’, requiring welfare recipients in remote communities to attend 25 hours of ‘work-like activities’ each week, with financial penalties in the form of cuts to unemployment benefits for each day that the recipient failed to attend. Hailed as a bid to ‘break the cycle of welfare dependency’ and ‘put an end to sit-down money’, this program did little to address the compliance and access challenges for recipients living in remote communities, hundreds of kilometres from Centrelink offices and banking services (Curtin 2016).

## Malcolm Turnbull: Another prime minister for Indigenous Affairs?

By the time Turnbull successfully challenged Abbott and took over the leadership, in September 2015, Indigenous affairs was seen by many to be in crisis. The leadership change raised hopes of new levels of engagement with Indigenous concerns, but the signals emerging from the prime minister's office were mixed at best. Several Indigenous leaders called for Scullion to be replaced as minister as part of the post-leadership challenge reshuffle, a call ignored by the new prime minister. In presenting the customary annual 'Closing the Gap' report to parliament on 10 February 2016, Turnbull acknowledged the limited progress on many of the key indicators of disadvantage, but promised to 'listen to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people when they tell us what is working and what needs to change' (Turnbull 2016a). He also repeated the advice he had received from prominent Indigenous educator Chris Sarra that government should 'Do things with us, not to us' (also see Sarra 2015). This suggested that Turnbull was inclined to move away from Abbott's close circle of conservative Indigenous advisors—Pearson, Mundine and Marcia Langton—in favour of alternative ideas and leadership. Turnbull also declared himself to be the 'Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs', echoing his predecessor, in an interview with Stan Grant on National Indigenous Television (Grant 2016).

Rhetoric did not equal action in the portfolio, and Indigenous leaders came to deplore the 'policy vacuum' and the 'critical state' of Indigenous policy under Turnbull and Scullion (Robinson 2016). The government continued to refuse to engage with the National Congress as genuine representatives of the Indigenous population. As minister, Scullion had repeatedly declined to meet the leaders of the National Congress (Fitzpatrick and Lewis 2016) and also refused to restore funding that had been cut in Abbott's 2014 Budget, arguing that it was not a 'representative body', given that its membership covered 'little more than one per cent of the Indigenous population' (Corsetti 2016). The Congress has over 8,500 individual members, as well as an organisational membership of over 185 peak bodies and Indigenous-controlled organisations employing and delivering services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across all States and Territories (National Congress of Australia's First Peoples 2015). As prime minister, Turnbull waited seven months to meet with the Congress leadership.

The lack of action to address Indigenous concerns was evident across many key areas of policy. Despite Turnbull's acknowledgement of the continued failure to meet targets under 'Closing the Gap', the 2016 Budget did nothing to restore the funding cuts of the Abbott era or demonstrate further engagement with Indigenous concerns. The DPMC was remarkably slow to respond to recommendations to reform the disastrous IAS. The Productivity Commission's review of the National Indigenous Reform Agreement in November 2015 showed that over 80 per cent of government investment in Indigenous services has gone to non-Indigenous organisations (Productivity Commission 2015). Scullion raised the ire of the land councils in the NT with his continued push to implement 99-year leases over Aboriginal land, his attempts to weaken the relationship between land councils and their membership and his expenditure decisions related to the Aboriginal Benefits Account (which holds funds from mining royalties on Aboriginal land) that overrode the recommendations by the advisory committee (Hope 2016). Scullion's grasp of his portfolio during this period also came into question once again just after the election, when *Crikey* reported on leaked documents from within the DPMC, drafted around the time of the May Budget, which revealed internal plans to overturn key aspects of the successful and popular Indigenous rangers program (Taylor 2016a). Scullion denied all knowledge of the policy proposals (Taylor 2016b). Scullion's lacklustre response to dramatic reports of abuse of Indigenous youth in the Don Dale Juvenile Detention Centre was similarly revealing of a lack of ministerial engagement with his portfolio.

Turnbull's inability to deliver positive results in Indigenous affairs can certainly be explained with reference to the complexity of the policy area, and the intergenerational nature of disadvantage resulting from racism and discrimination alongside decades of government neglect and underfunding. Nevertheless, Turnbull's meagre record over his months in power, particularly in terms of a disinclination to repair damaged relationships and improve failing service delivery, suggests either a lack of genuine interest or a leader trapped in the legacy of his predecessor.

The growing sense of disappointment and anger among Indigenous communities opened up a window of opportunity for Opposition Leader Bill Shorten and his shadow frontbench. The ALP in opposition maintained a steady critique of the government's performance in Indigenous affairs, and called for restored funding and greater attention to the 'Closing the Gap' targets. Many of the priorities earlier articulated

under the Rudd and Gillard governments in the context of 'Closing the Gap' were reinforced in the ALP's National Platform, which was approved in July 2015. The Platform also included commitments to endorse constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to continue to support the National Congress and to work to increase levels of Indigenous participation in positions of public office, particularly with an affirmative action plan for preselections (ALP 2015). Shorten created a stir with the announcement in March of the selection of Yawuru elder and highly respected 'Father of Reconciliation' Professor Patrick Dodson as the replacement Senator to fill the vacancy created by the resignation of Western Australian Senator Joe Bullock. With the preselection of Wiradjuri woman and former NSW government minister Linda Burney for the seat of Barton, the ALP began to develop election policies that would challenge the earlier bipartisanship on Indigenous policy, as would become clear during the election campaign.

## Indigenous affairs in the 2016 election campaign

Professor Marcia Langton pointedly observed in the *Saturday Paper* on 11 June that Indigenous affairs had received almost no attention in the election campaign (Langton 2016). In particular, she criticised the lack of consideration of the specific needs of Indigenous people with respect to many of the 'mainstream' issues that were most widely debated, such as internet coverage in rural and remote areas through the National Broadband Network (NBN) or the impact of economic policies—such as superannuation—on Indigenous people, many of whom lack financial literacy. This is a perennial problem in the reporting of election campaign policy debates, from an Indigenous perspective, as Indigenous interests and priorities are often assumed to be identical to those of non-Indigenous constituents.

For the Coalition, the campaign was understood to be an opportunity to promote the May Budget, and few new policies were announced during the campaign. Very little additional funding was allocated to Indigenous services. Scullion announced a renegotiated intergovernmental arrangement with increased funding of policing in remote communities

in the NT (Wild and Betts 2016). With budget cuts to legal services supporting Aboriginal people, the expansion of policing seemed likely to exacerbate the extremely high levels of Indigenous incarceration.

Other Indigenous-specific policies were framed in terms of the government's overall plan for 'jobs and growth'. Prime Minister Turnbull hosted a key campaign event in Queensland (QLD) on the anniversary of the 1967 Referendum, and focused on economic empowerment as a means of addressing Indigenous social exclusion. Turnbull emphasised the importance of developing Indigenous business opportunities as part of his overall 'national economic plan', and thus promised to encourage Indigenous entrepreneurs with a fund of \$115 million to support self-employed Indigenous people with infrastructure grants. Turnbull also highlighted the successful government procurement policy, which directs all government departments to engage Indigenous companies for 3 per cent of their contracts, with a target date of 2019–20 (Turnbull 2016b). The policy document noted that in its first 10 months, the procurement policy had delivered government contracts to the value of \$154.1 million to Indigenous businesses.

Scullion was embarrassed as minister during the campaign when responding to a very negative evaluation of the Community Development Program, inadvertently revealing his poor understanding of his government's own policy and its impact. The program had failed to create jobs as promised, but it had produced very high rates of defaults in the form of the withdrawal of unemployment benefit payments. Lisa Fowkes from The Australian National University revealed that in the program's first six months of operation (July–December 2015), 6,000 of the 30,000 people on the Community Development Program in remote communities had incurred financial penalties with the suspension of payments for eight weeks for breaches including failing to attend the designated work activity. This program was severely affecting many Indigenous households and impacted on the broader economy, as local stores reported a 10 per cent drop in food sales in the regions; it also led to social unrest, with violence and conflict escalating in some communities. When questioned by the ABC in early June, Scullion insisted repeatedly that suspended payments were restored in back payments, a claim that was later explicitly denied by his own department (Wild 2016a, 2016b).



As June drew to a close, the end of the financial year saw a number of Indigenous organisations preparing to close their doors as the decisions to cut their funding under the IAS came into effect, reminding many remote community residents of the government's earlier decisions. Turnbull and Scullion both attended the ceremony on 21 June to celebrate the success of the Kenbi land claim, covering the Cox Peninsula near Darwin, after a 37-year battle with the NT government, mostly under the leadership of the Country Liberal Party (CLP). Despite some unruly protestors, media coverage showed attractive images of Turnbull handing over the land deeds to the traditional owners and sitting with Aboriginal children in the dirt. However, it was revealed after the election that Joe Morrison, CEO of the Northern Land Council, had written to Turnbull soon after his visit to Kembi to ask him not to reappoint Scullion as Minister for Indigenous Affairs (Henderson 2016), a call echoed publicly by other Indigenous leaders.

The ALP had continued its criticism of the IAS as an 'abject failure' (Oaten 2016) and made a number of promises to restore funding to Indigenous services, and to the National Congress. Shadow minister Shayne Neumann announced a policy to provide additional funding of over \$20 million over three years for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, to restore operational funding cut by the Abbott government and to reinstate funding for advocacy work alongside services (Neumann 2016). The Labor Party also incorporated several Indigenous-specific policies in its widely proclaimed '100 positive policies', including funding for eye health and a program to provide mentoring for girls 'at risk of disengaging from education' (ALP 2016a).

The ALP announced a detailed policy on Indigenous justice and its aim of reducing Indigenous incarceration levels. The policy repeated the ALP's 2013 commitment to working with State and Territory governments through COAG to include justice targets in the 'Closing the Gap' framework, and developing justice reinvestment programs that aim to redirect funds used in the corrections system towards prevention and diversionary programs, or drug and alcohol rehabilitation activities (ALP 2016b). This approach was also broadly supported by the Greens (Australian Greens 2016a).

Another policy announcement that received media attention was the ALP's promise to double the number of Indigenous rangers over five years. This was a topical and important issue in many remote and regional

communities where the Indigenous ranger program is viewed as a rare success in government policy. The program has provided employment and opportunity for many Indigenous employees working on their own traditional country, engaging in projects related to land management, revegetation and the protection of endangered species. There was widespread concern that the Coalition government had continued to refuse to commit to funding the program beyond 2018, and many community organisations and supporters signed petitions and spoke publicly of their fears. The Greens also supported the ALP's promise to double the funding of the program, and furthermore suggested the extension of contracts to 15-year periods (Australian Greens 2016b).

## The Redfern Statement: A game changer?

On 9 June 2016, just three weeks before election day, the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples led a network of over 55 non-government organisations working across Indigenous health, legal services, human rights, education, child protection and disability services in launching the Redfern Statement at a special event at the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence in Redfern in inner-Sydney (Davidson 2016). This form of engagement in an election campaign is a standard technique used by interest groups keen to attract media and public attention (see Vromen, Chapter 18, this volume). This particular coalition of organisations working in Indigenous affairs is especially noteworthy given the substantial number of peak bodies joining forces in the one set of policy demands, and also given the risk of cuts in government funding for many of the signatory organisations.

The Redfern Statement was a bold call to the incoming government to restore funding in Indigenous affairs, to reform the Indigenous Advancement Strategy to better suit Indigenous priorities and needs, to commit to following the many recommendations from inquiries and reports that had been generated and ignored over previous decades and to establish a stand-alone Department of Aboriginal Affairs with senior Indigenous bureaucrats at its helm. The authors of the document declared:

It is time that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices are heard and respected, and that the following plans for action in relation to meaningful engagement, health, justice, preventing violence, early childhood and disability, are acted upon as a matter of national priority and urgency (National Congress 2016a).

The Statement also set out clear policy recommendations across each of these policy issues.

The Redfern Statement received relatively little mainstream media coverage, but it was diffused widely through Indigenous social media channels, and the #IndigenousVotes online campaign. The online campaign echoed the words of National Congress co-chair Jackie Huggins, who had stated firmly at the launch of the Redfern Statement, 'Ignore us at your peril, because we vote too' (Henderson and Timms 2016).

The major parties were markedly different in their responses to the Redfern Statement. The Coalition appeared flat-footed. Scullion issued a brief media statement insisting on the Coalition's good record in 'improving outcomes for First Australians', and pointing to 'additional funds' in the Indigenous budget including funding for the constitutional recognition campaign. In contrast, the shadow minister Neumann personally visited the Redfern offices of the National Congress on 16 June to deliver the ALP's response to the Redfern Statement, promising the restoration of funding, in an announcement that was very positively received by several of the signatory organisations including Australians for Native Title and Recognition and Oxfam. By 24 June, Neumann had released a new ALP policy document, 'Closing the Gap: Labor's Positive Policies', as a direct, detailed and considered response to the Redfern Statement. This policy document drew together policies that had already been announced and principles that had been set down in the National Platform. It also went further in explicitly acknowledging the need for improved engagement with Indigenous communities, declaring that 'Strengthening the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is central to our efforts to close the gap in Indigenous disadvantage' (ALP 2016c). It did not mention the call for a stand-alone Department of Aboriginal Affairs, however, and instead proposed an Indigenous Leaders' Summit to be convened with the National Congress after the election.

Despite this note of caution, the ALP's policy document proved to be a deft response from an opposition party in full campaign mode, and the Coalition's silence was striking. The leadership role played by the National Congress in drafting and promoting the Redfern Statement was perhaps a factor here. It is also clear that many of the policy measures articulated in the Redfern Statement were a direct critique of the Turnbull government's record, and drawing attention to this would have been unhelpful from the Coalition's point of view mid-campaign. It was not until a month after

the election that Scullion, reinstated as Minister for Indigenous Affairs in the newly elected Turnbull government, declared at the Garma Festival that he had thought that the Redfern Statement was ‘a good read’ and that he intended to hold a workshop for the signatories to discuss the ideas in more detail (Scullion 2016; Fitzpatrick and Lewis 2016). This forum was ultimately held in September, three months after the launch of the Redfern Statement, with limited outcomes and no indication that funding for the National Congress would be reinstated (Hayman-Reber 2016).

## The referendum/treaty debate

For most disengaged non-Indigenous observers, the key priority in Indigenous affairs during the election campaign was the question of how to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Australian Constitution. This issue has been on the government’s policy agenda for over five years, with both major parties supporting continuing discussions about relatively conservative changes to the text of the Constitution. Former Labor prime minister Gillard had commissioned an Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians that reported in 2012. Abbott had promised to ‘sweat blood’ over the issue, and Turnbull maintained the bipartisan support for changes to the text of the Constitution through a referendum, though he backed away from Abbott’s enthusiasm for a vote as early as May 2017.

Surprisingly, given this strong bipartisan support for the proposed referendum to change the Constitution, the question of constitutional recognition was the only Indigenous-specific question on the ABC’s Vote Compass survey (ABC 2016), overlooking the clearly articulated concerns among Indigenous groups about more practical priorities in health, justice, suicide rates, housing, employment, education and service provision in remote areas. Of the respondents to the Vote Compass survey, 72 per cent were in favour of amending the Constitution to ‘recognise Indigenous people as Australia’s first inhabitants’, echoing the similar levels of support during the 2013 election Vote Compass survey (Ford and Blumer 2016). Comparable results had been published by Recognise (the government-funded advocacy movement created by Gillard in 2012) in May, just as the election campaign began, with 77 per cent of non-Indigenous respondents and 87 per cent of Indigenous respondents indicating, in a poll conducted by Polity Research, that they would vote in favour of constitutional change (Recognise 2016).

The bipartisan consensus broke down dramatically when Shorten appeared on ABC TV's *Q&A* program, on Monday 13 June. In response to a direct question, he agreed that his support for continued progress in the debate on constitutional recognition would also extend to support for debate about a possible treaty with Australia's First Peoples. This reflected the influence of Dodson (as newly appointed Labor Senator) over Shorten. Dodson was one of many Indigenous leaders who had spoken publicly of the need to offer Indigenous people more than simply textual changes in the Constitution (Anderson 2016; Lane 2016). As Shorten spontaneously expressed it:

**Shorten:** Do I think that we should have our First Australians mentioned in our national birth certificate, the constitution? Yes. Do I think we need to move beyond just constitutional recognition to talking about what a post-constitutional recognition settlement with Indigenous people looks like? Yes I do.

**Jones (host):** Could it look like a treaty?

**Shorten:** Yes.

Turnbull was quick to rebuke Shorten the following morning, declaring that Shorten was risking the success of the constitutional recognition. Turnbull may not have been aware that his own minister, Scullion, had publicly conceded several weeks earlier that a treaty could coexist with the constitutional referendum, saying:

It's not something we're saying can't be discussed. Once you reflect the position of our First Peoples in our founding document, it doesn't mean that a treaty is off the table at all (ABC North Coast 2016).

The media were quick to present the referendum debate as an area of party political division and conflict, rather than mature bipartisan debate (Anderson 2016). Journalists and commentators adopted predictable opposing stances (see e.g. an editorial in the *Age* (2016); Kenny 2016). In hindsight, shortly after the election, Paul Kelly in the *Australian* declared that Shorten's behaviour had been 'brazen and relentless', and he had 'killed the referendum envisaged by the government while pretending all the time to support it'. Kelly nevertheless observed that Shorten was trying to demonstrate 'Labor's claim to dominate Aboriginal policy', and the strong alignment of his views with those of many Indigenous leaders (Kelly 2016). Arguably, Shorten's support for discussion of a treaty was a logical small step from the other more elaborately articulated aspects of the ALP's Indigenous policy platform.

## Indigenous representation

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Australia is dispersed and fragmented, and electoral systems have frequently posed significant barriers to Indigenous representation in parliament. When Dodson was selected to fill the Senate vacancy, he argued that substantial change in Indigenous affairs would be best supported by increasing Indigenous representation in the parliament, because activism was no longer effective. As he stated:

We've been very good at lobbying in the past, but that's because you had responsive politicians. I think the culture's changing and I think we've got to be part of the real decision-making process that a parliament engages in (cited in Lane 2016).

The 2016 election was significant then because more Indigenous candidates stood for election than ever before, a record number of 17 candidates across major and minor parties (Morgan and Mandybur 2016). The number of Indigenous MPs increased from four to five following the election, with Malarndirri McCarthy replacing Nova Peris as Labor Senator for the NT, Dodson retaining his Senate seat for Western Australia (WA), Jacqui Lambie retaining her Senate seat for Tasmania (TAS), Ken Wyatt retaining his seat of Hasluck in the House of Representatives for the Liberal Party, and Linda Burney winning the seat of Barton for the ALP as the first Indigenous woman elected into the House of Representatives. Former Liberal Senator for QLD Joanna Lindgren lost her seat, having been preselected too low on the ticket to be successful.

It is impossible to isolate Indigenous voting patterns within the electorate at large, and so the effects of the election campaign on Indigenous voters is difficult to discern. The electorates with the highest concentration of Indigenous voters are primarily in the NT, and here we saw a clear swing to Labor at the expense of the CLP (see Ruae, Chapter 7, this volume; Green, Chapter 8, this volume; Martinez i Coma and Smith, Chapter 9, this volume). The CLP lost the seat of Solomon to Labor's Luke Gosling with a 10 per cent swing, and Labor's Warren Snowdon held his seat of Lingiari with a swing towards him of 5 per cent. In the Senate, Malarndirri McCarthy increased ALP's first preference vote by more than 7 per cent, and Nigel Scullion suffered a 5 per cent swing against him.

## Conclusion

Indigenous policy maintained its usual relatively low profile during the 2016 election campaign, but the policies that were released by the two major parties revealed a new ideological and practical divergence, not seen since before the NT Intervention in 2007. The ALP's growing confidence in challenging the status quo in Indigenous affairs was arguably rewarded with swings in key seats with high numbers of Indigenous voters, notably in the NT. The Abbott and Turnbull governments' very poor performance over three years, introducing the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, isolating the National Congress, punishing unemployed people in remote communities and failing to make progress on 'Closing the Gap', created disillusionment and disappointment, and many dissident voices joined the coalition of organisations that presented the Redfern Statement and fostered a strong anti-government protest movement. Despite Turnbull's positive rhetoric about working with Indigenous people, his government continued to ignore the calls from Indigenous activists, organisations and advocates for respectful engagement, and it paid a price in electoral terms.

Prospects for improvements in Indigenous policy-making and genuine government engagement with Indigenous leaders and communities appear unlikely in the short term. Just three weeks after the election, the Turnbull government's response to revelations of abuse in the NT's Don Dale Juvenile Detention Centre was rapid, but clumsy. The government failed to adequately consult Indigenous organisations in appointing the Royal Commissioner in the first instance, it created an outcry and an embarrassing reversal, and then drafted narrow terms of reference that focused on the NT government's failures, rather than Commonwealth responsibilities (Brandis 2016). Scullion's confession that earlier reports of abuse and mistreatment of young Indigenous offenders in correctional services in his home territory had not 'piqued his interest' was similarly frustrating for observers, for whom the issues had been a high priority for many years (Hunter 2016). In November, the board of the National Congress formally announced that given the continued lack of financial support from the government or other significant benefactors, it would be forced to cease operating altogether at the end of 2017 (National Congress 2016b). While the government has been presented with numerous opportunities to foster greater engagement with Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander people, and re-energise Indigenous policy-making, in the 2016 election year it failed to manoeuvre itself out of the 'dead end' so evocatively described by Pearson.

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# 28

## Rainbow Labor and a Purple Policy Launch: Gender and Sexuality Issues

Blair Williams and Marian Sawyer

In 2016, the Coalition's proposed plebiscite on same-sex marriage became a significant issue in the election and there was also a record number of openly gay candidates. For the first time, Labor had a rainbow policy launch, targeted at the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) community. The Coalition lacked a similar policy launch or formal rainbow network, but increased its number of openly gay parliamentarians and overtook Labor in terms of LGBTI representation.

The rise in salience of LGBTI issues was not matched by similar attention to gender equality, despite bipartisan agreement on a number of issues such as domestic violence. When Labor had a women's policy launch and put forward significant machinery of government and other commitments, these failed to attract media attention. One of the few gender equality issues to gain traction was the fact that the number of women on the Coalition side in the House of Representatives was clearly going to fall. In Australia, there has been a notable lack of 'contagion' of women candidates across the party spectrum and the partisan gender gap in the House of Representatives has never been wider.

## The campaign

Most remarkable during this election campaign were the declarations of feminism from male leaders on both sides of politics. Labor Leader Bill Shorten had already signalled in his Budget Reply speech the priority a new Labor government would give to ‘equality for women’, including closing the gender pay gap, properly funding childcare and paid maternity leave and bringing more women into parliament and cabinet (Shorten 2016a). It was ‘closing the gender pay gap’ that brought most applause—currently, the average gender pay gap for full-time workers is 17.3 per cent (Workplace Gender Equality Agency 2016). Shorten continued to emphasise equality for women throughout the campaign; even Labor’s policy speech began with the salutation ‘Women and Men of Australia’ in that order.

Nonetheless, during the campaign, Shorten triggered a ‘feminism debate’ through remarks described by Nationals Deputy Leader Fiona Nash as ‘disgraceful and prehistoric’ and by television host Lisa Wilkinson as ‘dinosaur views’. When talking about Labor’s \$3 billion childcare package, Shorten had said that the package would assist women’s workforce participation and, ‘let’s face it, men in Australia rely on the women in Australia to do the childcare and to organise child care’ (Koziol 2016a; Reynolds and Schipp 2016). Shorten strongly defended his remarks, saying that it was clear that the burden of childcare still fell disproportionately on ‘working mums’, and this needed to be addressed (Beech 2016a).

In turn, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull was asked whether he considered himself to be a feminist, to which he replied: ‘I am a feminist, yes ... [women are] taking the world by storm’ (Cox 2016a). In contrast, both Liberal Deputy Leader Julie Bishop and Minister for Women Michaelia Cash were reluctant to identify as feminists. This is an ongoing theme—conservative men announcing their feminism whilst their women colleagues reject the label. The ‘f’ word appears too controversial for women to own, and yet outdated and antiwomen for men not to. Conservative men are able to claim the ‘f’ word to help with their ‘women problem’, yet women may be seen as ‘man-hating’ or ‘lesbians’ if they do. Research across 10 European countries has confirmed that in both centre-right (liberal and conservative) and far-right parties, men are more likely than women to identify as promoting gender equality, suggesting it is riskier for women than men to do so (Celis and Erzeel 2015: 55–56).



## Candidates

While for the first time all four leading political parties, including the Nationals, had women deputy leaders at this election, there was a notable shortage of Liberal women candidates. This was despite the Liberal Party's commitment to a target of 50 per cent female candidates by 2025 (Liberal Party of Australia (LPA) 2016) and the fact that with a self-described 'feminist' leader, the Liberal Party was expected to do more for gender balance than under Tony Abbott's leadership. Thanks to the Coalition, Australia has continued to slide down the international league table on representation of women in national parliaments and, on 1 July 2017, was in 50th place (Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) 2017).

It is clear that on the issue of women candidates there has been a lack of 'contagion' within the party system. Early studies of party quotas suggested that once one party had introduced them, rival parties were likely to follow suit thanks to the dynamics of party competition. The contagion of women candidates was thought particularly likely to occur within systems of proportional representation, with Norway being one subject of an influential early study (Matland and Studlar 1996). It has now been found that while such diffusion has occurred in countries such as Sweden or Spain, in others such as Iceland and Portugal contagion across the party system has been low or moderate (Kenny and Verge 2013: 18).

This is definitely the case in Australia: the introduction of an effective candidate quota by the Labor Party in 1994 has so far failed to diffuse across the political spectrum. The surge of Liberal women into the House of Representatives in 1996, with the help of a mentoring program set up by the Liberal Women's Forum, was not maintained. There has been an absence on the Coalition side of an effective ginger group, like the Labor-aligned EMILY's List, to maintain pressure on the party over preselections and policy. In 2016, the proportion of women among Coalition MPs fell to 17 per cent, its lowest point since 1993 (Figure 28.1). Similar trends have occurred at the State level, with dramatic falls in the number of women on the government benches when the Coalition has won office in recent elections.

## DOUBLE DISILLUSION

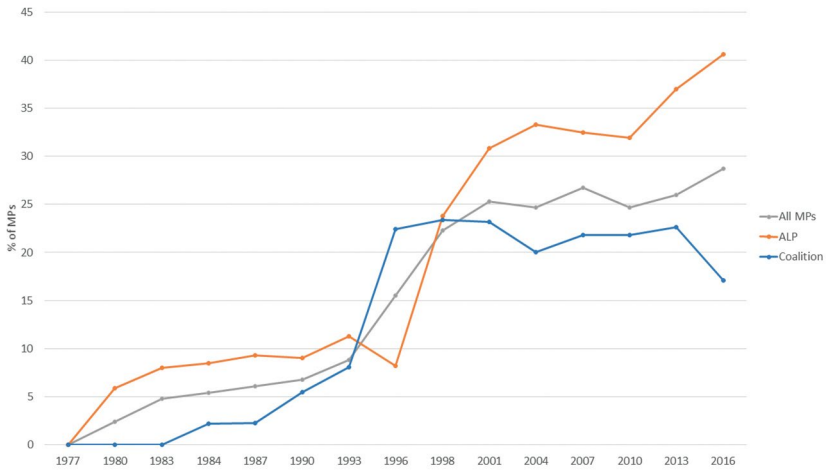


Figure 28.1. Women as a percentage of Coalition and Labor MPs in the House of Representatives, 1977–2016

Source. Compiled by Marian Sawyer, based on Parliamentary Library figures.

Although the proportion of women in the House of Representatives rose slightly in 2016 (from 26.7 per cent to 28.7 per cent), most of these women were on the opposition benches (Table 28.1). Interestingly, in around half of the seats won by women the contest was ultimately between two women and 16 of the seats retained by women had a female challenger from either Labor or the Coalition.

Table 28.1. Gender breakdown of the House of Representatives after the 2016 election

Party	Male	Female	Female (percentage)
Labor	41	28	40.6
Coalition	63	13	17.1
Greens	1	0	0
Nick Xenophon Team	0	1	100
Katter's Australian Party	1	0	0
Independents	1	1	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>28.7</b>

Source. Compiled by Marian Sawyer, based on Parliamentary Library figures.

Even in the Senate with proportional representation, an electoral system generally more favourable to women's representation, women made up only 27 per cent of Coalition Senators after the 1996 election—compared with 54 per cent of Labor Senators and 56 per cent of Greens Senators (Table 28.2). The gender difference between the major parties was dramatically illustrated by the Tasmanian Senate result—an all-female team of five Labor Senators was returned as contrasted with an all-male Liberal team of four. Despite the efforts of several Liberal women parliamentarians to instigate change (e.g. Troeth 2010), the Coalition has continued to maintain that the adoption of quotas would 'patronise' women. During the campaign, Vote Compass found that while a majority of Labor voters backed quotas, 60 per cent of Coalition voters opposed them. Overall, men were almost twice as likely as women to oppose quotas (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2016).

Table 28.2. Gender breakdown of the Senate after the 2016 election

Party	Male	Female	Female (Percentage)
Labor	12	14	54
Coalition	22	8	27
Greens	4	5	56
Nick Xenophon Team	2	1	33
Pauline Hanson's One Nation	3	1	25
Derryn Hinch's Justice Party	1	0	0
Family First Party	1	0	0
Jacqui Lambie Network	0	1	100
Liberal Democratic Party	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>39.5</b>

Source. Compiled by Marian Sawyer, based on Parliamentary Library figures.

Despite there being fewer Liberal women in the House of Representatives, the number of women in the Cabinet remained at six. This was a vast improvement on Abbott's 2013 Cabinet (see Table 28.3) where there was only one woman, Julie Bishop. It is notable, however, that not only was the proportion of women in Cabinet (26 per cent) considerably less than the proportion of women in the Labor Shadow Cabinet (35 per cent), but half the women in the Turnbull Cabinet were childless, compared with none of the women in the Labor Shadow Cabinet. This perhaps indicates

the greater difficulty women with children have in rising through Coalition ranks. All the men in the Turnbull Cabinet had children, indicating that for men, unlike women, children are a political advantage.

Table 28.3. Gender breakdown of Cabinet, 2010–16

Cabinet	Male	Female	Female (Percentage)
Gillard August 2010–13	16	4	20.0
Rudd 2013	14	6	30.0
Abbott 2013–15	18	1	5.2
Turnbull Sept–December 2015	16	5	23.8
Turnbull July 2016	17	6	26.1

Source. Compiled by Blair Williams based on Parliamentary Library figures.

While the numbers of Coalition women in the House of Representatives decreased, the number of gay Coalition politicians has increased. Overall, according to Australian Marriage Equality, there was a record number of LGBTI candidates standing in the 2016 election—23 for the Greens, seven for Labor, six for the Liberals and ‘at least six from minor parties or Independents’ (Karp 2016). After the election, the Coalition had four openly gay parliamentarians compared with Labor’s three (see Tables 28.4 and 28.5). This is a remarkable development that has taken place quite suddenly since Western Australian Senator Dean Smith was first elected in 2012. Smith was followed in 2015 by Trent Zimmerman, the first openly gay man to be elected to the House of Representatives. In 2016, these two were joined by Tim Wilson, in the safe Liberal seat of Goldstein, and by Trevor Evans in the seat of Brisbane, where Labor had also stood a gay candidate.

Notable gay Coalition candidates who were not successful included Jonathan Pavetto in Bob Katter’s Queensland seat of Kennedy (the seat Katter had claimed contained no homosexuals) and Aboriginal man Geoffrey Winters in Labor Deputy Leader Tanya Plibersek’s seat of Sydney.

On the Labor side, Louise Pratt, National Co-Convenor of Rainbow Labor, regained a Senate seat after defeat in the 2014 rerun of the Western Australian Senate election, Senator Penny Wong continued in her leadership role as Labor Senate Leader and Julian Hill was elected to the seat of Bruce. Following the election, the Queensland State Conference of the party adopted a 5 per cent quota for LGBTI candidates in winnable seats at State, federal and local government levels, the first LGBTI quota in Australia.

In the Greens, Robert Simms, party spokesperson on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Intersex, lost his South Australian Senate seat, but Janet Rice retained her Victorian Senate seat. Hence, LGBTI representation in the Senate was at 5 per cent and in the House of Representatives 3 per cent (Tables 28.4 and 28.5). In the UK House of Commons, LGBTI representation reached 5 per cent after the 2015 general election (32 out of 650 MPs) and 6.9 per cent after the 2017 election.

Table 28.4. LGBTI representation in the House of Representatives after the 2016 election

Party	Male	Female
Labor	1	0
Coalition	3	0

Source. Compiled by Marian Sawyer.

Table 28.5. LGBTI representation in the Senate after the 2016 election

Party	Male	Female
Labor	0	2
Coalition	1	0
Greens	0	1

Source. Compiled by Marian Sawyer.

## Sexuality policies

One of the big issues of the election was the debate over same-sex marriage. Despite the number of openly gay Coalition candidates, the Coalition's sexuality policies were dogged by a commitment to hold a plebiscite on same-sex marriage. This commitment was a delaying tactic in regards to marriage equality dating from the Abbott leadership. While it was not a tactic that had been supported by Turnbull, it was part of the price extracted by the conservative wing of the Liberal Party and the Nationals for their support. There was not only the commitment to a plebiscite, which Labor repeatedly labelled a 'taxpayer-funded platform for homophobia', but also the uncertainty about whether conservative members of the Coalition would vote for same-sex marriage regardless of the outcome of the plebiscite.

This issue bubbled away, with speculation about whether Coalition parliamentarians would vote in accordance with the outcome of the plebiscite, the outcome in their own electorate or with their own conscience. South Australian Greens Senator Robert Simms, who is openly gay, asked how the Prime Minister could justify spending '\$160 million on what was in effect a giant opinion poll not even binding on his own members' (Knott 2016). Another issue for the Coalition was the opposition within its ranks to the Safe Schools program directed against homophobia and bullying in schools. When a mass shooting occurred during the election campaign at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, Prime Minister Turnbull initially failed to respond to its homophobic dimension, describing it only as an assault on 'freedom'. However, while he did not go as far as Labor in expressing solidarity with the LGBTI community over the shooting, he did subsequently describe it as a 'murderous attack on gay people' (Koziol 2016b). Unsurprisingly, given the divisions between conservatives and moderates in its ranks, the Coalition did not release a policy document targeted at the LGBTI community, unlike Labor and the Greens. The Coalition Co-Chair of the Parliamentary Friends of LGBTIQ Australians also believed it unlikely that the Coalition would develop such a policy in the future.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, in the UK general election in 2015, the Conservatives did not release a separate manifesto directed at the LGBTI community, unlike Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens. However, unlike the Coalition in Australia, the UK Conservatives did include a number of LGBTI-related pledges in their general manifesto, such as tackling 'homophobic, bi-phobic and transphobic bullying' in schools. The Scottish National Party pledged in its manifesto to support the creation of an LGBTI-rights envoy in the Foreign Office, 'to promote the rights of LGBTI people throughout the world, as an integral part of UK foreign policy' (Smith 2015).

In Australia, Labor (and the Greens) had straightforward commitments both on marriage equality and discrimination against the LGBTI community, although the Greens went further in terms of wanting to end the religious exemption in Australia's antidiscrimination laws. Shorten was praised as a 'champion of the LGBTI community' (Power 2016) and, in another development, the large Shop, Distributive

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1 Interview with Warren Entsch MP, 1 December 2016, Parliament House, Canberra.

and Allied Employees Association, which effectively controls a number of Labor preselections, had finally dropped its opposition to marriage equality. Vote Compass found a majority of Australians (or at least a majority amongst its 350,000 respondents) supported marriage equality, with support particularly strong among young people and women (Blumer 2016). However, while this seems to align with Labor and Green positions, polls during the campaign indicated a majority of Australians also favoured ‘having a say’ in a plebiscite. This was to change after the election as the full implications of the plebiscite proposal became clearer.



Figure 28.2. Rainbow Labor, 2016 Mardi Gras

Source. Photographed by ©Ann-Marie Callihanna, Mardi Gras, Sydney, 24 June 2016. Used with permission.

For the first time, in 2016 Labor included a Rainbow Labor campaign launch in its federal election campaign. The length of the campaign made it easier to fit such a launch into the campaign’s early stages and it provided an opportunity to showcase popular policies.<sup>2</sup> Rainbow Labor has become a flourishing network within the party and has been successful in changing Labor policy on marriage equality. It is differently situated in

2 Interviews were conducted with Senator Louise Pratt (1 September 2017, Parliament House, Canberra); the Hon. Penny Sharpe MLC (14 September 2017, phone interview) concerning the Rainbow Labor campaign launch; Senator Janet Rice (24 November 2017, Parliament House, Canberra) concerning the Greens campaign.

different State branches of the party. In Victoria (VIC) and Queensland (QLD), it is a formal network recognised in the party rules, while in Western Australia (WA)—where party branches are now divided between direct and local branches—it is one of the direct branches, along with the maritime and manufacturing branches and Perth Labor Women. In NSW, Rainbow Labor has no official status within the party but is included on membership forms. NSW Legislative Councillor Penny Sharpe was the driving force for the 2016 Rainbow Labor launch.

At the launch in Melbourne, on 21 May, Senator Wong reminded the LGBTI community that Labor would legislate for marriage equality within 100 days of gaining office, and unveiled a new commitment to the establishment of a dedicated LGBTI Discrimination Commissioner in the Human Rights Commission (Wong 2016a). The establishment of a dedicated Commissioner on ‘Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Intersex Rights’ had already been Greens policy (although not mentioned in their ‘Equality for Everyone’ election policy). While the Rainbow Labor launch attracted some media coverage on the ABC and Sky News (e.g. Beech 2016b; Hasham 2016), Labor’s commitment on sexuality issues gained much more attention in the wake of Senator Wong’s powerful Lionel Murphy Memorial Lecture on 21 June. What drew attention was the passion with which Wong connected Labor policy to her own personal experience and the potential of a plebiscite to make her own family, as well as the families of others, the target of condemnation and censure. She criticised those ‘who don’t understand that for gay and lesbian Australians hate speech is not abstract. It’s real. It’s part of our everyday life’. She said, ‘I know that a plebiscite designed to deny me and many other Australians a marriage certificate will instead license hate speech to those who need little encouragement’ (Wong 2016b).

Wong’s statement that not one ‘straight politician’ advocating a plebiscite knew what it was like to live with casual and deliberate prejudice provoked a strong response from Treasurer Scott Morrison who claimed that he had also experienced hatred and bigotry for his views. The suggestion that opponents of marriage equality experienced hatred and bigotry similar to that experienced by the LGBTI community caused a social media frenzy and the hashtag #scomophobia turned viral on Twitter and Facebook. Contributors pointed to the unlikelihood that a white Christian male from Sydney would be subject to the kind of bigotry experienced by, for example, an Asian migrant lesbian (Noyes 2016).



## Gender equality policies

The major parties have manifested considerable nervousness about producing women's policies in recent federal elections (see Table 28.6). Even when one has been produced, it has rarely been given a launch. For example, in 2007, the Coalition released its policy onto its website two days before the election, while in 2010 the Labor policy was slipped onto its website the day before the election.

Table 28.6. Women's policies at federal elections, 2007–16

	Coalition	Labor Party
2007	Yes	No
2010	No	Yes
2013	Yes	No
2016	No	Yes

Source. Compiled by Marian Sawer. Originally published in Harris Rimmer and Sawer (2016).

In part, this can be attributed to the policy influence of neoliberalism and the narrowing of gender equality policy to a point where it is compatible with a market agenda (Kantola 2010). In countries where neoliberal influence has been greatest, parties of both centre-right and centre-left have switched the focus of their gender equality policy to the international arena, apart from the issue of gender-based violence. In the 2015 general election in the UK, for example, Rosie Campbell and Sarah Childs found evidence of a 'broad consensus' on issues of violence against women and girls, and promotion of gender equality internationally through development aid and in conflict zones (Campbell and Childs 2015: 211–12). This convergence on violence and the international arena does not mean all partisan differences disappear. In Australia and the UK, for example, there are important differences on issues such as how to address gender pay gaps (Campbell and Childs 2015: 215; Harris Rimmer and Sawer 2016).

However, this time Labor did launch a women's policy, thanks to the efforts of Shadow Minister for Women Senator Claire Moore, supported by the Caucus Status of Women Policy Committee. The latter has played an important role in keeping gender equality issues on the agenda for more than 30 years (Sawer and Turner 2016). As with the LGBTI policy launch, both institution-building and 'critical actors' within the

party were crucial in engineering the policy events. The women's policy had detailed machinery commitments including an intergovernmental Ministerial Council on Gender Inequality; restoration of impact on women's statements for Cabinet proposals and gender budgeting; and reinstatement of the Australian Migrant and Refugee Women's Alliance as a funded peak advocacy group (Australian Labor Party (ALP) 2016). The policy also included significant commitments to front-line services dealing with domestic violence, including community legal centres and safe housing, commitments highlighted in the later campaign policy launch. The women's policy launch took the form of a 'family picnic' on 11 June, in the seat of Barton. The Shadow Minister and the Labor Leader's wife wore purple, while the Labor Leader wore a purple tie. In his speech, Shorten reaffirmed that 'equality for the women of Australia is a national priority' (Shorten 2016b).

In contrast to the Rainbow Labor campaign launch, however, there was practically no newspaper coverage of the women's policy launch. Proquest captured only three newspaper stories mentioning it: in the *Advertiser*, the *Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, while the *Daily Telegraph* had earlier mentioned Labor's commitment to women's budget statements and gender parity in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) teaching scholarships (Bye and Meers 2016). There was somewhat more coverage on social media. A couple of substantial articles appeared on the *Mamamia* website, which has a unique audience of 899,000 according to the March 2016 Nielsen Digital Ratings. One of the *Mamamia* election articles compared Labor and Coalition policies on gender-based violence and included a photo from the Labor Women's Policy launch. It highlighted items such as Labor's commitment to five days of domestic violence leave and Minister for Women Michaelia Cash's opposition to such leave on the ground of the 'perverse disincentive' it would create for employers to hire women (Gagnon 2016). The other substantial article on *Mamamia* was a repost of an article by Eva Cox from *The Conversation*, again comparing party policy of particular interest to women. Cox was critical of the assumption of both major parties that the only way to achieve gender equality was to make women more competitive in paid employment, including through STEM funding (Cox 2016b).

As we have seen, Labor Leader Shorten has repeatedly emphasised the priority his government would give to gender equality. In contrast, while Prime Minister Turnbull had declared himself a feminist during the campaign, there was no purple policy launch for the Coalition, just

a media release responding to Labor's Women's Policy and affirming 'the Turnbull Coalition's commitment to supporting Australian women' (LPA 2016). It included the STEM funding package also included later in the campaign policy launch.

Not only was there no Coalition women's policy (unlike the 2013 election where there was a significant machinery commitment) but the Coalition campaign launch was also disappointing. Turnbull spoke of the right to live without fear of violence and reminded listeners that his first announcement as prime minister had been funding to eliminate violence against women. What followed, however, was not a new funding commitment for women's refuges and front-line services; instead, it was funding to stop the 'trafficking of illegal firearms on our streets' (Turnbull 2016). As the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) commented, this was not of much use to women and children fleeing domestic violence (WEL 2016). WEL had been running a 'two cents a day' campaign, asking party leaders to commit to its Women and Children's Safety Program. According to its convenor, former head of the Office of the Status of Women Helen L'Orange, the campaign was largely ignored by the print media, although it did better on social media with some 160,000 hits and retweets. Another related campaign calling for an overhaul of the family court system was launched by former Australian of the Year Rosie Batty along with Women's Legal Services Australia. It was supported by more than 90 organisations and had the benefit of Batty's presence and personal story, but also failed to gain traction.

Women's advocacy organisations such as the National Foundation for Australian Women (NFAW) undertook the regular task of applying a gender lens to the policy offerings of political parties. NFAW presented comparisons of the available party policies of the Coalition, Labor and the Greens. On machinery of government, only Labor had commitments, while on Working Women's Centres both Labor and the Greens had commitments to specialised services, while the Coalition's commitment to competitive tendering meant that nonspecialised services might be selected (NFAW 2016). A newer advocacy organisation, Fair Agenda, sent a questionnaire to political parties and produced a scorecard based on responses. The Coalition did relatively poorly compared with the scores allocated to the Greens, the Nick Xenophon Team and the ALP—for example, on issues such as funding of family violence services, family law reform and paid parental leave (Fair Agenda 2016). The Nick Xenophon Team's commitment to Fair Agenda on paid parental leave, made on behalf

of the party by successful Senate candidate Skye Kakoschke-Moore, was to be significant in determining the party's position on the issue after the election. The Work and Family Policy Roundtable (WFPR), made up of academic experts from 16 universities, also prepared a scorecard on policies, finding that neither Labor nor the Coalition had proposed an integrated approach to managing public policy on work and care, and that policy was going backwards—for example, the Coalition's policy on parental leave (WFPR 2016).

Pauline Hanson's One Nation did not respond to the Fair Agenda survey, but was notable for reviving an earlier commitment to the men's rights agenda—in particular, the abolition of the Family Court and its replacement by a Family Tribunal made up of 'people from mainstream Australia' (Pauline Hanson's One Nation 2016). This policy dated from the 1998 federal election when it was shared by parties such as Abolish Child Support/Family Court and the Family Law Reform Party. Hanson had declared that the 'white Anglo-Saxon male was the most downtrodden person in the country', something that appeared to contribute, along with her opposition to gun control, to the large gender gap in support for the party (Sawer 2000: 150–51).

## Conclusion

Despite the feminist commitments of Liberal and Labor leaders in the 2016 election campaign, and the efforts of women's advocacy groups, gender equality policy in general failed to attract any significant attention. The one exception was the Coalition's deficit in terms of women candidates. Little attention was paid to the significant machinery of government and other policy commitments put forward by Labor and the Greens. In contrast, the issue of same-sex marriage continued to be a high profile one with a range of cross-cutting currents. There was strong opposition to the Coalition's proposed plebiscite by Senator Wong and LGBTI leaders inside and outside the ALP, but the new gay Coalition parliamentarians were more divided.

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# 29

## Migrant and Ethnic Politics in the 2016 Election

James Jupp and Juliet Pietsch

The outstanding feature of the 2016 federal election was that immigration, refugees, ethnic integration and multiculturalism were scarcely mentioned by the major parties, but they were focused on mainly by the Greens and a hostile Pauline Hanson's One Nation (PHON). The epic separation of the United Kingdom (UK) from the European Union (EU), which ran almost parallel to the Australian campaign, centred on resentment about the EU basic policy of free movement of goods and migrants. Moreover, continuing warfare and terrorism in the Middle East kept Islam in the forefront of public discussion as a major threat. Australia retreated into the safety of traditional suburban issues: jobs, incomes, health and education. Many of the debated issues were within the province of State governments rather than the Commonwealth. The cross-country high-speed train debate emerged again from darkness. The elections in Queensland (QLD) and Tasmania (TAS) were especially parochial, but not unique. The Labor leader Bill Shorten leaped ahead with the threat to Medicare. The Coalition simply repeated the old tale of the budgetary mess that Labor had left behind such as the asylum seeker deaths by drowning they had caused. PHON, marginal Liberals and odd Independents kept up an uninformed barrage against Muslims, which had a very limited reaction from the party leaders (Chan 2016).

Few candidates seemed anxious about Islam, terrorism, the EU, apportioning blame for the original Iraq war, the shift of immigration towards India and China, the Chinese military presence in the South China Sea, or even the highly eccentric international role of US presidential candidate Donald Trump. This retreat from the 'real world' included virtually ignoring the growing public concern about the asylum seekers locked up in Pacific Islands for no crime other than coming to Australia by an unofficial route (Australian Human Rights Commission 2014; Amnesty International/Human Rights Watch 2016). Demonstrations on this and other international or ethnic issues were well attended, but had no visible impact on the mainstream political struggle. After the election, international heat became stronger. Only with the terrorist attack in Nice and the coup in Istanbul in July was there much Australian interest displayed in anything international, other than commemoration of long-forgotten battles of World War I. A major survey suggests a declining public confidence in government, but still a reasonable level of public support (Markus 2016).

Despite this apparent indifference to the outside world, that world was moving in dangerous and reactionary directions. In Europe, parties of the 'Right' were recording increased majorities on issues like immigration, Islam, national identity, the flood of refugees from Iraq and Syria. There was a decay of many liberal and socialist parties in the face of nationalism and racism, some of which did not hide a fascist inheritance. The Australian response was largely confined to a segment of the Liberal Party favourable to the former prime minister, Tony Abbott, and encouraged by the Murdoch press, especially the *Australian*. Its counterparts in Britain were also encouraged by the Murdoch *Sun*, and encouraged by the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). UKIP was the real victor of the British election of 2015, establishing strong votes in former Labour districts, which, in 2016, voted to leave the EU. Australia had nothing comparable, despite the creation of a 'conservative' strand that was threatening to move outside the Liberal–National Coalition. All this international agitation passed by the major parties, with their leaders firmly fixed on domestic issues. To many Australians with international origins or heritage, the election might have seemed like a battle by 'Anglo' Australian politicians on parochial 'Anglo' issues.

## The decline of migrant and ethnic politics

Despite this marked retreat from the 'real world', issues underpinning multiculturalism and political inclusion remained significant. There was active campaigning among migrants and ethnic minorities and general concern with Islam, terrorists, Indigenous inequality, immigration levels and social cohesion. Detailed analysis of the possible impact of such issues was complex, confined to a relative handful of academics and involved organisations like the Refugee Council of Australia (RCA) or the Federation of Ethnic Community Councils of Australia (FECCA). Candidates from the major parties pronounced Australia as the 'most successful multicultural country in the world' without making any comparative references to anywhere else. Yet, in practice, at the Commonwealth level, nearly all multicultural institutions have been abolished. These institutions were initially established in an effort to build a nondiscriminatory policy framework for migrants and ethnic minorities from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB). The overall aim of multiculturalism was to dismantle the remaining remnants of the White Australia Policy and provide the foundations for the future social and political integration of migrants from NESB. Some of the significant policies and programs of multiculturalism included improvements in the Adult Migrant Education Programme, which was initiated in 1947 to teach survival English to refugees; free telephone interpreter services for migrants from NESB and emergency services; the establishment of Migrant Resource Centres and the introduction of a Special Broadcasting Service (SBS).

The results of the 2016 federal election suggest that the dismantling of multicultural policies and programs was shortsighted and has had consequences for the quality of representative democracy in Australia. In terms of descriptive representation, Australia's Commonwealth Parliament is one of the most unrepresentative in the western world (Karina 2006). For example, despite a long history of non-European migration, which is now on a par with the rate of European migration, few migrants or ethnic minorities with Asian, African or Pacific Islander ancestry were elected to the House of Representatives in the 2016 federal election. Only four representatives with Asian ancestry were elected to the House of Representatives and the Senate. Yet, in 2016, nearly 12 per cent of Australia's population identified as having Asian ancestry. This suggests that the long-term goal of political equality for all Australians, regardless

of cultural, religious or linguistic background recommended in the *Don't Settle for Less* report (Immigration and Ethnic Affairs 1986) is yet to be realised (Zappala 2001). Without a strong multicultural legislative and policy framework, the Australian political landscape has fallen a long way behind other Commonwealth countries with shared migration histories such as Canada and New Zealand.

Leading up to the 2016 election, FECCA asked whether the major parties were prepared to develop a national legislative framework on multiculturalism. In brushing aside the significant cutbacks the Coalition made to multicultural policies and programs, the government stated that 'no legislation is required to further enhance support of our multicultural communities' (FECCA 2016). The Labor Party similarly watered down any long-term commitment to multiculturalism by stating that it will continue to combat racism and re-establish the Office of Multicultural Affairs within the Department of Social Services, invest in the AMEP and support new courses in workforce participation (FECCA 2016). Such promises fail to acknowledge the overriding national importance of cultural diversity within Australia's representative institutions.

Over the past few decades, there has been a significant shift in the make-up of Australia's migration program, which has reoriented its yearly intake towards Asia (Salt 2016). In the future, new migrant communities will grow to become significant political blocs to which parties will need to pay close attention (Jakubowicz 2016). Within such an environment it may be timely to revisit the possibility of an Australian Multiculturalism Act that builds on progress being made at the State level. For instance, New South Wales (NSW), Victoria (VIC) and South Australia (SA) have specific multicultural legislation in place. Western Australia (WA) enacted a *Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission Act* in 1983, but this was repealed in 2006. In 2016, the Queensland (QLD) parliament passed the *Multicultural Recognition Act* (see also Ozdowski 2015).

The issues of immigration, multiculturalism and cultural diversity have largely been replaced in Australian federal election campaigns with an almost obsessive focus on the issue of asylum seekers and boat people (Glynn 2016). The Coalition enlarged upon its success in stopping the boats and the foolishness of Labor in opening the flood gates to asylum seekers when in office. Essentially, there was no real difference between the two major parties on this issue, with only the Greens campaigning against the detention of entrants without a visa. As in other multicultural societies,

such as Britain or the United States, canvassers and propagandists sought to appeal to the ethnic vote by such ancient traditions as advertising in ethnic newspapers or sending a representative along to relevant meetings. Polling organisations had great difficulty in defining and predicting the likely loyalties of ethnic targets. The assumption remained that ethnic minorities (including the Indigenous peoples) were more likely to prefer Labor to the Coalition. Why this might be so, when there was little policy difference between the major parties, was never made clear. Some polling suggested only that many ‘ethnic’ Australians were just as unsympathetic as the ‘Anglo’ majority to asylum seekers who were perceived to be jumping the gun, especially when that affected family reunion for their own group. Conservative candidates made use of this resentment in relevant electorates, but with little visible impact. The only electorates with a large ‘ethnic’ presence that shifted from Liberal back to Labor were Barton (NSW) and Hindmarsh (SA). Green support in Batman (VIC) was concentrated in the southern booths adjoining Green Melbourne. The more ‘ethnic’ northern booths, with long-established Greek and Italian loyalties, remained Labor. Green sympathy with detained asylum seekers did not seem to attract a shift among these older voters.

In the final event there were few significant gains or losses in electorates with large ethnic populations, either in 2010, 2013 or 2016 (Jakubowicz 2013). However, there were continuing shifts in the origins and loyalties of that section of the population who had either been born outside Australia in a non-Anglo culture, had parents from there or used a language other than English at home (see Pietsch 2017). This was not the same as the ‘migrant’ population, almost a million of whom had been born in the United Kingdom and another half million in New Zealand, Canada, the United States or elsewhere in the ‘Anglosphere’. This large Anglosphere migrant component of the electorate has rarely been seriously analysed (Hammerton and Thomson 2005; Pietsch 2017). It is especially influential in WA and SA and, if anything, more conservative than the average, except in the WA seats of Brand, Fremantle and Burt. In outer suburban Dunkley, with the largest population of British origins in Victoria, Liberals narrowly held the seat. Working-class ‘British’ districts such as Brand (WA) or Makin and Kingston (SA) retained their Labor loyalties. Essentially, the picture of Labor reliance on a block of ‘ethnic’ voters remained the same as for many previous years. However, the makeup of the ‘ethnic’ population was changing. Ageing migrant communities from Europe were being replaced by newcomers from Asia and the Middle East, many of whom were settling in middle-class districts.

## Ethnic Australia: A shifting sea of change

While a majority of voters, and a much larger proportion of politicians, were of 'Anglo'-Australian or 'British' origins, it was still necessary to understand and recruit support from non-Anglo or British origins, especially as voting has been compulsory for citizens throughout the whole period of non-British immigration. This was gradually accepted by the Liberal and Labor parties in the half-dozen major cities in which most immigrants settled. It was rarely important for rural Australia and the National Party, or for QLD, TAS and WA. Understanding ethnic and multicultural Australia requires a detailed knowledge of a very complex and diverse society. However, Australia has historically emphasised uniformity and cohesion and still does, unlike the United States, Canada, New Zealand or even the United Kingdom. British origins, language, political systems and immigration rules have traditionally all given preference to English-speaking 'Europeans'. Political leaders as varied as Henry Parkes, Dr Evatt, Bob Menzies, John Howard and Abbott have all given support to this tradition and to its implementation as public policy. When circumstances required broader immigrant sources, newcomers have been largely expected to subscribe to the national ideology of social cohesion and the sole national language of English. Those who did not come from that tradition tended to be seen as outsiders, at best, or positively dangerous at worst. While the urgency of this approach gradually waned, it was still highly significant in politics and given public voice by leaders like Howard into the present century. At the same time, partly as a reaction, partly as a needed compromise, tolerance was emphasised as a national virtue. However, 'tolerance' was regularly denied by opponents of Islam and by PHON supporters. By 2016, official multiculturalism had been relegated to the Department of Social Services, from its once lofty role in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. The SBS was commercialised for food lovers, and regularly threatened with amalgamation with the ABC.

As elsewhere, tolerance can be affected by changing circumstances. This became apparent after 1945 with the sudden and massive intake of refugees from postwar Europe with all-party agreement. Multiculturalism survived as the basic, if controversial, ideology of nation-building. By the start of the bicentennial century in 1988, this was endorsed by Labor leader Hawke and former Liberal leader Malcolm Fraser. Commonwealth and State governments designed laws and programs to create unity



through diversity. Among these were eventually contradictory attempts to define Australians as a united and even uniform people, with common values originating in the English-speaking world, but with a variety of religions, cultures and original 'homelands'. Howard always found this hard to understand, but Fraser did not (Jupp 2007).

This state of affairs was being steadily challenged by the start of the new era in 2000. The shattering impact of rising Islamic militancy was the major element disturbing a rather self-satisfied nation. But even before the turn of the century, the 'ethnic vote' was being debated, the issue of Aboriginal inequality had been raised to the national level, nationalist parties like Australians Against Further Immigration were born and conservatives began to speak openly of the risks of multiculturalism. The road was open for Pauline Hanson's One Nation with her significant swing in 1996 against multiculturalism and Asian migration. There was very little active terrorism in Australia, but enough to turn the public away from tolerance and governments back towards emphasising the dangers of uncontrolled immigration from the Muslim world (Overington 2016).

The electoral scene set in 2016 had its roots in this anti-immigration sentiment and revived racism 10 years earlier (Leach, Stokes and Ward 2000; McAllister and Cameron 2014). Anti-immigration sentiment was strongest in QLD, but the main influences came from the United States after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and from the Islamic world, with the failed Vietnam war being replaced by the failing war against Iraq. The ethnic groups from Eastern Europe that were created in Australia after World War II were becoming aged. These post-World War II refugees were restricted to mainly Catholic Europeans by official policy. Most were fairly conservative. Their children and grandchildren now make up a significant membership of the conservative parties. There was very little addition from immigration following the post-World War II period. Their birthplaces in 2011 included Poland (48,613), Romania (14,026), Russia (18,241), Serbia (20,257), Bosnia (25,667), Croatia (48,779), Czech Republic (7,417) and Hungary 19,068 (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2011). From this total of 202,068 people comes a population likely to have experienced communism in one form or another, and to have their consequent sympathies directed toward the Liberal Party. They might be described as the founders of multiculturalism or the 'displaced persons'. Many have shifted from inner-city industrial suburbs of Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide to outer suburbs such as Dandenong or Sunshine. Most have produced second or third generations who may

still identify with the parental homeland, or not, as they think fit. They differ from the following flow of Southern Europeans (Greek, Italians, Maltese) who formed a pro-Labor bloc that still survives, but is also ageing (Pietsch 2017).

## From Asians to Muslims and migrants to boat people

Contrasting with this early intake of Europeans into Australian society are the growing numbers of Chinese and Indians who have arrived in recent years. The migrants are varied in culture, language and histories. They can never be meaningfully described 'as a whole', any more than can Europeans. Within Australia, their places of residence vary greatly across the major cities, as do their religious institutions, social networks and political allegiances. Chinese are divided culturally between Mandarin speakers (mainly from China and Taiwan) and Cantonese speakers (mainly from Hong Kong, Singapore, Southeast Asia and from the original Australian settlement before 1920). In Sydney, Cantonese speakers may be found mainly in Banks (10,452), Barton (10,587), Bennelong (12,293), Bradfield (8,376), Fowler (7,713), Parramatta (8,555) and Reid (9,798). Mandarin speakers number 9,940 in Banks, Barton (11,866), Bennelong (13,202), Kingsford Smith (7,249), Parramatta (10,324) and in Sydney (8,648) (see Appendix). Both Cantonese and Mandarin speakers can be found in large concentrations in comfortable middle-class suburbs. Chinese from varied origins are mainly located in Sydney or Melbourne. Smaller communities can be found in the other major cities. Immigration policy, by choosing skilled and educated intakes, affected the politics of established groups and the areas in which they chose to live. Many Chinese of both major cultures now live in the Sydney north shore seats of Bennelong or Bradfield.

A rapid increase in Indian immigration in the previous decade has introduced a major change among those who might be termed 'ethnic'. While many give English as their language of the home, increasing numbers nominated an Indian language. These are predominantly Hindi (111,253), Punjabi (71,170), Tamil (50,108), Bengali (35,610) and Gujarati (34,197) in Sydney; but a different pattern is evident in Perth: Malayalam (25,080) or Kanada (5,926) (see Appendix). Many of the latter South Indians, like Tamils in Sydney, are Christian. A substantial

number of Indians are students and fluent in more than one language. Indian languages such as Urdu or Tamil are widely spoken by those not of Indian birth, namely Sri Lankan, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Nepali. Like the Chinese, many Indians have settled in the past in Malaysia and Singapore, in Nepal, Thailand or even some Pacific islands, notably Fiji. They may have acquired dual or triple loyalties, languages, religions or cultures that distinguish them from the majority category of 'Indian' or 'Chinese'. One example is the Catholic Chinese of East Timor, who have been settled as refugees in the Northern Territory (NT). These groups with mixed origins have been an important factor in the formation of ethnic organisations in Australia. Other groups have been based on religion, with there being substantial organisations for Hindus, Muslims, Eastern Orthodox or Catholic Christians, Sikhs and Buddhists. India can truly claim to be the most multicultural society on earth, and this is reflected in their Australian immigrants. Like the Chinese, many are prepared to adopt some 'western' cultures and loyalties. Both Indian and Chinese migrants have prospered in business rather than in representative politics, where European and Middle Eastern influence has been more marked, especially at the local level.

Indian-born language speakers totalled 295,016 in 2011, but many were born outside India (ABS 2016). The largest number of Tamil speakers in Sydney was in the electorates of Parramatta, Greenway and Blaxland (all Labor) and Reid (Liberal) (ABS 2011). Many Tamils were from Sri Lanka, which was in a state of conflict for over 30 years. Fewer Sinhalese and Tamils were focused on south-east Melbourne electorates, including Bruce and Hotham (Labor) and Chisholm and Deakin (Liberal), and these groups tended to be more politically active. A large but little noticed element is from the Philippines, numbering 171,015 in 2011. Like the Indians, most are fluent in English, but many also use their own languages in social and local affairs. Some Filipinos are recruited to support the major parties, most noticeably in the western Sydney city of Blacktown. These include speakers of Tagalog (81,354), Filipino (55,338), Cebuano (1,422) and Bisaya (2,237).

Arabic migration to Australia extends back to the nineteenth century, and consists mainly of Lebanese. Avoiding the White Australia Policy, the great majority were Christians, which remains true of many Lebanese today. Muslims were more likely to be Afghans or North West Frontier Indians than Arabs, and were brought to central Australia for the camel transport industry. Nominally British subjects, they were eventually relieved of some

penalties of the White Australia Policy. Although the majority of Muslims in Australia may come from Muslim countries, categorisation obscures a wide variety of Iranians, Afghans, Somalis, Sudanese, Indonesians, Malaysians, Bosnians, Turks, Egyptians, Africans, Ethiopians and many others. Those speaking Arabic totalled 286,840 in Australia in 2011, of whom 76,379 were Lebanese. Those born in Muslim states were mainly from Pakistan (30,168), Sudan (19,292), Afghanistan (28,540), Indonesia (103,059), Iran (34,370), Iraq (48,105) and Malaysia (116,008).

## Ethnic constituencies and issues in 2016

From the earliest days of postwar immigration to Australia any (non-Indigenous) distinctive group that tended to live together were described as creating a ghetto, following the US borrowing of the original Venetian name for the Jewish quarter. While this term faded as multiculturalism was developed, it had sprung to life again by 2000, being favoured by Hanson among others. In the USA, the Jewish American, and later the African American and Italian American, concentrations were usually poor, disadvantaged and considered dangerous. The only major examples of ghettoisation in colonial Australia were in Sydney around the Rocks and Surry Hills, and were predominantly Irish. Melbourne had a very small Italian concentration in Dorrit Street, Carlton, by the 1930s, but Carlton is now too expensive for newcomers to buy property in. As with Leichhardt in Sydney, Italians and their descendants socialise in these inner-city districts, but now live and vote further out in the suburbs.

By the 1950s, the term 'ghetto' was revived with the arrival of the postwar displaced persons and Italians and Greeks, and applied from time to time to Vietnamese and anyone else who preferred to settle with their own people. Australian elections are based on defined geographical areas, and these concentrations were usually apparent and attracted criticism—especially Vietnamese Cabramatta and Muslim Lakemba, both in inner-western Sydney. Chinatowns tended to develop as eating places in both Sydney and Melbourne, and lost their nineteenth-century reputation as dangerous. Many Sydney Chinese living elsewhere use such areas for shopping and eating, rather than for voting. The same is true in Melbourne for Little Bourke Street. Similarly, the Jewish communities of north shore Sydney or Caulfield Melbourne have mostly moved away from their original bases in Bondi or Carlton. As 'ghettoisation' in Australia

is unlike the US original, it does not usually matter whether groups are geographically concentrated or not. However, in terms of democratic politics, ethnic concentration matters a great deal. Party organisation usually has a geographical base and concentrated communities provide its votes, leadership, safe seats and funds.

Large and concentrated 'ethnic' communities of various origins are most evident in central and eastern Sydney (Blaxland, Chifley, Fowler, Grayndler, Kingsford Smith, McMahon, Parramatta, Sydney, Watson); and in northern, western and south-eastern Melbourne (Batman, Calwell, Gellibrand, Gorton, Holt, Lalor, Maribyrnong, Scullin, Wills). In most of these, Labor majorities of 30,000 or more are common. This is the true Labor heartland and the core of multicultural Australia. However, these areas of Sydney and Melbourne are not immune from change. Electorates like Banks, Melbourne Ports, Batman, Wills and Melbourne itself have not been safe from attack or even defeat (Pietsch 2017). Conversely, electorates in the outer suburbs, such as Bruce, Greenway, Jagajaga, or Macquarie, have attracted immigrants willing to change Liberal loyalties. In a few central electorates (Melbourne, Sydney), non-voting students from Asia may exaggerate the probable electoral impact.

Ethnic minorities are central to Australian politics. A vocal minority can often influence local politicians and councillors. Examples include the Eastern Christians (Armenians, Syrians, Chaldeans and Maronites). Their concentrated small communities all have useful links with Catholic or Protestant churches and influence the selection of refugees from persecution in the Middle East. Afghan Muslims, speaking Dari (20,158), Pashto or versions of Persian (34,483), are joined by the Hazaragi-speaking victims of Afghan Islam. Burmese (12,324) and Karen (6,402) take a similar role for Myanmar. Most former refugee organisations are well aware of the need to cultivate politicians, regardless of party. A local MP can often influence immigration decisions, although many do not relish this task.

Small active enclaves include the Burmese in Perth and Stirling; the Armenians in Bennelong and North Sydney; Turks in Calwell, Wills and Scullin; Koreans in Bennelong, Berowra, Bradfield, Mitchell, Parramatta and Sydney; and Portuguese in Fremantle. These enclaves may not affect election results, but can be a basis for organisations favouring one or other of the major parties. There are no functioning minority parties with an ethnic base, the last being the Democratic Labour Party (DLP) that had

a predominantly Catholic following of Irish–Australian background in VIC in the 1960s. Groups of refugee origin often establish tightly knit communities focused on their original homeland and its problems. This was generally true of postwar displaced persons. With ageing and acculturation and the collapse of communism, this cohort is not so large in numbers, but still varied in culture, politics, religion and skills. Many migrants come from states that would deeply resent discrimination against their communities, while others are protecting their governments from criticism. Australian relationships with Asian societies are greatly different from those of 50 years ago.

## Conclusion

While voting is compulsory and most candidates are ‘Anglo’-Australians, politics in Australia has a significant aspect that does not focus on Commonwealth issues. Family reunion, as an immigration policy/platform, may be more important, as it is currently expensive and liable to curtailment. Cultural, religious and language maintenance may be the major concern of the variety of ethnic organisations. Race relations may be more important for newer arrivals. However, while ethnic variety has changed dramatically since 1946, the party systems and concerns have not moved so quickly and neither have political or academic understandings. At the grassroots, there is a wide variety of concerns in relation to finding influential roles in Australian politics, without necessarily accepting all the institutions, practices and traditions of a society still trying to ensure uniformity. Many of the campaigns and issues of the 2016 election did not even touch on the concerns of ethnic groups. From the ‘golden days’ of official multiculturalism, policies, funding and support have been steadily reduced and even abolished. Refugee and asylum policy has become harsh and restrictive. Yet at least one third of Australians have a multicultural background, which may modify pressures on new arrivals to assimilate and conform. Local politics often reflect a recognition of this, but national politics rarely do.

## Appendix

Table 29.1. Australian electorates (selective): Languages Other Than English (LOTE) spoken at home

Arabic Electorate	South Asian		Vietnamese		Chinese	
	(n)	Electorate	(n)	Electorate	(n)	Electorate
NSW						
Banks	6,960			Blaxland	14,729	NSW Only
Barton	11,948	Blaxland	1,143	Fowler	28,362	Banks
Bennelong	2,554	Chifley	1,021	Grayndler	2,379	Barton
Berowra	1,891	Greenway	3,452	McMahon	7,147	Bennelong
Blaxland	32,207	Mitchell	1,203	Parramatta	1,410	Kingsford Smith
Chifley	6,034	Parramatta	4,131	Reid	1,748	Parramatta
Cook	2,352	Reid	2,652	Sydney	1,898	Sydney
Cunningham	1,583			Watson	6,211	<i>Cantonese</i>
Fowler	10,882	Greenway	4,658	Werriva	8,773	Banks
Grayndler	1,823					Barton
Greenway	3,828	Greenway	5,345	Aston	1,013	Bennelong
Hughes	2,215			Batman	3,062	Bradfield
Kingsford Smith	2,013			Bruce	5,223	Fowler
Lindsay	1,911	<i>Bengali</i>	35,610	Calwell	3,144	Parramatta

DOUBLE DISILLUSION

Arabic Electorate	South Asian		Vietnamese		Chinese	
	(n)	Electorate	(n)	Electorate	(n)	Electorate
Macarthur	3,524	<i>Gujarati</i>	34,197	Chisholm	1,972	Reid
McMahon	18,513	<i>Hindi</i>	111,253	Deakin	1,109	
Mitchell	2,697	<i>Marathi</i>	8,561	Gellibrand	10,657	
Parramatta	14,247	<i>Urdu</i>	36,285	Gorton	9,943	
Reid	3,985	<i>Hindustani</i>	1,408	Holt	1,567	
Sydney	1,445	<i>Kanada</i>	5,926	Hotham	8,950	
Watson	31,575	<i>Malayalam</i>	25,080	Melbourne	5,303	
Werrinwa	12,546	<i>Telugu</i>	18,710	Scullin	3,803	
		<i>Bengali</i>	35,610	Wills	1,259	
Batman	4,315	<i>Punjabi</i>	71,170			
Bruce	2,733	<i>Tamil</i>	50,108	Adelaide	2,788	
Calwell	13,557	<i>Sinhala</i>	48,160	Makin	2,001	
Gellibrand	3,579	<i>Nepali</i>	27,128	Port Adelaide	8,278	
Gorton	2,847	<i>Total Indian and other associated languages</i>	353,718			
Holt	2,833			WA		
Hotham	2,817			Cowan	5,988	
Isaacs	1,046			Perth	3,003	
Lalor	2,896			Stirling	3,431	
Maribyrnong	2,261			QLD		
				Griffith	1,109	



29. MIGRANT AND ETHNIC POLITICS IN THE 2016 ELECTION

Arabic Electorate	South Asian		Vietnamese		Chinese	
	(n)	Electorate (n)	Electorate (n)	Electorate (n)	Electorate (n)	(n)
McEwen	1,408		Moreton		2,700	
Melbourne	2,283		Oxley		10,738	
Menzies	1,899		Rankin		1,255	
Murray	1,296			ACT		
Scullin	6,708		Fenner		2,494	
Wills	8,514		Canberra		1,292	
		SA				
Adelaide	1,309					
Hindmarsh	1,069					
Makin	1,037					
		WA				
Burt	1,576					
Swan	2,057					
Stirling	2,157					
		QLD				
Oxley	1,020					
Moreton	1,576					
Rankin	1,361					

DOUBLE DISILLUSION

Arabic Electorate	South Asian		Vietnamese		Chinese	
	(n)	Electorate	(n)	Electorate	(n)	Electorate
ACT						
Fenner	1,171					
Canberra	1,250					

Notes. (n) stands for the number claiming to speak a particular language other than English at home in the relevant Census.

LOTes by electorates: (over 1,000 speakers) (2011 Census) – these are NOT figures for number of eligible voters, but of those using a LOTE at home.

Other LOTES of over 1,000 distributed over Australia include Balkan and Eastern European (Macedonian, Croatian, Serbian, Russian, Polish, Hungarian); Southern European (Italian, Maltese, Greek); Western European (French, Portuguese, Spanish, German, Dutch); Middle Eastern (Persian, Turkish, Assyrian, Armenian, Dari); Rest of Asia (Burmese, Khmer, Filipino/Tagalog).

Source. Compiled by © James Jupp and Juliet Pietsch from ABS (2011), adjusted for boundaries.

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# 30

## Conclusion: The Implications of the 2016 Federal Election

Anika Gauja, Peter Chen, Jennifer Curtin and Juliet Pietsch

In the year that the pollsters were stumped by unanticipated outcomes in both the Brexit vote and the United States (US) presidential election, the Australian polls got it close to right. Although Malcolm Turnbull had not campaigned particularly well and the party's relentless mantras of 'jobs and growth' and 'innovation' were perceived as out of touch with the concerns of everyday Australians, the poll trends almost consistently put the Coalition one to two percentage points ahead of the Australian Labor Party (ALP). They predicted a close result in terms of the vote, which, in 2016, also translated into a close result in the number of seats won.<sup>1</sup>

With the parties within a few percentage points of one another, and the Liberal–National Coalition suffering a period of leadership and policy turmoil prior to the 2016 federal election, the circumstances going into the campaign did not present a reassuring scenario for stability. Would the federal election follow the 2014 Victorian and the 2015 Queensland State elections where questions of leadership (transition and style) were seen as definitive in the electoral losses for the incumbent Coalition governments? Or was the 2015 New South Wales (NSW) contest—where a new, young leader who consolidated the Coalition's hold on government with an

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1 This is not always the case. In 1998, the Coalition won 49 per cent of the vote and 80 seats out of 148.

agenda for major infrastructure expenditure leveraged against economic rationalisation (asset sales, administrative reform)—a better indicator of what might occur? In other words, would the elevation of Turnbull, with his contrasting style and policy standpoints compared to Tony Abbott, result in an agenda for change and increased support within the electorate?

In the end, neither scenario was borne out. While the 2016 election clearly produced a ‘new’ government (albeit one with a narrow margin for error in the lower house), we could not describe the outcome as a political victory given the government’s deliberate choice in bringing on an early election over policy issues with comparatively low public salience (Essential Media Communications 2016). Many of the chapters in this book questioned the government’s motivation and wisdom in seeking an early, double-dissolution election, and now one year on, issues of stability and a lack of resonance with the electorate continue to plague the government. By the end of 2016, Turnbull’s popularity rating as preferred prime minister had fallen to its lowest level since he took the leadership from Abbott, dropping 18 points during 2016 to 41 per cent. On top of this, confidence in Turnbull as the leader best placed to manage the economy had dropped below 50 per cent for the first time since he became prime minister (*Australian* 2016). Since September 2016, the ALP has consistently maintained a two-party preferred lead over the Coalition (*Australian* 2018). With little to suggest that Turnbull’s popularity will rise significantly, the implications of the decision to go to the polls early and via a double dissolution may yet prove fatal.

## ‘Double disillusion’: Some key themes from the volume

As editors, we called the 2016 federal election volume ‘Double Dissolution’ to highlight the lacklustre nature of the campaign, the failure of the election to produce a decisive result despite both houses of parliament being dissolved, as well as disaffection with the major parties and their limited capacity to pursue the policy challenges facing contemporary Australian society. These sentiments are poignantly captured in findings from the 2016 Australian Election Study (see Bean, Chapter 10), which show that, in contrast to the previous four elections, fewer people cared about which party won the election and those paying close attention to the campaign through traditional media sources continued to decline. In



this section of the chapter, we return to some of these themes and, in the section that follows, reflect on the implications of the 2016 federal election for the 43rd Parliament.

## A failure to reset: Leadership and policy capacity

The timing and circumstances of the elevation of Turnbull to the prime ministership were less than optimal. Beyond the party's internal machinations, this was true of the longer-term position of Australia in its economic cycle, the medium-term memory of Australians to the leadership uncertainty of the Rudd–Gillard administration and the compressing effects of the short, three-year election cycle at the federal level in Australia.

While politics have become increasingly personalised in the figure of the leader in Australia (Bennister 2012: 161–73; see also Strangio and Walter, Chapter 4), the presidentialisation thesis remains contestable. Turnbull inherited real constraints in taking office. The policy legacy of his predecessor, and the internal political and ideological divides in the Liberal Party that supported Abbott's ascendancy, constrained Turnbull's freedom of action immediately upon his taking the leadership and this continued right up to the 2016 election. Polling indicates that this transition period, perceived as indecisiveness, did his reputation considerable harm (Jackman and Mansillo, Chapter 6), demonstrating that the choices a leader makes immediately upon assuming office can be critical. To some extent, this view of Turnbull as a 'fizza'<sup>2</sup> reflects a paradox of Australian political leadership: the hesitancy of his first months in office was deemed to be at odds with the aggressiveness with which challengers are required to pursue leadership (as discussed in Strangio and Walter, Chapter 4). What is less visible was the new prime minister's emphasis on Cabinet processes and executive decision-making. While this was the foundation laid for his incoming government, it provided little in the way of visible 'wins' in 2015–16.

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2 Coined by the former Prime Minister Paul Keating, but popularised by the Sydney artist Michael Agzarian.

Having failed to use his 'honeymoon period' as the new prime minister to announce a significantly new policy agenda, it appears that Turnbull also missed the opportunity afforded by a long election campaign to put a new stamp on his incoming government. Research suggests that the longer the campaign period, the more likely voters will be exposed to a wide range of campaign messages from which they can accurately estimate the true positions of candidates on important issues and the true state of the economy (Stevenson and Vavreck 2000). However, in the Australian case, the 56-day campaign was not employed as a space for a period of significant agenda-building that would serve as the foundation for a new Turnbull era (see Taflaga and Wanna, Chapter 2). Rather, the abnormal election period proved too short to facilitate informed policy discussion and too long to sustain a simplistic economic mantra that was, in effect, largely a rebranding of the core neoliberal orientation of the traditional dry elements of the party (see Cahill and Ryan, Chapter 22).

The 2016 federal election therefore did little to increase the policy capacity of the major actors involved in the Australian political contest. The campaign was also notable for a lack of policy discussion and deliberation in key areas, such as social policy. As Amanda Elliot and Rob Manwaring argue in Chapter 24 of this volume, despite the predominance of 'Medicare', education, housing, health and unemployment were areas in which both major parties struggled to mount cohesive narratives and policy plans. Difficult and divisive policy areas, such as the environment and energy transition, were also avoided during the campaign (Pearse, Chapter 25), in addition to contentious issues, such as refugee policy, which otherwise attracted bipartisan support (Dehm and Walden, Chapter 26). Attention to multicultural affairs and the concerns of migrant communities was similarly muted (Jupp and Pietsch, Chapter 29). Indigenous policy debates, though characteristically low profile, saw an ideological and practical divergence between the two major parties not seen since the 2007 Northern Territory (NT) intervention (Perche, Chapter 27). Due to the salience of the marriage equality debate during the previous parliamentary term and the Coalition's commitment to holding a plebiscite on the issue, LGBTBI policy received greater attention during the campaign. The ALP held a women's policy launch, though media coverage was lacklustre (Williams and Sawer, Chapter 28).

Following the ascendancy of Donald Trump in the US presidential election campaign, the prime minister has since seized on concerns about the social impacts of deindustrialisation as a vindication of his emphasis

on employment and economic growth during the campaign (Chan 2016). However, this misremembers his emphasis on *laissez-faire* economics that focused on free markets, labour flexibility (Turnbull 2015) and an embrace of ‘agility’ that others see as the ‘uberfication’ of once-stable employment. As both the right and left of politics are increasingly developing and popularising renewed critiques of neoliberalism, the Prime Minister, once seen as a herald of new ideas in politics (Hopewell 2013), is increasingly looking like an adherent to a dated economic orthodoxy.

Similarly, the ambiguous outcome of the election campaign has also not resolved debate about the wisdom of the strategic conduct of the Coalition in opposition and under Abbott’s administration (Kenny 2016). Thus, in the policy and strategic dimensions of leadership, the election failed to provide a clear direction for an administration entering its third session of parliament. With the departure of high-profile senator Cory Bernardi to form his own party, the Australian Conservatives, as well as Abbott’s continued critique of Turnbull’s policy stances on issues such as gun control, the innovation agenda and the environment, the disillusionment of the electorate appears to have been mirrored in the party room. Moreover, the near election loss has not resulted (within the government at least) in a renewed recognition of the need for caucus unity and party discipline, a necessary requirement if the Coalition is to convince the public that stable government—one of its key electoral slogans—is desirable and deliverable.

## Beyond the major parties

As several of the chapters in the volume have shown, the 2016 federal election was also notable in highlighting the increasing importance of minor parties and Independents in Australian politics (Curtin, Chapter 16; Green, Chapter 8; Kefford, Chapter 15; Curtin, Chapter 16). Results revealed the highest level of primary minor party support in both the Senate and House of Representatives since 1949, demonstrating—in part—the effects of major party disaffection and the fragmentation of the electorate. This is further evidenced by declining rates of partisanship amongst Australian electors; though as Clive Bean notes in Chapter 10 of this volume, partisan attachment is still the greatest influence on voting choice in Australian elections.

Outside of the electoral arena, the 2016 federal election campaign saw the prominent participation of a wide array of interest groups (Halpin and Fraussen, Chapter 17) and most notably the online advocacy group, GetUp!, which was able to achieve a level of engagement and influence that surpassed the more traditional interest organisations. As Ariadne Vromen notes in Chapter 18, GetUp!'s success was underpinned by the group's strategic flexibility in combining both digital campaigning with 'hyper-local' initiatives that targeted sitting conservative Coalition parliaments to indirectly achieve policy change by seeking to oust particular individuals from the parliament.

The broader shift to online participation was also highlighted in the Australian Election Study (AES) results, which suggested that an increasing number of voters followed the campaign via the Internet (Bean, Chapter 10), as well as in the chapters by Peter Chen and Scott Wright, Verity Trott and William Lukamto. Though traditional media was still the primary and most trusted source for election news in the 2016 campaign (Carson and McNair, Chapter 19), Chen's chapter pointed to increasing levels of diversity (both in terms of providers and the audiences targeted) within the non-traditional media landscape and online news reporting. Wright, Trott and Lukamto showed the ability of online forums to act as spaces for deliberation and everyday political talk.

We suggest that the 2016 election highlighted Australian electoral democracy in a period of transition. Traditional actors (such as the major political parties, interest groups and traditional media, for example) continue to dominate electoral politics, yet we also have evidence that the range of actors who participate in election campaigns and debate is becoming more diverse, as are the spaces in which politics and policy are debated. Although 2016 was an election characterised by disillusionment, this may well be symptomatic of a transition to a more complex and fluid electoral landscape.

## Looking forward

While considerable attention has been paid to the choice of the double dissolution and its implications for the Senate crossbench, the ambiguous election outcome has produced a range of constraints and dependencies on the new government.

The first is negotiation within the Senate. The objectives of the 2016 Senate reform package are likely to be more fully realised only at the next election (2018 or 2019), though the consolidation of minor parties once only used for preference harvesting has been seen in the 2016 contest. For minor parties and half-term Senators, there is a strong incentive to increase their profile before facing the full electoral quota of a normal Senate election. Thus, while Abbott's prime ministership was criticised for his inability to manage the complex Senate (Bourke 2015), Turnbull faces a more difficult and complex set of negotiations, only partly due to the number needed to form minimum winning coalitions for each piece of controversial legislation.

Here, the role of the Nick Xenophon Team (NXT) and Pauline Hanson's One Nation (PHON) will be important, but each has very different political logics (Kefford, Chapter 15). A legislative stalemate cannot serve the interests of NXT, who need to stake out a position in the 'sensible centre' of politics through effective negotiation with government. PHON appeals to those disenchanted with the major parties for not addressing their concerns about immigration, national identity and globalisation.

While the problem of negotiating legislative support in the current context could be seen as a creation of the cartel-like approach to electoral law reform, the established party cartel may serve as the best way the new government has in passing legislation; maintaining the tendency for non-controversial legislation to pass through with the support of both Labor and the Coalition. The ALP has taken its own oppositional mandate out of the election, and is likely to be very selective in what aspects of the government's legislative agenda it will support.

The second complex set of dependencies lies within the Liberal Party and across the Coalition. The Liberal Party of Australia comes out of the 2016 federal election showing its factional make-up more clearly than ever before. John Howard's 'broad church' party (Hollander 2008: 86) continues to diversify, with some of the loudest voices of dissent coming from its reactionary and strongly conservative right. In light of Bernardi's departure from the Liberal Party, and the continued threat of a split from members of its conservative right wing, the government's policy agenda will continue to be constrained in order to satisfy the largely cultural concerns of this mixed group and avoid further splintering (O'Malley 2017). The Nationals, having performed well, have been encouraged to

maintain more autonomy from their Coalition partner. Barnaby Joyce appears more willing to embrace the party's own brand of agrarian populism than was his predecessor, Warren Truss.

The public nature of these ongoing intraparty negotiations is likely to be a theme of the new administration, but disunity may be overstated. Executive political management provides insight into the way the government is likely to focus its attention. Unlike Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard, Turnbull has appeared to use cabinet conventions effectively to produce a disciplined executive, both during his first term<sup>3</sup> and into his second. But a viable alternative leadership candidate has failed to emerge. Julie Bishop is the only minister to have a 50 per cent poll rating, but she is not sufficiently conservative for many in caucus, and the Abbott loyalists have long memories (Hartcher 2015). Thus, where the above barriers cannot be resolved through negotiation, the government is likely to focus on administration over legislation. Whether this is sufficiently inspiring to convince voters this is a government worthy of re-election remains to be seen.

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<sup>3</sup> In return, Turnbull's post-election Cabinet was largely unchanged in its core composition (Anderson 2016), signalling his recognition of the importance of this level of unity to his administration.

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