NEXT LEFT
Country Case Studies

Australia

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A NEW LABOURISM "DOWN UNDER"

Rob Manwaring

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Editors:
A. Schieder, L. Andor, M. Maltschnig, A. Skrzypek
FEPS project coordinators:
A. Skrzypek, C. Guedes
with the support of A. Iwanowska

English language editor:
R. Cowie
Design, layout and printing:
Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR

Logo and cover design:
Les Marquisettes (V. De Wolf)

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Few words from the Editors

The Next Left Country Case studies is a new publication series from the FEPS and Karl-Renner-Institute Research Programme, which is soon entering into its 15th year of existence. This particular collection is designed to provide readers with a set of answers to reoccurring questions such as: *how are the other (sister) parties doing? What are the best examples that could be shared from their respective practices? Is their current situation a result of a long-term process or just an electoral blip?* These and many other queries are covered in the volumes that are intentionally kept short and remain focused on social democratic parties and the specificities of the respective national contexts in which they operate. Although they are crafted with a mission to zoom in, they also provide an incredibly valuable material that can enable comparative studies – being in that sense an innovative assemblage that feeds in an obvious void not only within the world of think tanks, but also when it comes to contemporary academic writings.

The study included here - brilliantly written by Rob Manwaring, Professor at Flinders University in Adelaide – is a story of the Australian Labour Party, which has recently noted an extraordinary victory. As a governing party under the leadership of Anthony Albanese, it faces the challenge of delivering progressive politics against the background of very turbulent times. From the text, one gets to learn about the profound transformation that the ALP has undergone both in political and in organizational dimensions, which impacted its positioning within

the Australian two-and-a-half party system. It also increased its electoral appeal. The modernization helped to catch up with trends that alter citizens voting patterns. One of the visible aspects of those changes is the use of quota and feminization of the party's representations, which now include incomparably more women politicians in key positions. The party has become more representative and to that end, now has a stronger mandate that legitimates its project for Australia.

The lessons that can be drawn from the ALP's transformation are most inspiring, especially when we consider that the ALP is one of the oldest centre-parties in the world. When deliberating the policy choices that had been made on the path to creating a new agenda for "new labourism", it is interesting to see how the party dealt with some of the issues that had proven to be quite challenging for the European sister parties. Examples here are the ability to win voters on the legacy of how well ALP handled the pandemics (acting on the state government levels), as also ways in which the party acquired strong credentials not only in somewhat more traditional issues (education, health), but also in such hard questions as how to re-frame criminal justice. On this canvas, R. Manwaring shows a clear shift from what used to be a more *technocratic social democracy* to a coherent, forward looking and aspiration driven organization. This is what also brought an opening and capacity to claim ownership over such issues as: the environment and the fight against climate change, well-being, and policies for indigenous Australians. The ALP's strive against inequalities started being much less sectorial, and more intersectional.

To that end, the ALP is determined to govern now in a *distinctively progressive manner.* It is true that it has seen two profound surges of the party membership, which followed the reform of the leadership selection process and the elections in 2019. In this period the number of activists almost doubled. That said, the ALP is struggling with similar

questions as its sister parties elsewhere – especially when it comes to the demographic and sociological profile of members. Though the party also faces "middle classing", it resonates well with young people – and this publication offers an insight as to why it succeeds to do so.

Presenting this volume to the readership, we hope that it will prove to be a fascinating study – helping to deepen the knowledge about the progressive movement worldwide and offering inspiration by showcasing some of the practices that elevated the ALP to the strong position it is in now.

Brussels / Vienna, 1st September 2023

Executive summary

In 2022, Anthony Albanese's Labor government led the party to victory at the federal election, after being held in opposition for nearly a decade. This was a rare achievement, as Labor had only ever won from opposition three times since the 1950s. The Albanese win also coincided with a resurgence of Labor at the state level in Australia. Yet, there is a fragility to Labor's win, and they secured just 32.8% of the primacy vote in Australia's preferential electoral system. This constitutes the lowest ever primary vote of any government since the second world war. Yet, despite the thinness of the win, Albanese's government could be poised for at least a second term in office and achieve a range of much-needed policy gains.

The state of social democracy in Australia

As explored in Chapter 1, Australian social democracy is currently on the front foot, with a strong presence both federally and in many of the key Australian states. The Albanese government has learnt many painful lessons from the troubled Rudd-Gillard era (2007-2013), where the party ejected both leaders before the end of a full electoral term, and when it was undermined by chronic factional instability. Albanese has capitalised on a new factional balance within the party that was achieved by his predecessor, Bill Shorten.

Albanese's government has also learnt hard lessons in the course of being in opposition since 2013, where it failed to win successive elections. In particular, the 2019 federal election result entailed a major overhaul of Labor policy.

While the Australian Labor Party (ALP) is the main custodian of the social democratic tradition in Australia, it is challenged, buttressed and supported by both the resurgent Green party – now a significant and established minor party – and the trade union movement – which provides financial backing. The trade union movement provides financial stability to the ALP, but this is also challenging in the face of declining union density.

The Australian party system in flux

In Chapter 2, the dynamics of the Australian party system are mapped out, along with the implications for the future of the Albanese government. In summary, while Australia is broadly seen as a stable two-and-a-half party system, there is a clear decline in the vote share of both major parties and a rise in minor parties and independents. In 2022, the breakthrough of the teal independents (socially liberal independents) confirmed a long-standing trend in Australian politics. It leaves the party system more fragmented, although in the short term this is a great problem for the Liberals, which may well struggle to recover a number of key heartland seats. The ideological contours of the Australian party system are also mapped out, and one observation is that it is arguably one of the most right-leaning party systems, compared to similar countries, which arguably forces the ALP to adopt more centrist or right-leaning policies.

A new labourism

In Chapter 3, the policy agenda of the new Albanese government is mapped out. It can best be described as a "new labourism" – drawing upon the long-standing traditions of social democracy. Labourism was historically geared to giving pragmatic and tangible gains for the working class. Albanese's *new* labourism builds upon this to find ways to improve working conditions and pay, along with job security, for key groups. It's new in that it has an explicit focus on embedding gender equality into its program, while also securing ways to decarbonise the economy. Yet, the agenda is not without trade-offs. Critically, the ALP conceded important ground on tax policy, accepting highly regressive changes implemented by the former Coalition government. Facing high inflation, the ALP will need to show tangible gains, especially to tackle cost of living pressures. In other areas, Labor is showing a very deft hand in the politics of "catch up", making sound environmental policy and in the realm of indigenous affairs. The Albanese government could well leave an indelible and improved mark on Australia. There are also a suite of potential policy innovations to be adopted that were trialled by the Labor state governments, which led the country in its response to COVID-19.

A party fit for purpose?

In Chapters 4 and 5, key organisational and social changes affecting the ALP are outlined. Firstly, the state of the organisational structure of the ALP is examined. The ALP is generally a very late adopter of party organisational change, and in many areas lags behind its sister parties. It does, however, have a very strong record in terms of recruiting and retaining female members of parliament (MPs). Chapter 5 explores both the profile of the ALP and its changing electorate.

Again, its ability to recruit female MPs is a real strength, based on a strong quota policy. This is an area which the Coalition has systematically failed to address. Yet, a deeper problem for the ALP (and indeed other centre-left parties) is how to attract potential candidates from working class backgrounds.

A new labourism for the future

The elevation of the Albanese Labor government in 2022 is a much-needed injection of progressivism to Australia. The government has already secured a number of key policy successes, and crucially, is seeking to remain in office, by adopting a much-needed cooperative and inclusive approach with independents and other minor parties. This is a much-needed politics of "catch up". Given the state of disarray in the Liberal ranks, Labor could realistically be set for a second term. However, the success of "new labourism" rests on a number of key trade-offs, and Labor may need to build up more political capital to take stronger action on climate change, and critically, tackle wider structural social and economic inequalities.

1 The state of social democracy in Australia

1.1 The Australian Labor Party in context

The Australian Labor Party (ALP) is one of the oldest centre-left political parties in the world, formed in 1891 (Dyrenfurth and Bongiorno, 2011). The ALP quickly rose to be a key part of the Australian party system, and in 1904, under Chris Watson, the ALP became the first national Labour-led government to form in the world. Despite it long and rich history, the ALP's electoral record is patchy at best. Since the Second World War, there have been 30 federal elections in Australia, and the ALP has won just 11 of them.

At the 2022 federal election, Labor leader Anthony Albanese achieved something that the ALP has only previously managed three times before since the 1950s – winning office from opposition. Albanese's victory was a critical triumph for the ALP after nearly a decade in opposition. The Liberal Party of Australia (LPA) and its wing party, the National Party of Australia (the Nationals), together known

as the Coalition, have dominated Australian politics since the 1990s, and indeed been a significant brake on progressive reform. Prior to Albanese's 2022 win, there have been just three key Labor federal governments in Australia since the 1970s:

- 1972-1975 – the Whitlam government
- 1983-1996 – the Hawke-Keating era
- 2007-2013 – the Rudd-Gillard governments.

Each of these governments has been distinctive and left an indelible legacy on Australian politics. One previously pervasive way of thinking about the impact of the ALP has been through the prism of what was called the "initiative-resistance" thesis (Botterill and Fenna, 2010). Here, earlier scholars asserted that the ALP was the party of "initiative" seeking to implement progressive change in the face of "resistance" from the centre-right coalition parties.

In the initiative-resistance frame, we can see the ALP as custodians of a proud legacy of key institution building in Australia, which usually comes off the back of a long period of conservative reign (Manwaring, 2021). The short-lived Whitlam government was a political earthquake, introducing a multitude of key social reforms, notably, Medibank, the government-owned private health insurer. The Hawke-Keating era was characterised by a series of significant economic reforms, underpinned by the Accord, a government-brokered pact with the union movement. Under the more recent and troubled Rudd-Gillard era, we can note key legacies, including the apology to the stolen generations – a critical step in rebuilding relations between Australia's indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, and also the creation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

In most recent years, the ALP's electoral performance has been one of disappointment (see Table 1). Since 2007, the height of Kevin Rudd sweeping Labor to power, it has been largely a case of diminishing

electoral returns. Factional in-fighting saw chronic leadership instability in the party throughout its 2007 and 2010 terms of office. In both cases, neither prime minister survived a full term of office. The 2013 election was part of the electoral rest, but Labor did better than expected in 2016 (but still lost), and worse than expected in 2019 (and lost). After a near decade of coalition rule, Albanese finally took the party back into office in 2022, albeit with strong seats gains, but not a significant improvement in vote share.

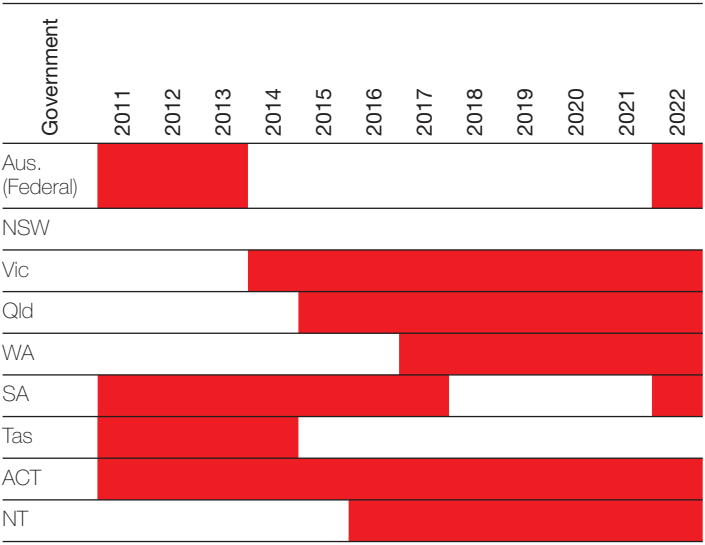
Table 1. ALP and federal election results (2007-2022).

Election year	2007	2010	2013	2016	2019	2022
Result	ALP government	Minority ALP government	Opposition	Opposition	Opposition	ALP majority government
ALP leader	Rudd (then Gillard)	Gillard (then Rudd)	Rudd (then Shorten)	Shorten	Shorten (then Albanese)	Albanese
ALP seats	83/150	72/151	55/151	69/150	68/151	76/151
Primary	43.38	37.99	33.38	34.73	33.34	32.8
ALP seat change	+23	–11	–17	+14	–1	+8

In this context, we can see the rise of the Albanese federal government as being elected to repair much of the disarray, ineptitude and policy inertia that characterised much of the Coalition's near-decade in office, which was characterised by a regular churn of prime ministers. As explored below, it remains a more open question of how far the Albanese government can embed an emboldened and retooled social democracy in Australia.

If Labor's federal electoral record is generally poor, then it is a different story at the state level. Australia has a strong federal system, with significant economic and political powers devolved to the state governments. In recent years, Labor has dominated at the state level (see Table 2). In 2023, Labor currently holds power in six of the eight states and territories, and is likely to win an early election in New South Wales (NSW) in 2023. That election happened in March 2023 with a Labor win. Labor's dominance at the state level is entrenched, and indeed, throughout the early to mid-2000s, it held office in *all* the states and territories.

Table 2. Federal and state-level Australian governments in 2011-2022.



Legend: ALP in office (red)

Crucially, Labor has dominated in some of the most populous states, including Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia. Australian state governments have strong powers in health, education and criminal justice policy. While there has been growing centralisation within Australia's federalism, the state governments remain significant actors. For example, while approximately 80% of all Australian taxes are federal, the states spend nearly 50% of all government revenue. To a large extent, the state governments led Australia's response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Fenna, 2022). Electorally, a number of Labor state governments were rewarded for their handling of the pandemic. The exemplar in this regard is the Daniel Andrews-led Labor government in Victoria, a state government that services a population of 6.6 million people. Andrews won the 2022 state election, which secured an uninterrupted third term for his government; indeed, he *increased* his party's seats from its previous landslide win in 2018.

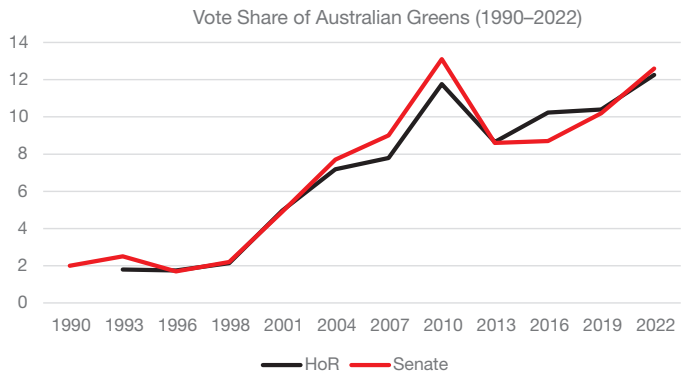
In summary, at the national and state level in Australia, at the start of 2023, the ALP was well-placed across the federation, with a number of significant landmark wins. Yet, as outlined below, there is a fragility to this picture, and the ALP faces a range of structural challenges across the party system, and in its electoral base.

1.2 Social democracy, the Greens and the trade unions

The ALP remains the only long-standing *major* political party in Australia to champion social democracy and its related traditions. The dominant tradition in the ALP is its labourism, which arguably makes it more distinctive than its European social democratic and socialist counterparts. Indeed, it is this labourist focus that arguably enables political space for others to champion social democratic causes and

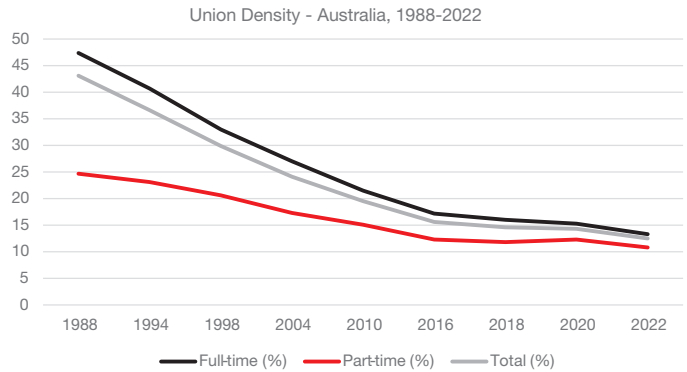
issues, notably the Australian Greens. The Greens remain the only significant challenge to the ALP from the left. Conversely, the Coalition faces a range of challengers from the right. Since its emergence in the 1990s, the Greens have challenged the social democratic credentials of the ALP (Crowe, 2018). In Figure 1, the electoral breakthrough of the Greens is charted, with a steady and rising vote share.

Figure 1. Vote share of the Australian Greens.



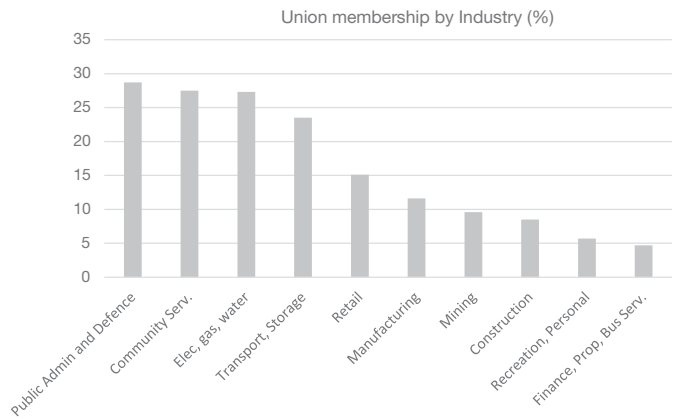
What makes the ALP distinctive from its European social democratic counterparts is the formal affiliation of trade unions to the party's structures. The Labor party is a creation of the union movement and shares this distinction with its New Zealand and UK sister parties. This formalised link with the unions is critical because it shapes the factional dynamics that underpin the party, and three main affiliated unions play a critical role (Markey, 2016). A key challenge for the ALP is that it relies on its institutional affiliation of its long-standing union partners, but union density is decreasing in Australia and is highly

Figure 2. Union membership density in Australia.



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022)

Figure 3. Union density by sector.



Source: Roy Morgan Research (2017)

varied across sectors (see Figures 2 and 3) (Larkin and Lees, 2017). The challenge for the ALP is that it needs to fend off the progressive critique posed by the Greens, but also appease its union backing, within the context of declining union membership. The rise of the Albanese government and its policy agenda reflects many of the trade-offs involved in this complex set of relationships.

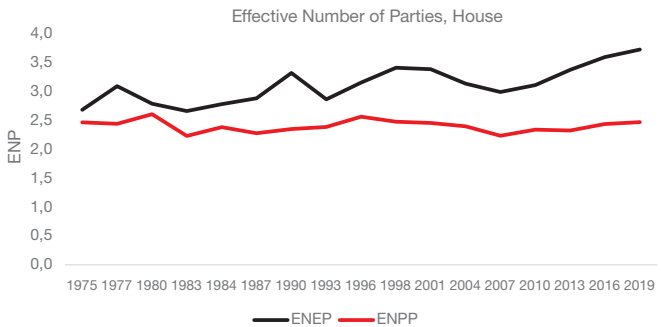
2
The Australian party system in flux

2.1 New dynamics in the Australian party system

On the face of it, Australia seemingly has a long-standing two-party system. Generally, election outcomes, and media coverage, focus on a simple two-horse race – the ALP against its main rival: the centre-right Liberals. Yet, in the literature on party system types, Australia is often described as a "two-and-a-half" party system, given the long-standing relationship between the Liberals and its coalition partner, the Nationals. What makes Australia's party system so unusual – in part, a function of its geography – is the continued presence of an agrarian-based party. Since election outcomes are decided by the winning party grouping securing a majority in the 151 seat lower House of Representatives, on some measures, there is still some case to characterise Australia as a two-and-a-half party system. In Figure 4, two measures of the number of "effective" parties are tracked in Australia since 1975.[1] On the one conventional measure of effective parties (ENPP), there is a case that Australia remains a two-and-a-half party system, albeit with some indication of the growth of other significant

parties since the Rudd Labor government's win of 2007. However, if using alternative measures of effectiveness (ENEP), we can see a clear pattern of growth of minor parties in Australia, and the overall number of "effective" parties rising from 2.5 in 1975 to 3.7 in 2019. Indeed, for the Senate, the figure is 4.1.

Figure 4. Effective number of parties in Australia.



Australia's party system has been largely understood as one of the most stable against comparable advanced industrial settings. The majoritarian electoral system used in the lower house still tends to favour the major parties, and government formation remains dominated by the Labor/non-Labor axis. However, there are significant underpinning trends and changes to the party system that have important consequences for the ALP, and the social democratic project more broadly.

Firstly, we can see that the vote share of the major parties is in decline. This is a trend in common with much of Europe. Across the social democratic party family, there is clear evidence of major party

vote share decline, with clear outlier cases of significant decline, notably, the PvDA in the Netherlands and the PS in France. This broader trend is also evident in Australia. In Figure 5, the vote share of the ALP is charted from the 1980s. In Australia's preferential system, the two-party preferred vote, which aggregates the vote share for the main parties is fairly stable, but, critically, Labor's primary vote share is in structural decline. In the 1960-1970s, the major parties would easily capture over 40% of the primary vote, yet since the Hawke-Keating era, we can see a significant decline. In 2007, the emergence of the Rudd Labor government saw an improvement, but this is an outlier amongst continued decline.

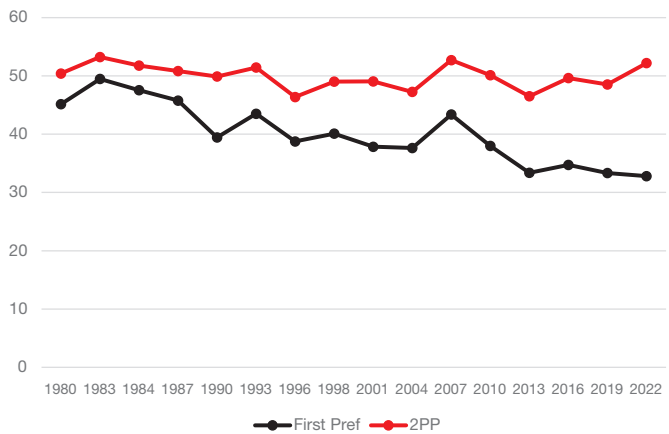
What is striking about Anthony Albanese's win in 2022 is that the 32.6% primary vote was the lowest recorded for any post-WWII government in Australian political history, and the federal ALP's lowest since 1934. This is striking, given that the Coalition had been in power for nearly a decade, was badly ailing on a number of fronts, and yet the ALP's primary vote actually declined overall. Labor's win was built on specific regional gains, notably Western Australia in 2022, and the overall seat count somewhat masks this ongoing structural issue for both major parties. It is evident too that, in its review of the 2022 federal election, the ALP flagged the loss of key "heartland" voters, especially in parts of Sydney and Melbourne (Combet and Oshalem, 2022).

One of the key factors that appears to be driving this decline of the major party vote share is the decline of lifetime Labor (and major) party voters and an attendant decline in "party identification" with the major parties. The Australian Election Study (AES) is the most systematic mapping of political public opinion and activity in Australia and, after every election, gains a representative sample of Australian public opinion. From the AES, we find a number of key trends and changes

in how Australians are engaging with party politics, and the wider implications for the party system. Some of the main changes include (Cameron and McAllister, 2022):

- a significant decline in lifetime voting (in 1967, 72% of respondents reported always voting for the same party – it is at its lowest level in 2022 – just 37% of lifetime voters);
- a significant decline in stable major party voters (in 1987, 38% of Labor voters were lifetime voters, by 2022, this was just 12% of Labor voters); and
- a moderate decline in support for *any* political party (when respondents are asked to rate on a 0-10 scale how much they like parties); there has been a decline since the 1980s (e.g., the aggregate score for Labor in 1998 was 5.7, and was 4.5 in 2022).

Figure 5. Labor's first preference and two-party preferred count (1980-2022).



Overall, the party system changes have important implications for the ALP and the broader social democratic project in Australia. Firstly, and historically, the Australian party system is still seen as a largely stable two-and-a-half party system, with a strong Labor–non-Labor axis. While this captures one dynamic within the party system, in many respects, it masks some deep-seated changes. In common with parts of Western Europe, many voters are shifting their loyalties away from the major parties, and this includes the ALP. The overall structural vote for the ALP is at an all-time low, and its primary vote is in the low 30s. In the House of Representatives, the number of seats, not votes, shapes government formation, and arguably, there is a complacency amongst ALP ranks about what this means. The 2022 review of its election performance notes the challenge, but does not really engage with the structural challenge it presents. Minority governments, hitherto largely uncommon in Australia, are now a much more likely prospect. Yet, Labor proved it could govern successfully as a minority government (2013-2016), although Australians are not generally supportive of minority governments.

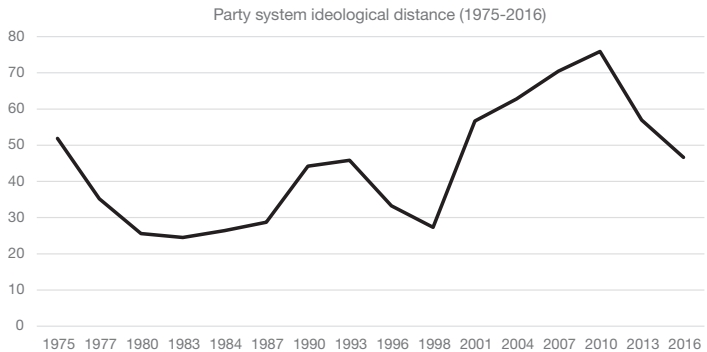
Secondly, the party system is changing rapidly, and the rise of minor parties is now a clear feature of the party system. In 2022, there was a clear three-way block between ALP, the Coalition and the range of minor parties. The rise of the so-called "teal" independents, who won a number of high-profile, mostly safe, traditionally Liberal-held seats is indicative of this wider change. It adds a new level of flux and complications to electoral contests. In some ways, the challenges are greater for the centre right, rather than the centre left, as there appears to be far greater fragmentation on this side of politics – the teal phenomenon potentially opens up a new rift between the liberal and conservative traditions in Australia. To some extent, the 2022 federal win was a case of the Coalition *losing* office, rather than the ALP winning it in an outright sense.

For the ALP more narrowly, it will increasingly need to rely on favourable "preference flows" to win seats in order to achieve victory. The Australian party system is now more fluid, and the ALP cannot rely upon a heartland base in the way it used to. The number of "lifetime" ALP voters is much smaller than ever before. Indeed, there are clear signs that not only is its base shrinking, but in outer suburban areas its traditional base is turning away from the party. In summary, Australians are now far more transactional in their dealing with the major parties and are increasingly showing support for new challengers.

2.2 Ideological change within the party system

From the previous section, it is evident how the party system is changing, for example, in the overall number of significant parties, and wider trends such as the rise of minor parties. Here, the broader ideological changes are highlighted. Using Manifesto data, we can gain some understanding of how the major parties are changing over time, and their ideological positioning in the party system. In Figure 6, the overall ideological space in the Australian party system is presented using the RILE index.[2] The RILE index is a broadly accurate measure of the overall ideological gap between political parties. In Figure 7 the gap between the two most extreme parties within the Australian party system are presented on the left-right spectrum. In a party system where the overall ideological gap is small, we expect to see a clustering of parties around the centre ground, but where the gap is greater, there is some evidence of ideological widening – where electoral contests are being potentially shaped by much more significant ideological contests.

Figure 6. Ideological distance in the Australian party system.



In Figure 6, we can see two clear recent trends. First, from the period roughly of the John Howard-led Coalition government (1998 onwards until about 2010), we see a clear ideological widening in the Australian party space. This is perhaps unsurprising, given that Howard drove the Coalition into a far more conservative ideological space, and forwarding a neoliberal agenda; this presented the ALP with a suite of economic and social policy dilemmas. Over this period, the populist radical right One Nation party also emerged on the political scene, although its electoral impact has been far more muted than say either the AfD in Germany or the Swedish Democrats. However, since the Gillard Labor era from 2010, the ideological space in the Australian party system has been narrowing considerably, but it still remains more polarised compared to the 1970s.

There are similar trends between the two major parties over this period. In Figure 7, the ideological gap between Labor and the Liberals is outlined since the 1975 election.

Figure 7. Ideological difference between ALP and liberals (1975-2016).

The overall aggregate ideological story of the two major parties, since the rise of the Howard government in the mid-1990s, is one of growing ideological distance. The two major parties are not, on this evidence, converging or operating within overly close ideological space of each other. The gap grew between the two parties throughout the Howard era and has, to some extent, eased since the Rudd/Gillard era. Yet, critically, it appears not to have been corrected since the period of the 1980s. The 2010 election was, unsurprisingly, one of the most extreme results in Australian political history. Here, the conservative-minded Liberal leader, Tony Abbott, led an aggressive conservative-right campaign against the Julia Gillard-led Labor minority government, supported in office by the Greens and two key independents. It was a particularly divisive time in Australian politics.

In this ideological mapping, it is also important to place the ALP, in particular, in a comparative context. The issue here is that, if there is policy learning across the social democratic party family, then it is critical to pay attention to structural differences across different parties.

In Figure 8, the aggregate RILE scores for the main centre-left parties are presented in Australia and a number of key comparator countries. This enables us, over a longer period, to compare how "left" the parties are on a left/right spectrum. It is commonly known that, from the 1990s onwards, many of social democratic parties experienced a third-way turn, towards pursuing more centrist agendas.

Figure 8. Left/right score for the social democratic party family in selected countries (1970s-2010s).

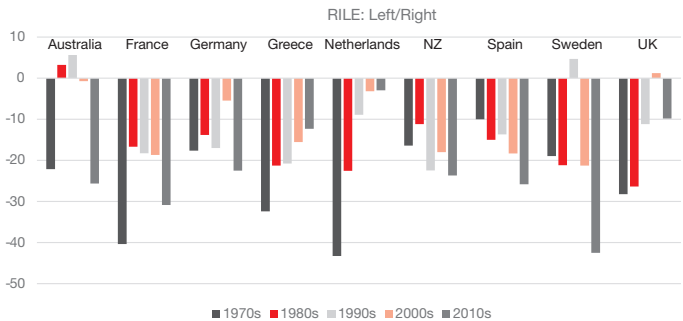


Figure 8 clearly demonstrates that the ALP, at least on the RILE left/right index, has traditionally been one of the most right wing of all the centre-left parties. The core codes in the RILE index focus on economic protection, market regulation and economic planning, along with strong support for the welfare state. In this regard, we can see how the traditional centre-left parties, for example, the SAP and the SPD, might well easily score highly as left parties. As indicated above, the distinctiveness of the Australian welfare state and its tax system mean that these features are structurally less likely to appear in the ALP's manifesto and policy commitments. Yet, we can see how, especially

from the Hawke-Keating era, where the ALP pursued a controversial economic reform agenda, it scored highly as one of the most right-wing governments. We see very similar centrist or right scores for the New Labor government in the 2000s and the SAP in the 1990s. Yet, the ALP is distinctive in that, for at least two decades, its overall net score *was more right wing* then left wing. Since the 2010s, there has been a significant shift to the left again, and the ALP on this metric is closer to the SAP, PS and PSOE, for example.

2.3 Flux and ideology in Australia

This section seeks to briefly capture some of the key dynamics with the Australian party system. Firstly, we can see that, in the past two decades, there have been some profound structural changes in Australia. While, on the face of it, Australia appears to be a stable two-and a half party system, it is, in fact, a much more complex and dynamic polity. There are two key intersecting trends – firstly, the structural decline of the support base for the major parties, including the ALP, and secondly, the dramatic rise of minor parties and independents in Australia. The 2022 federal election result is perhaps the culmination of these trends, and we can see an almost three-way split between the two major groupings and the bloc of minor parties. This shapes both governing patterns and electoral contests. For the ALP, as the historic carrier of the social democratic project, it cannot rely as strongly on its core base and is much more dependent on having to negotiate and work with other parties in a much more meaningful manner, in a more fluid party system. If anything, the ALP would do well to examine how many of its sister parties have navigated this more polycentric political space.

In the context of these broader changes, we can see evidence of ideological realignment and change in Australia. Following the Hawke-

era third-way turn of the ALP, it remained one of the most right wing of all the centre-left parties. Yet, this score, to some extent, underplays the important structural differences in Australia, in what is a much-lower-tax country, with a far more targeted welfare state (Wilson, 2013). The legacy of the Hawke-Keating era continues to cast a shadow over the ALP, as it seeks to redefine and recalibrate its core message, seeking to balance economic growth with social reform. In recent years, it has taken a more "left" turn, at least judged by the left-right index, but this has not secured electoral advantage. What's clear is that the 1990's era Howard government has proven to be an ideologically divisive and polarising influence on Australian politics. Its marriage of social conservatism and economic neoliberal settings continues to influence and shape Coalition governments. Moreover, the ideological space between the Liberals and Labor has grown considerably over time, even if there has been some more recent narrowing.

It has been said of Margaret Thatcher that one of her most important legacies was not just to change the UK's political and economic settings, but to change the Labour party. To some extent, whilst the Hawke-Keating era was transformational on the ALP and its project, arguably, the Howard era has had a more profound policy and ideological impact on the party. As explored in Chapter 3, in a number of critical areas, the party has adopted more right-wing positions, and expressed timidity on issues like tax reform and progressive taxation. The Albanese Labor government is, in this respect, a changed creature from its historic predecessor in the 1980s. Yet, arguably the most critical ideological changes are posing more existential problems for the centre right rather than the centre left. The growing ideological distancing in the party system, and the conservative ascendancy within the Liberal ranks, is now, after nearly a decade in power, causing significant problems. The "teal" phenomenon in 2022, with a significant number of centre-right,

but socially liberal, independents winning in nominally “safe” liberal inner-city seats, exposes critical flaws in the conservative and liberal traditions. After Labor’s very disappointing result in 2019, a disciplined ALP might well be able to consolidate and build a new era of social democracy within Australia.

3
Policy change and renewal in the ALP

The aim of this chapter is to set out the Albanese Labor policy agenda and identify potential policy transfer and innovation across the social democratic party family. The focus is to better understand Labor's changing policy agenda – which is critical to understand the 2022 federal win. The chapter has three main sections. The first two parts focus on the two most recent periods of Labor leadership, Bill Shorten's tenure, covering the 2016 and 2019 elections, and Albanese's policy reset for the 2022 election. The third section examines potential ideas for policy transfer and includes innovations from a number of the state Labor governments.

3.1 Technocratic social democracy under Bill Shorten (2013-2019)

Following the 2013 election loss of the Labor minority government, Bill Shorten, a former union leader from the party's right faction, won the leadership over Anthony Albanese. Shorten began a reconstruction of the party's agenda, and the main contours of that approach are outlined here. Shorten was given two elections as leader, and in effect ran a two-term policy strategy. Here, for brevity, we aggregate

the main policy contours of Shorten's agenda (see Table 3) (Karp and Hutchens, 2016). The focus is primarily on Labor's key tax and fiscal policy approaches, rather than an in-depth analysis of specific policy domains.

Table 3. Labor's policy agenda in the 2016 and 2019 federal elections.

2016 *"putting people first"*	2019 *"fair go for Australia"*
Return the budget to surplus in the same timeframe as Liberals, but run an interim deeper deficit	Tax relief for low- and middle-income earners. Labor pledged to match the Coalition's tax relief rebate of $1,080 for those earning less than $48,000. Labor also offered tax relief worth up to $350 for low-income workers earning up to $37,000 Labor would restore the budget deficit levy of 2% of those earning incomes over $180,000 (until surplus equalled 1% of GDP – expected over a four-year period)
Restrict negative gearing to new housing from 2017	Abolish negative gearing or investors buying existing houses from January 2020
Not to match the Liberals' planned cuts to corporation tax (reduce from 30% to 25%; $50 billion in savings)	Halve capital gains tax discount for investment properties
"Mediscare" – campaign of fear, suggesting privatisation of aspects of the universal health care system	End cash rebates for excess franking credits, preventing self-funded retirees receiving refunds (estimated revenue of $10.7 billion over four years)
Spending: $500 million smart investment fund; increase spending on health; $10 billion "concrete bank" for infrastructure; implementation of Gonski schools' needs-based model over a decade ($437 billion)	Spending: increases in Medicare cancer plan and dental plan; additional $3.3 billion for public schools; introduce a "living wage" pegged to minimum wage; reverse penalty rate cuts for retail and hospitality workers; increase in pay for childcare workers

3.2 Understanding Labor's policy agenda under Bill Shorten

A key feature of Shorten's agenda was a reclamation of the issue of *social class*. The language of class was much more explicit in Shorten Labor's discourse and rhetoric compared with previous recent Labor governments. A key development was the report overseen by key Labor figure Jenny Macklin (Australian Labor Party, 2016). The Macklin report placed a strong emphasis on tackling inequality and recognising structural economic and social barriers in place for many disadvantaged Australians. Shorten built this language of class into his agenda and policy approach. At the 2019 election, Shorten set his sights on "the top end of town", explicitly targeting corporate Australia and the affluent classes.

The second feature, particularly the 2019 campaign, was Shorten's *policy-rich* agenda. It was ambitious in the sheer volume of pledges, but, crucially, also contained a significant number of high-spending pledges. It also tapped into contemporary centre-left debates, such as the call for a "living wage" (Wilson, 2021). The breadth and ambition of the agenda in 2019 was in stark contrast to the Coalition's policy-lite approach. On one set of metrics, Labor took 69 headline policies to the election compared with the Coalition's 45 (Manwaring, 2018).

Thirdly, Labor's fiscal agenda was *technocratic*. Labor's ambitious spending agenda was underwritten by a set of technical, but highly redistributive, policies. Firstly, Labor sought to tackle Australia's housing affordability crisis by closing a series of key tax concessions, especially for middle income and affluent groups. A key element was to reduce the scope of negative gearing on new investment properties and, relatedly, a halving of capital gains tax (profits made from selling assets). A key target here was property investors, and the tax concessions

that predominately middle-class investors profit from. The knock-on effect, from Labor's perspective, was that these settings were driving up property prices and locking out key workers and first-time home buyers from the goal of home ownership.

In addition, the most controversial tax concession Labor targeted was its "franking credits policy" (Savage, 2019). Franking (or imputation) credits are paid to a person owning shares for the tax that has already been paid by the issuing company on their dividends. In Australia, taxpayers receive a credit against their tax bill for the franking credits received from franked dividends. This is a unique tax arrangement to Australia. The history of this unique set of arrangements is complex and lies in tax reforms made by Labor Prime Minister Paul Keating, and then, crucially, a key move by then Liberal Prime Minister John Howard was the decision in 2006 to make superannuation (pension) income tax free for most people over 60. The net effect of these policies was a significant regressive move to shore up the wealth of affluent older Australians. Over time, franking credits have become a particular mechanism used by many middle income and affluent older people to supplement their private and other income streams. Again, as far as there is available evidence, it was tax concession that disproportionately benefited the more affluent groups. During the campaign, Labor was then subjected to a highly successful scare campaign about a "retiree tax", in large funded by the right-wing billionaire Clive Palmer and his vanity party, the United Australia Party (UAP). Palmer pumped close to $85 million dollars into the scare campaign.

In summary, we can characterise Shorten's policy agenda as technocratic social democracy that was redistributive, had a specific class appeal and could be located within Labor's social democratic tradition. But it was *technocratic* in two key features of its policy design. Firstly, it was targeted at specific and limited areas of tax

concessions and fiscal policy. It was also a policy-rich, but arguably "scatter gun", approach.

There is an argument that a less technocratic version of social democracy than Shorten's might have had a better degree of internal policy coherence. For example, under the "traditional" model of social democracy – even if we see this as a stylised or ideal model – the overall model was reinforced by three key interlocking elements – a strong welfare state to support labour market activation with the goal of full employment (Bailey, 2009). In contrast, Labor's Shorten technocratic social democracy had more limited policy coherence or overall systemic ambitions. Yet, the second critical element of the technocratic approach is that it largely seeks to rely on "non-traditional" social democratic policy instruments, especially avoiding direct increases to income tax. This approach links to wider debates about other centre-left parties seeking to use indirect forms of taxation to refurbish their welfare states (Beramendi and Rueda, 2007).

Overall, Shorten's approach had a mixed electoral impact, but ultimately must be deemed a failure in the Australian context. Firstly, it was a policy-rich approach, which, indeed, did seek to offer a strong contrast to the vague policy agenda and instabilities of the Coalition's period in office. Clearly, in 2016, Labor's vigorous defence of the universal Medicare health system resonated with voters. There are elements here of Judt's "defensive social democracy" – with centre-left parties shifting to defend key institutions that they were instrumental in creating (Judt, 2009). Yet, by 2019, the policy-rich, technocratic and highly redistributive policy agenda failed to resonate with enough marginal seat voters, especially in key electorates in Queensland. Labor's agenda was undone by Shorten's own lack of popularity with the electorate, but was also subject to a fierce, well-funded and effective scare campaign. Technocratic social democracy, despite

many of its key underlying merits, has managed to resurrect long-standing electoral images that continue to dog the centre-left – that it remains a high-tax, high-spending project.

3.3 Albanese's new labourism

Anthony Albanese comes from the party's left faction and was a former minister in the Rudd-Gillard era, holding the post of deputy prime minister in the brief second Rudd tenure. Albanese contested the leadership against Shorten in 2013 and won the rank-and-file vote, but Shorten won heavily amongst MPs.[3] For Albanese, his leadership was overshadowed by the global pandemic, and Labor, in common with many other opposition parties, struggled to catch media attention. Whilst Australia has a generally decent story to tell in terms of its response to the pandemic, it was also largely helped by the luck of its distance and island status. During the height of the pandemic, Albanese's Labor attacked the government's record on the slow purchase and rollout of vaccines, and delays in setting up suitable quarantine facilities. In this respect, Albanese's pitch to voters was on grounds of competence, rather than strong ideological differences.

However, on assuming the leadership of the party unopposed in 2019, Albanese set out to differentiate Labor's agenda from the Shorten period. Within Labor ranks, there was a profound sense of grief and anguish at the 2019 result, where Labor expected to perform much better than it did. Albanese faced a tough task in rebuilding confidence and recalibrating its policy agenda. Following the 2019 electoral loss, Labor conducted a far-reaching review of the party's 2019 campaign and performance (Emerson and Weatherill, 2019). The post-election review offers a candid, and strikingly honest, take

on the devastating 2019 loss, noting a "cluttered" policy agenda, the unpopularity of the leader and, critically, internal institutional failures in running its campaign. A key element was Labor's spending agenda (ibid.):

> *Labor's tax policies did not cost the Party the election. But the size and complexity of Labor's spending announcements, totalling more than $100 billion, drove its tax policies and exposed Labor to a Coalition attack that fuelled anxieties among insecure, low-income couples in outer-urban and regional Australia that Labor would crash the economy and risk their jobs.*

Following the review, Albanese then set out his "vision" in a series of key speeches to a range of audiences (Albanese, 2019). The vision speeches arguably lacked an overall coherence, but they championed a range of progressive, social democratic and, crucially, labourist issues and themes. They generally did not catch much media attention, but they were a key part in resetting Labor's agenda. In one of the early speeches, Albanese gave a brief overview of some of the core themes:

> *The Labor party is going to advance a progressive and practical agenda consistent with our values. Our policy agenda will be bold and clear. And by the time the next election comes about, Labor is going to be back as the party of growth, the party of aspiration, the party of social justice, the party of nation building, the party of the natural environment, the party of science and the party of the future (ibid.)*

In summary, from the vision speeches, we can distil the Albanese approach around the following core themes and issues:

- pro-economic growth
- fairness

- jobs and wages
- security
- nation building and infrastructure
- aspiration.

Albanese takes a more "labourist" approach than Bill Shorten, giving much more centrality to the concept of work, wages and conditions. Labourism remains a key distinct tradition in centre-left politics, which traditionally has given primacy to securing immediate material gains for the working class.[4] Indeed, during the election campaign, the rise in global interest rates, which included a mid-campaign rate rise from Australia's reserve bank, drew further attention to the ongoing issue of wage stagnation in Australia.

Following the vision statements, Albanese unveiled Labor's policy agenda.[5] Most critically, Labor under Albanese abandoned several of Shorten's signature policies, including the unwinding of tax concessions (see Table 4). There was a noticeable shift away from the technocratic tools for redistribution that characterised the Shorten period. A critical element of Labor's agenda was how it accepted tax changes set out by the Coalition. The most important concession Labor made was to sign up to the "stage three tax cuts" – the centrepiece of which was the removal of an entire income tax band (see Table 5).

The critical issue is that Labor's new policy agenda was shaped and constrained within terms set by the Coalition. Despite Albanese's commitment to progressive taxation in one of his vision speeches, the acceptance of the stage three tax cuts signifies a significant concession to a more regressive tax code. What might make Labor's task even harder is that the economic conditions from 2022 to 2023 are challenging, with record levels of inflation, energy spikes driven by the invasion of Ukraine and structural problems such as low wages within the Australian economy.

Table 4. Albanese's policy agenda.

Policy reversals/changes	Policy proposals
Reversal of policies on negative gearing and capital gains tax	Structural focus on improving capacity and productivity within the economy
Reversal of policy on "franking" credits	Infrastructure investment in renewable energy; focus on local manufacturing ($1 billion National Reconstruction Fund); transport spending
Sign up to Coalition's stage three "tax cuts" – in effect, removing the 37% income tax band	Legislation on job security, wage theft and gender pay gap
Sign up to the Coalition's low-to-median income tax offset; fuel excise duty cut for six months	Push to universal childcare; expert panels on pay awards for care workers; reduce costs of medicines on the pharmaceutical benefits scheme (PBS)
	"Help to buy" federal housing scheme (shared equity scheme)
	Expansion of fee-free technical and further education (TAFE) and university places

Table 5. The Liberal coalition's "stage three tax cuts".

Rates	Previous rates & threshold	18–19 Budget Threshold	19–20 Budget	
			Rates	Threshold
Nil	Up to $ 18,200	Up to $ 18,200	Nil	Up to $18,200
19%	$18,201 to $37,000	$18,201 to $41,000	19%	$18,201 to $45,000
32.5%	$37,001 to $87,000	$41,001 to $200,00	32.5%	$45,001 to $200,000
37%	$87,001 to $180,000			
45%	Above $180,000	**Above $200,000**	45%	Above $200,000

Source: ACOSS (2019)

3.4 Labor's economic and social policies – the politics of "catch up"

Labor's labourist agenda has three main elements and is primarily focused on improving productivity in the economy, in the face of record-low levels of immigration, and increasing capacity, especially amongst women. To this end, the three main elements include a job security guarantee (to be legislated) to tackle precarious and "gig" work, a shift to near-universal childcare and an expansion of support for the TAFE (vocational education) sector. In December 2022, after much hard bargaining, the government passed its centre-piece industrial relations reforms through the parliament, securing greater bargaining powers for unions and tackling insecure work. These measures are intended to tackle structural issues within the economy, which were long-ignored by the Coalition.

Labor sought to bed down its policy agenda with its first budget in October 2022, after nearly a decade in opposition. Labor's budget contained very few surprises, but it did reflect Labor's policy priorities and preferences (Hitch and McElroy, 2022). Firstly, it was notable how Labor, in part influenced by sister parties like New Zealand's Labour party, introduced "well-being" into its budget. Here, it sought to diversify the traditional economic growth measures and to ensure the budget also addressed wider social issues and supports. In policy terms, the centrepiece of government spending was on its childcare commitment, along with an increase in support for paid parental leave (funding support for up to 26 weeks). This was both labourist in approach, but also, crucially, gendered, in seeking to support more women to enter into the workforce. To some extent, these policies are not very new to many Western European, especially Scandinavian, countries, but it does reflect the centre left in Australia seeking to play "catch up". The

budget also sought to tackle an ongoing "cost of living" crisis, seeking to reduce outgoings on household budgets, and, while overall health spending was not significantly increased at Labor's first budget, there was a commitment to reduce costs of drugs listed on the PBS to make commonly listed medication affordable for families.

Whilst not "innovative" per se, Labor's budget was notable too for redirecting funding in at least two key ways. Firstly, there was a significant increase in funding for the environment and climate change measures, again reflecting a politics of catch up. The second area was the refurbishment of the overseas aid budget, a constant source of critique by the Coalition. Labor announced a significant increase in aid, in particular, to its neighbouring pacific region. Again, there was also a focus on using these funds to help support measures to tackle climate breakdown and its impacts.

Overall, in summing up Labor's policy agenda, we can note three main areas of interest. As outlined above, there was a strong focus on labourist measures to support Australian households. In particular, under Treasurer Jim Chalmers, Labor sought to redress long-standing areas of neglect by the Coalition, by focusing on insecure work, the provision of universal childcare and expanding the vocational and training sector. Labor's short- and long-term electoral fortunes will rest on how effective these measures are. Despite a good deal of pressure, Labor was committed to *not* reversing the controversial and highly regressive income tax changes it supported when the Coalition was in office. Social democrats, as ever, are often forced to operate within settings controlled by the centre right, fearing electoral backlash if they are seen to move too quickly into progressive areas.

Secondly, Labor, unlike the Coalition, is committed to taking the threat of climate breakdown seriously. One of its first legislative measures on assuming office was to legislate its commitment to

reduce greenhouse emissions by 43% by 2030. Labor was pushed hard by both the Greens and the teal independents to make this target stronger, but the ALP is seeking to both appease community demands for stronger action on tackling climate breakdown and not alienate the business community. Labor's targets fall short of climate science's recommendations to keep overall global heating levels within a 1.5% increase, but do reflect significant improvement on the feeble efforts of the Coalition. Once an international pariah on climate politics, Albanese has smoothly shifted to enabling Australia to have a stronger platform for taking the imminent threat posed by global heating more seriously. Again, this is the politics of "catch up".

The third area of note in Labor's agenda is its approach to indigenous affairs. On a wide range of metrics, indigenous Australians are far more likely to experience health issues, poverty, discrimination and incarceration than non-indigenous Australians. Following a critical meeting of indigenous leaders in 2017, the "Uluru statement from the heart" was released, calling for a wide range of measures to improve reconciliation and tackle the systemic abuse and disadvantage faced by indigenous Australians. A key measure within this agenda was the call for a constitutionally enshrined voice to parliament (the Voice) (The Uluru Statement). On winning the 2022 federal election, Anthony Albanese's first commitment was to ensure that a referendum on securing the Voice would take place within Labor's first term of office, and the date was 14th October 2023. This is Australia's first constitutional referendum in over twenty years.This is a potentially ground-breaking initiative and could remake Australia's democracy and help become a key marker in a renewal of good relations between Australia's indigenous and non-indigenous peoples.

Overall, we might describe Albanese's agenda as a "new labourism". Unlike earlier forms of labourist politics, it is less narrowly focused on

specific (mostly industrialised) sectors. Yet, it has a strong pragmatic approach, is gender responsive and reflects some effort to broaden Labor's approach to political economy, especially as it seeks to marry a staunchly pro-growth agenda with its need to tackle climate breakdown. Unlike its sister social democratic parties, Labor's agenda has less rhetoric (and explicit policies) focused on reducing overall economic and social inequality. Labor considers itself constrained by the long legacy of the Coalition rule and what is generally a right-leaning party system.

3.5 Innovation, catch up and best practice

In this concluding section, we reflect on Labor's policy agenda, and identify any key policy areas or ideas that might be suitable for policy transfer or adoption outside Australia. Firstly, we focus on the new agenda of the new Albanese federal Labor government, and then, secondly, we can note some key developments from a number of state Labor governments.

Federally, there is very little that is new or innovative that is part of Albanese's new Labor government. Some of its landmark pledges (e.g., its commitment to near-universal childcare) are hardly new, and, indeed, have been widely adopted, especially in a number of Scandinavian countries, where parties like the SAP have led the charge on these sorts of universal policy pledges. Even in recent years, for example, Labor's landmark NDIS might have been groundbreaking in the Australian context, but are more common in Western Europe. Indeed, the distinctiveness of Australia's welfare state means that a number of Labor's policies may not necessarily be very transferable. On surveying the full suite of Labor's 2022 policy pledges, there is very little that is unique or innovative in the strongest sense of the concept.

However, this lack of innovation should not discredit much of Labor's policy agenda, and its achievements since securing office. First and foremost, Labor's agenda reflects a much-needed politics of *catch up*. A decade of centre-right rule saw neglect and marginalisation of a suite of economic, social and environmental issues. It is unlikely any government would correct them all in a single election term, but a chastened ALP has set out a solid set of measures to tackle structural issues in the economy, make some immediate material improvements and, crucially, make meaningful steps to tackling climate change. In effect, a lesson here for social democrats is the merits of both pragmatism and a *defensive* social democracy. Australian Labor is not innovative, but it is seeking to repair and defend critical public infrastructure and recalibrate the Australian economy on a more inclusive footing – epitomised by its "well-being" focus in the budget.

The second element worth noting for potential lesson-drawing is its approach to governance. Ultimately, Albanese's government places a premium on consensus building. It does this in a number of ways. Drawing upon the Hawke-era neocorporatist approach (embodied in the agreement with the trade unions – "The Accord"), Albanese established a "jobs summit" to build new sets of relations with both the private sector and the unions (Peetz, 2022). This approach has the potential to reap long-term benefits to the ALP's agenda. This consensus-style governance is also evident in the newly polycentric parliament, with a record number of cross-bench MPs in the lower house, and a strong Greens presence in the senate. Labor has worked hard to build cross-party support where it can implement its agenda. With structural changes in party systems affecting many polities, and with many social democrats now operating from a smaller base, there are opportunities to learn from this style of governance.

Finally, it is worth noting that some of the more striking policy developments and innovations have taken place at the state level in Australia – usually led by Labor governments. Some of these might include:

- the introduction of human rights charters in a number of jurisdictions (in the absence of a national human rights framework in Australia);
- the sustained and experimental use of deliberate democracy experiments and mini-public in states such as South Australia and Western Australia;
- a range of environmental and climate-change policies (banning single-use plastic bags, carbon emission targets, fracking bans);
- social policy innovations – especially around the development of plans to tackle and reduce domestic violence, often with co-design and collaborative governance arrangements; and
- often first movers on socially liberal policy reforms, for example, Victorian Labor was the first government to introduce assisted-dying legislation in Australia.
- Efforts to prohibit the privatization of key assets, following Labor's state win in 2023, by seeking to change the NSW Constitution

While all governments have mixed records, with missed opportunities and failed policy experiments, the key issue outlined here is that it is often Labor state governments that have driven socially progressive policy change in Australia. The wider lessons for social democrats studying the Australian experience is that, while there may not be a significant number of truly path-breaking new policy developments, there has been a widespread record of important policy achievements by the centre left.

4
The ALP – a party organisation fit for purpose?

Is the ALP's structure and organisation fit for purpose for the 21st century? The family of social democratic and labour parties are creatures of the late 19th century, born of the growing political and social power of the embryonic industrial working class. These political parties have long since broadened their social bases and reflect new and diverse societies. It remains an ongoing quest for the parties to renew their identity and relevance, as well as their underpinning structures, to ensure that they remain key players in their respective party systems.

4.1 Renewing the organisation of the ALP

The ALP is organised on a somewhat different footing to other sister national social democratic parties, in that it comprises a federal structure, with both a national branch and branches in each of the states and territories. There has been some debate as to whether or not the ALP is categorised as a single entity, or it is a linked group of eight separate entities (Gauja and Grömping, 2020). To a certain extent, this federal structure makes organisational renewal a more complex project, in that factional bases and different state branches may be

resistant to specific changes. For long-term observers of the ALP, there is a strong view that the party has not renewed its structures enough, especially during periods of opposition (Lavelle, 2017). Indeed, the last major effort to reform the party was in the mid-2010s, and this failed to have much impact (Manwaring, 2013).

4.2 Candidate selection

There is organisational diversity across the ALP in terms of candidate selection (for both state and national elections). Generally speaking, the rank and file may have some voice or input into process, but the leadership, unions and factions tend to exercise control. In the mid-2010s, there was some appetite to experiment and broaden the selection processes and in NSW, there was a push to introduce primaries for selecting local candidates (New Matilda, 2014). This experiment was relatively short-lived, and the appetite for meaningful reform has ebbed. One difficulty is that, even if an organisational reformist is elected as national president, they tend to have little power, other than that of influence, to direct the state and territory branches.

This speaks to a wider problem highlighted by critics, especially those on the left of the party, who argue that the factional bosses wield too much power, and, indeed, the ALP lags behind other social democratic parties in democratising its processes (Karp, 2018). This tends to be a recurrent theme in a number of the party's internal reviews. The difficulty in Labor's inability to systematically grapple with party reform is that it then leaves itself hostage to a range of potential abuses – especially the problems of "branch stacking", which, at its worst, entails the misuse of taxpayer funds.[7] Most recently, this has been a significant problem in the Victorian state branch, which then prompted another review in the state division (Bucci, 2021).

4.3 Leadership election processes

One of the main national organisational changes that has helped democratise the party is the leadership election rules for the party leader. Previously, the leader was elected by the caucus of the parliamentary Labor party (PLP). It was Kevin Rudd in 2013 who introduced the changes, which split the vote 50:50 between the rank and file and the PLP. These changes came as a result of factional power plays that removed both Rudd and Julia Gillard from leadership before the end of a parliamentary term (Madden, 2022). A further change was to increase the threshold required to force a leadership challenge against a prime minister to 75% of MPs (or 60% for an opposition leader). It is notable that, unlike the British Labour party, there is no bloc vote for the unions in the leadership procedures.

4.4 Community organising

The other notable innovation driven by the ALP has been some experimentation with community organising networks, especially in the Victorian division. Following the Obama presidency, there was renewed interest in community organising, and a (re)discovery of Saul Alinsky's (1971) work "Rules for radicals". Leaders like Ed Miliband were noted enthusiasts, for example. The broader issue is that mainstream parties, in particular, are becoming more detached from local communities, and efforts to organise locally are seen as a way to re-embed within society. At the 2022 federal election, the rise of the teal independents, many of whom came from ground-up "voices of" movements, was seen as a vindication of community-led grassroots campaigning (Dunlop, 2022). This approach has not been widely adopted across the ALP, and there is some institutional resistance to it. Indeed, there is a case that minor parties and independents are much better placed to lead such exercises.

4.4 Union affiliation

The distinctive feature of the ALP is the formal affiliation of a number of key trade unions to the party, reflecting the long-standing view that the party was historically the main political voice for the industrialised (and unionised) working class. Over time, the union weighting of its voice at national and state conferences has diminished and now sits at a 50:50 weighting with conference delegates. In the 1970s, the weighting in many state branches was at 75%. While the party has made a number of reforms to recalibrate this relationship, it is arguably more telling that less-radical changes have not been formally adopted. There is perhaps something of an uneasy truce here, as the unions remain key financial backers of the party.

Trade union financial support is a major source of political control, and unions were the source of just over 50% of the party's total funds at the 2022 federal election (Griffiths and Chan, 2023). Union donations to the ALP remain strong, yet there are signs of some fragmentation across the union sector. There is some evidence that some unions are seeking to wield power through either increasing or reducing political donations and also donating to other parties. For example, in the run up to the 2013 federal election, the NTEU donated $1 million to the Greens' campaign. In 2014, the Electrical Trade Union gave $360,000 to the Greens, followed by the CFMEU, which gave $125,000 in the same year. In addition to donations, unions can de-affiliate from the party, as did the ETU in 2010. For the Albanese government, the new push for consensus-style politics, drawn from the Hawke era, is likely to receive favourable support from the union movement, more generally. It's unlikely that further organisational reforms will occur (such as further reducing the union bloc vote), but potential new governance structures might help pave a new road for both the ALP and its affiliate unions.

4.5 Donations and state funding

State or public funding remains the bedrock of the Australian political system, since its introduction in the 1980s, by the Hawke Labor government. It seeks to provide some form of state support for parties and "level the playing field". Yet, Australia's donation and party campaign regulatory regime remains very opaque, and fails to capture money flows with any great deal of adequacy (Griffiths and Chan, 2023). At the 2019 federal election, the Liberals received just over $27.5 million from public funding and the ALP received $24.6 million (Australian Electoral Commission, 2020). For the ALP, the unions remain the key financial backers, and generally are outspent by the Coalition. One of the key trends is the growth and use of investment vehicles by the parties, registered as "associated entities" under the electoral act, which provide key sources of funding. In 2022, for example, "Labor Holdings" was the second largest ALP donor with just over $2 million for the party.

The advent of the teal independents, pushing for greater integrity in Australian politics, may force the Albanese government to re-grasp the nettle of Australia's electoral funding regime. Yet, it's likely that the two major parties will block any significant major reforms. The professionalisation of politics has increased cost for parties (increased internal polling), but can be offset, in theory, by cheaper digital campaigning.

4.6 A more connective party?

A final area to consider in the party's overall organisation is its embrace of digital technologies. Generally, the Australian political parties have been quite late adopters of digital technologies, and candidates have not always been at the forefront of using social media.

In more recent elections, this has changed. In the most comprehensive survey of the use of data-driven campaigning, while the Liberals and the Greens make use of digital technologies, the ALP was the only one judged to be using truly "data-driven strategies" (Kefford, 2021). What's clear is that, while the ALP is trying to adopt and incorporate digital technologies and social media into its organisational DNA, it is still a very long way short of what Margetts has called the "cyber party" (Margetts, 2001). This speaks to a broader issue about the ALP's organisational structures, in that there are a number of voices in the party which recognise that it may be detaching from civil society in some respects, leading to its experiments with community organising. However, it has only slowly begun to rejuvenate its organisation to boost its critical democratic-linkage role.

4.7 The ALP's organisation in review

In this brief summary of the ALP's organisational structures, the key question is to ask if it is fit for purpose for the rest of the 21st century. There is a paradox at the heart of the ALP. Positively, it has proven to be a resilient vehicle, both at state and federal levels. There have been periodic crises, which touch upon some organisational malaise (NSW in the 2000s, Victoria more recently), but it has been crudely effective. Moreover, since the turmoil of the Rudd-Gillard era, it has managed to keep factional balances across the party – a remarkable and important achievement. At times, factional wars have proven very costly. The ALP can win elections; it receives substantial state funding and can attract donations. However, the ALP is very much a laggard in terms of organisational reform, and for many on the left, it is behind the other sister social democratic and labour parties. It has

renewed its leadership selection processes, increased membership to some extent, and experimented with technologies and community organisation. Yet, without a systematic overhaul of its organisational structures, there is a risk that it may become more detached from wider civil society.

5
Connecting the party and the electorate

5.1 A declining and ageing membership

In common with many advanced industrial societies, declining party membership is a long-standing trend, including in Australia (Van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke, 2012). Yet, this is not a uniform picture. In the mid-2010s, membership was estimated at about 37,000–38,000, but the most recent figure given by the party is just over 60,000 (Davies, 2020). A 2010 review of the ALP also confirmed a decline in membership, member activism and in the number of local branches. More positively, there have been two main surges in party membership: the first took place after the 2013 leadership selection reforms, which devolved input to the rank and file for the first time; and the second after the 2019 federal election. The issue of declining membership (and declining activism of members) remains a long-standing issue, although this debate has taken place since the 1960s.

Yet, this long-term picture of decline has to be offset by also reflecting upon the changing meaning of "membership" and the different ways that party *supporters* might engage (Gauja, 2015). UK Labour, more so

than the ALP, has been active in creating "supporter networks", which enable those sympathetic to the ALP to engage, but not commit to full membership (ibid). The UK Labour party has also been more proactive in its policy development processes, seeking to engage more broadly with the rank and file and wider supporters. The ALP, at different times, has indicated some willingness to experiment in this area, but has not created the institutional space to do so yet. There are concerns that current policy-making remains too centralised, and that a rank-and-file-led policy agenda might be "too left" to be electorally palatable. There is also some reticence about lowering some barriers to party membership more broadly. The case of the rise of Jeremy Corbyn, in part, fuelled by the left-leaning Momentum group, is seen as a warning for those who are more centrist or sit on the right factions of the parties.

The other concern aspect of Labor's declining rank-and-file base is its sociological profile. According to a key survey of the demographics of party members, "the analysis of the demographic characteristics of ALP party supporters in Australian states show that the median supporter is male, 30-44 years old, born in Australia and university educated" (Gauja and Grömping, 2020).

5.2 Labor and representation

Organisationally, the most positive story that Labor has to tell is regarding gender and female representation in terms of candidates and MPs (Hitch, 2021). In 1994, the party adopted a quota of 35% female representation in winnable seats, and this has now increased to 50% by 2025, extending to key party positions. The proof, as they say, is in the pudding. The party currently has 47% representation amongst its federal MPs, and one of the most balanced cabinets in Australian history. Moreover, it is in stark contrast to the failure of the coalition

parties to recruit and retain female MPs that has driven their downfall. A key part of the 2022 teal phenomenon is that, overwhelmingly, all the successful candidates were women.

There is a case that Labor needs to do better in terms of race and ethnicity, but it does also have a stronger record than the Coalition in championing and recruiting indigenous MPs. However, in terms of gender, the party has undergone a remarkable transformation, and, indeed, the highlights of Chalmer's economic agenda is a concerted focus on tackling gender pay inequity and related issues. A renewed Labor might do well to think more strategically about how it recruits from different social bases. An ongoing trend is the "middle classing" of politics, and, in Australia, like elsewhere, we can see evidence of how professional people dominate representation of MPs. A survey of the South Australian parliament is emblematic (see Table 6).

Table 6. MPs' employment background in the 54th South Australian parliament.

Background	No.	%
Business	19	27.5
Law	12	17.3
Unions	9	13
Public Sector	9	13
Farming/primary industries	4	5.8
Media/journalism	4	5.8
Local government	4	5.8
Staffer	3	4.3
Other/unclassified	5	7.2
Total	69	100

Source: Constructed from the 54th parliamentary directory.

Based on available data for the 54th South Australian parliament, approximately 72% of MPs had a university undergraduate degree. At the 2016 census, 16.2% of the South Australian population had attended a university (and 22.7% attended a tertiary or technical institution). Similarly, there is an over-representation of certain professions and employment backgrounds compared with the wider South Australian population.

There are clear patterns of employment linked to partisanship, with 18 of the 19 MPs having a background in business/private sector being either Liberals or former liberals. Likewise, all nine MPs from a union background are from the ALP. In summary, if we use education and employment background as proxy indicators for class, we see a strong over-representation of MPs coming from middle and high socioeconomic backgrounds.

This poses a problem for the ALP, in particular, as it risks not being able to demonstrate to its electorate that it can recruit MPs from the background of many of its core supporters. For example, at the 2022 federal election, the ALP lost the traditionally "safe" and ethnically diverse seat of Fowler in NSW. The ALP pre-selected the high-profile former NSW premier, Kristina Keneally, who lost the seat on preferences to local candidate and independent (and former Liberal) Dai Le.

5.3 The changing ALP electorate

The profile of Labor MPs can also be linked to wider changes to the electorate. The ALP faces a similar challenge to that its sister social democratic parties have faced – the declining vote share of its "working class base". This change both reflects long-standing changes in the class structure of the country, but also the changing profile of the party – especially as it continues to professionalise. In Table 7, the changing

profile of the support base of the two major parties is compared across three key recent elections. This data gives some indication of changes in the support profile, and where the predominate sources of support come from.

Table 7. Changing profile of ALP and Coalition voters.[8]

	1996		2007		2016	
	Labor	Liberal	Labor	Liberal	Labor	Liberal
Age						
18-24	30.5	39.7	47.7	34.6	37.3	29.7
25-34	42.6	38.2	44.4	32.5	37.9	28.6
35-44	41	39.9	47.5	35.2	33	37.7
45-54	29.8	55.2	46.6	37	40.4	35.1
55-64	30.2	51.6	43.6	40.6	35	38.3
65+	35.9	54.7	42	41.3	28	52.1
Gender						
Male	38.8	45	44.6	37.2	30.9	42.9
Female	34	47.4	45.1	38.7	38.3	34.1
Highest education						
Primary	36	47.2	45.1	40.1	38.2	36.6
Secondary	33.2	45				
Post-secondary (non-university)	39.2	45.4	40.6	40.6	33.4	40.2
University	38.4	44	45.9	32.3	33.8	37.5
Religion						
Catholic	40.4	45.4	48	37.6	38.3	41.2
Protestant	29.2	52.7	40.2	44.9	28.3	45.2
Orthodox/Eastern Catholic	56.4	34.5	47.6	42.9	46.9	45.3

Other	33.8	44.4	62.9	21.0	47.5	35.6
None	45.6	34.5	49	28.7	36.1	30.1
Household income						
Lowest quintile	42.6	42.6	52.2	28.1	40.8	28
Second quintile	34.3	48	48	36.1	35.9	38.7
Third quintile	36	42.8	44.9	35.9	34.9	38.1
Fourth quintile	39.6	45.7	41.8	40	31.5	38.5
Highest quintile	31.1	51.3	37.2	49	31.4	44.4
Location						
Rural area or village	31.2	46.9	37.8	34.7	29.1	34.6
Small or mid-sized town	35.8	38.1	52.3	26.1	32.5	35.8
Suburbs of large town or city	42	41.6	44.1	40.2	41.6	36.8
Large town or city	37.1	48.8	47.1	39.7	34.3	40.3
Left-right placement						
Of self	4.7	6.3	4.5	6.4	4	6.1
Of own party	5.1	6.8	4.9	7	4.4	6.5
Of main competitor party	6.3	3.7	6.6	3.8	6.3	3.5

There are a number of trends worth noting. Firstly, the ALP tends to receive much better support from younger people, which, if their voting behaviour continues to remain consistent, might bode well for the future. Secondly, on gender, the ALP receives a disproportionate level of support from women. At the 2022 federal election, this played out as a significant problem for the Liberals, but it also reflected how Labor might well be losing touch with some men in wider society. There is, perhaps, something analogous to Trump's win amongst disaffected men over Hilary Clinton, for example.

The data on class and education is arguably the most interesting. At the 1996 election, the Liberals received a higher proportion of higher education voters than the ALP, but this was reversed at the 2007 election, and then changed again for the 2013 election. The Liberals also draw more heavily from those with post-secondary qualifications (other than university) – arguably a key target group for the ALP. The data for household income – a useful proxy for class – is also striking. The ALP continues to draw its support much more heavily from those in the lowest income quintile, and the highest quintile still disproportionately favours the centre right. Yet, at the second quintile, this is a target group that the Coalition has often captured from the ALP, in two of the three elections featured here. This reflects a group of voters who are materially secure, but often see their electoral interests with the Coalition. From John Howard's phrasing, these are the „battlers" – the working class who, across Europe, are no longer rusted on and attached to the centre left.

In summary, there is the potential disjunct for the ALP between its MPs and candidates and the wider groups it seeks to represent. Labor does well to recruit and promote women and has strong support amongst the professions – from Thomas Piketty's phrasing – the „Brahmin left". Yet, the MPs of the ALP are drawn from a smaller social pool, and crucially, some of the poorer groups see the Coalition, not the ALP, as protecting their best interests. The 2022 election is emblematic of many of these changes, especially the class patterns of voting.

As political scientist Sarah Cameron puts it:

> *Although working class voters remain more likely to vote Labor than Liberal, their support for Labor has diminished over time […] [Results from the AES] […] indicate that since the 2016 election, both the Labor and Liberal parties have lost support from working class voters in favour of minor parties. While 48% of the working class voted*

Labor in 2016, this dropped to 38% in 2022. The Liberal vote declined to a similar degree. (Cameron, McAllister and Jackman, 2022).

If anything, the electoral challenge for the ALP will prove to be an ongoing challenge. More positively, in the short term, a competent, well-honed labourist ALP government should see at least a second term in office (and possibly a third) and should continue to profit from the fragmentation on the right. Yet, it will need to find new pathways to galvanise parts of the electorate that are increasingly looking to minor parties and independents to represent their political voice. The party system is changing and is more fluid, and there is a decline in support for the major parties. While Labor still attracts a sizable support from the working class, its overall low primary vote shows it is less socially embedded than it was in the 1950s to 1970s.

Endnotes

1 Two indices are used here: the effective number of electoral parties (ENEP, devised by Laakso and Taagepera, see: M. Laakso and R. Taagepera (1979) "'Effective' number of parties: A measure with application to West Europe". *Comparative Political Studies*, 1(12): 3-27. DOI: 10.1177/001041407901200101) and the effective number of parliamentary parties (ENPP). The former measures vote share for parties contesting elections, and the latter focuses on parliamentary presence. (See Casal Bértoa, F. (2013) "Post-communist politics: On the divergence (and/or) convergence of east and west". *Government and Opposition*, 3(48): 398-433. DOI: 10.1017/gov.2013.9.)

2 This section draws upon the Manifesto research on political representation (MARPOR) dataset, which codes political party manifestos (or proxy documents) to outline the key policies that political parties present at key elections. The RILE index is a compositive score, which places the parties on a left/right scale based on their policy commitments. Further details can be found on the Manifesto website. There is also a time lag in coding manifestos and publishing data. At the date of publication of this case study, the 2019 and most recent 2022 manifestos had not been coded (see A. Volkens, T. Burst, W. Krause et al. (2020) "Manifesto project dataset". Manifesto Project (MRG/CMP/MARPOR). Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB)).

3 Labor's leadership system was a 50% split between members and 50% between caucus MPs.

4 Throughout social democratic history, there has been a controversial debate about the role of labourism. For early socialists, it was seen as a betrayal of the socialist cause, in that the immediate focus was on securing improvements in wages and job conditions, rather than remaking capitalism. Contemporary labourism is distinctive in that it focuses less narrowly on the working class (especially those in manual and blue-collar sectors), but more broadly on low-paid workers activating specific "underemployed" social groups.

5 The fourth stage of Albanese's strategy was the formal six-week election campaign, not covered in depth here.

6 Changing Australia's constitution is comparatively difficult to achieve. For a referendum to be successful, it needs to receive a double majority. This consists of a majority of total votes cast nationwide, and a majority of votes in at least four out of six states.

7 For a more systematic review of all the main party reform proposals and their adoption, see: Barda, D. (2020) "A review of all the ALP reform reviews – 50 years of soul searching – 1964 on". 1 October.

8 All data constructed from the CHES and AES surveys. Thanks to Dr Josh Holloway at Flinders for valuable work in producing this data.

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Biography

Dr Rob Manwaring is an Associate Professor at Flinders University in Adelaide, South Australia. Rob teaches politics and public policy, and his main research interests are in centre-left political parties. In 2021, his book, 'The Politics of Social Democracy' was published with Routledge.