A short political history of Australia

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Key terms/names

Australian Labor Party, bicameralism, colonialism, Constitution, the Dismissal, Federation, Gough Whitlam, High Court, Indigenous Australians, Julia Gillard, Liberals/Liberal Party of Australia, *Mabo v Queensland (No 2)*, Medicare, National Party of Australia/Country Party, Robert Menzies, self-government, squatters, suffrage, White Australia policy/*Immigration Restriction Act 1901* (Cth)

Non-Indigenous peoples have occupied land in Australia for 230 years, bringing different ways of life and forms of government to those of the Indigenous peoples they displaced. Today, Australia is one of the most multicultural societies in the world, and its politics focuses on securing high living standards for a diverse population. But before the Second World War, Australia was overwhelmingly white and Anglo-Celtic. As a settler society, political conflicts were dominated by disputes over the distribution of natural resources and, later, political power. Politics in the colonial and Federation eras established institutions, rules and norms that continue to shape national government and politics in Australia.

From Dreamtime to European settlement

Indigenous people first arrived in Australia over 60,000 years ago. They brought with them customs and law. While Indigenous customary laws varied across tribal groups, there were some common aspects. Customary law was part of the oral tradition and reflected Indigenous peoples' religious beliefs and their connection with the land. These laws were passed down the generations, from elders to children.

Indigenous laws were sets of rules enforced through social norms and sanctions. They included internal and external mechanisms for maintaining order and managing disputes. These laws considered kinship relations and stipulated rights and responsibilities according to individuals' roles within the community. Decision making was often collective and deliberative. Customary law shaped Indigenous lives, from when and how to get married to when and how tribes should go to war. At the time of first contact Indigenous societies were governed by these laws.[1]

However, neither Indigenous claims to land nor their laws were recognised by the British when the First Fleet arrived in 1788. The colony was established on martial lines and was dominated by men, both in the militia and as convicts. London was nine months away by ship. This degree of isolation effectively rendered the governor a dictator.

When New South Wales (NSW) was established, British politics was influenced by 'enlightened' interests that argued (naively) for colonial expansion with minimal violence. Thus, Indigenous peoples were present in early Sydney, and attempts to 'gift' Christian civilisation to Indigenous peoples were simultaneously exercises of good will and coercion. While early governors often acted as a force for restraint, the steady expansion of pastoral interests saw the spread of both sanctioned and unsanctioned violence against the Indigenous population. Indigenous peoples continued to resist the occupation of their lands and disproportionately suffered the consequences of war, massacre and disease.[2]

Politics in NSW was dominated by its governor, the militia and conflicts between free settlers and emancipated convicts over access to land. The problematic links between the militia and government manifested in the Rum Rebellion (1808), after Governor Bligh attempted to break the militia's illicit alcohol trade. In response, London sent Governor Macquarie and replacement troops to restore order. Macquarie (1810–21) perhaps did the most to develop early NSW. He built major public works and introduced the first bank and a currency. Macquarie was also sympathetic to the former convicts (emancipists) and granted them lands, which upset the free settlers, many of whom were also members of the militia. Macquarie's eventual dismissal highlighted London's important role in colonial governance.

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1   Law Reform Commission 1986.
2   Reynolds 1987.

Self-government and gold

By 1820, European settlers numbered only 33,000. NSW's nascent (male-dominated) civil society generated demands for representation. Naturally, the model for government was based upon the British concept of responsible government and developed in stages. In 1823, an appointed seven-member Legislative Council was created to advise the governor. Seven elected councillors were added in 1828. The council was expanded in 1842 with more appointed members. In 1850, the British parliament legislated for limited democratic self-government in the Australian colonies.

By contrast, South Australia (SA) was established as a free colony in 1834. Enshrined in its enabling Act were principles of political and religious freedom, reflecting the settlers' determination to develop without convict labour. The settlers used land sales to fund passage for free skilled labourers and guarded against dictatorial government by dividing political rule between the governor and the 'Resident Commissioner'. This experiment quickly broke down, and the SA parliament developed in stages, along similar lines to NSW. However, SA was a beacon of democratic innovation. In its constitution (1856), it adopted universal suffrage for all men (including Indigenous men) and low or no property qualifications to sit in parliament. It continued to innovate, granting propertied women the right to vote in 1861. In a British Empire first, SA legalised trade unions in 1876 and granted all (including Indigenous women) the right to vote and to stand as a candidate for elected office in 1894.

Victoria became a separate colony from NSW in 1851. That same year, large deposits of gold were discovered, sparking a gold rush. Keen to secure a share of this wealth, Victoria introduced a much-hated mining license. Resentment against the licence fee grew on the Ballarat goldfields, resulting in the celebrated 'Eureka Stockade'. Under the Eureka flag, a brief pitched battle was fought between miners, asserting their claimed rights and liberties, and police in December 1854. The result was 22 deaths. Later, Melbourne juries refused to convict the rebels. This popular feeling infused Victoria's self-government debate with a democratic flavour.

However, the most important impact of the discovery of gold was on the development of Victoria itself, tripling its population between 1850 and 1860. By the 1880s, 'Marvellous Melbourne' was Australia's largest city. Gold became one of Australia's key exports (alongside wool and wheat), and both the revenues and the influx of young working-age men expanded the economy and fuelled Australia's first long economic boom, which lasted until the 1890s crash.

Dividing resources and allotting rights

At the time of self-government, politics in the Australian colonies was shaped by high levels of immigration of English and Scots. These immigrants were steeped in

the working-class culture of 'the people's charter' and the early union organisation of Britain's 'hungry 1840s'. This brought an early form of social-democratic politics and ideas of utilitarianism (a strand of ethical thought emphasising the promotion of the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people) to Australia.

The division of the continent's natural resources was at the heart of colonial politics. These political battles were important for establishing the institutions and principles that Australian democracy would continue to follow.

The British Crown owned all the land and could choose how to distribute it. Australia's natural grasslands precipitated the pastoral industry's rapid expansion and the rise of 'squatters' – illegal occupants of vast grazing estates, who pushed out the frontier well ahead of the colonial surveyors. Squatters rapidly became wealthy and powerful 'wool kings'.

As the numbers of free settlers increased, conflict arose about the distribution of land. The squatters were eager to secure legal rights to their occupied lands. Opposing them were the 'selectors' – free colonists wanting a farming life on a 'selection' of land. Although the following describes NSW, similar events repeated themselves across the colonies. Squatters used their existing clout to shape suffrage provisions in several colonies. Voting rights were based on property ownership, and the squatters successfully locked out ordinary colonist from the upper chambers of colonial legislatures by setting high property qualifications.

In NSW, the squatters' liberal-minded opponents were able to dominate the lower chamber almost from the beginning of self-government. Liberals wanted to break up the 'squattocracy' and release this land to prospective selectors. They petitioned London to extend voting rights (suffrage) to all men paying a £10 per year rent. This was an expensive rent in the UK and would safely exclude the working classes. However, in high-inflation, gold rush Australia, this price was the norm. The result was that the British legislated near-universal male suffrage in the Australian colonies in 1855.[3]

Thus, a wide franchise, a hostile governor and the policy preferences of the London Colonial Office saw the squatters' privileges curtailed and some of their pastoral holdings broken up. Liberal forces were also successful in securing Britain's agreement to end transportation during the 1850s (SA never accepted convicts, while Western Australia [WA] continued taking them until 1868). These changes illustrate the continued influence of Britain in Australia's political life during the 19th century.

Australia's economy was overwhelmingly rurally based, and squatters successfully kept the best lands for themselves. Land given to 'selectors' was too small and unprofitable. The resulting rural poverty saw the rise of bushrangers such as Ned Kelly. In 1891, the Australian Labor Party (ALP) was formed, centring on the mining and shearing industries. That year, it succeeded in winning four seats in SA

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3   Hirst 1988.

and 35 seats in NSW. The ALP was the union movement's political wing, providing parliamentary representation for its working-class base. It was the first labourist party in the world to win power – for a week in Queensland in 1899 and for four months at the federal level in 1904.

Setting the rules of the game: Federation to the World Wars

The decades surrounding Federation in 1901 saw Australians willing to engage in creative democratic experimentation. Events and decisions made at this time would shape Australian politics until the 1980s.

The Federation debates

The push for Federation was the result of changing economic and geopolitical circumstances. The depression of the 1890s – more severe than the Great Depression – incentivised the creation of a single economic market. Another argument was that a nation would be better able to defend the mostly empty continent.

Through two constitutional conventions, debate focused on how to manage so large a land mass while balancing the interests of more and less populous colonies. Heated debates occurred around the exact powers of the proposed Senate, ultimately resolved by granting the Senate near equal powers (except the ability to introduce money bills) to those of the proposed lower house. A bill of rights was debated but not introduced.[4]

The final model drew on the bicameral UK, but with significant (federal) elements adapted from the USA and Switzerland. Narrowly approved on its second attempt, Australia federated in 1901. But the debate excluded working men, the Labor Party, virtually all women and all Indigenous people. Indeed, Indigenous peoples were not counted in the Census until 1967.

Electoral innovation and women's suffrage

Elections in the 19th century were violent affairs. Winning often depended upon bribery and the copious provision of alcohol. Australia was no different, until it pioneered the adoption of the secret ballot (or 'Australian ballot') and banned alcohol. These interventions transformed elections from wild affairs to safe and dignified ones – socially acceptable events for women to participate in.

SA was a leader on women's suffrage. WA followed suit in 1899. Federation was predicated on accepting existing voting rights in the colonies, and this proved pivotal to granting all white women voting and candidacy rights at federal elections from 1902. Yet women's representation was persistently low. The first woman

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4   Galligan 1995.

elected to any Australian parliament was Edith Cowan in WA in 1921. Women did not enter federal parliament until 1943 (Enid Lyons [Liberal] in the House of Representatives and Dorothy Tangney [ALP] in the Senate).[5] In 2010, Julia Gillard became Australia's first female prime minister.

Solidification of the party system

At the time of Federation, politics was split between three political forces: the Victorian-based 'Protectionist' liberals, the somewhat mislabelled conservative 'Free Traders' and the working-class ALP. Both the liberal and conservatives forces were loose coalitions rather than formal parties. They struggled to compete with the ALP's discipline – the result of 'the pledge', which bound ALP parliamentarians to vote along party lines on pain of expulsion. At the time, politicians were not paid and working-class Labor representatives could be easily induced to switch sides.[6]

At the federal level, three voting blocs produced several short-lived minority parliaments before 1909. This frustrated politicians like Alfred Deakin (a Protectionist and three-time prime minister) who were used to the two-party politics of colonial legislatures. Deakin termed this 'the three cricketing elevens', implying it was ill-suited to Westminster-style politics. Deakin and the Free-Trade/Anti-Socialist leader Joseph Cook choose to 'fuse' their parties to oppose Labor. Deakin rejected Labor on the grounds of its illiberal 'pledge', which offended his belief in individual conscience. The fusion of 1909 has proved long-lasting, as forerunner of the Liberal Party of Australia.[7]

Social laboratory

In the decade after Federation, Australia was considered a leading social and democratic laboratory. In addition to women's suffrage, Australia was also at the forefront in social policy, including the aged pension, child endowment, the industrial arbitration system and the indexed living wage for male workers. These payments cemented the idea of Australia as the 'working man's paradise', but they also placed women at a disadvantage. The living wage was designed for a man to support a wife and three children in a 'dignified' manner, but this standard justified *legislated* lower wages for women and stymied attempts at parity until 1969.

At Federation, the Australian economy was in the doldrums because of shifting global economic conditions and the devastating Federation drought, which depressed the rural sector.[8] Population growth slowed and politics focused on maintaining high wage levels, which saw the extension of the state into areas of public health and welfare, but also measures to lock out 'cheap' Asian labour.

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5   Sawer and Simms 1993.
6   Loveday, Martin and Parker 1977.
7   Brett 2003.
8   McLean 2013.

Advocacy for the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* (Cth) was led by the ALP, but the Act was supported by all parties.[9] It drew on earlier colonial practices, instigated in reaction to the influx of Chinese miners during the gold rushes. Support was underpinned by racist and nationalist sentiment linked to Anglo-Australians' self-identification as subjects of the British Empire and members of the 'British race'. Under the Act, customs officers could apply a 'dictation' language test to screen out racially, and later politically, undesirable people. This system ended plantation-style sugar farming in north Queensland, which depended upon the importation (but often kidnapping and enslavement, known as 'blackbirding') of indentured labour from the Pacific. It also restricted the flow of Asian immigration until the policy was moderated from the mid-1960s and then formally repealed in 1973.

First World War

When the First World War broke out, Labor Prime Minister Andrew Fisher declared that Australia would support Britain 'to the last man and the last shilling'.[10] Thousands of volunteers joined up to fight for the 'mother country'. However, opponents also mobilised; former suffragists such as Vida Goldstein formed peace movements. As the war continued, conditions on the home front deteriorated, including industrial conflict over low wages and shortages. Those that protested often fell afoul of the punitive *War Precautions Act 1914* (Cth), which saw many activists jailed for public dissent.[11]

Conflict over whether to introduce conscription became protracted, eventually splitting the governing Labor Party. Disagreement within the government about conscription stemmed from religious and ethnic divisions between Protestant Anglo-Saxon Australians desirous of supporting the Empire and Irish Catholic Australians hostile to Britain over the issue of Irish independence. Billy Hughes, a Protestant, led a breakaway group of Labor MPs to join forces with the conservatives, forming the Nationalist Party. Hughes, as prime minister, attempted twice to introduce conscription via referendums in 1916 and 1917. Both were defeated. These bitter campaigns entrenched existing sectarian divisions in Australia between Catholic pro-Labor and Protestant anti-Labor supporters that would persist until the mid-1950s.

Australia was devastated psychologically and economically by the First World War. The nation was disproportionately impacted by the war's effects on British Empire trade – unable to sell its exports or import the manufactured goods it required. Many of the men who died during the war were young and well educated.

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9   Dyrenfurth 2011.
10   Murphy 1981.
11   Wright 2018.

Australia took on loans, on top of an existing heavy debt burden, to finance the war, and this retarded economic recovery into the 1920s.[12]

Between the wars

In the interwar period, Australia turned away from the world, attracting few immigrants and raising tariffs to protect its manufacturing sector. Many Australians were frightened of the political forces unleashed by the war: namely socialism, communism and Irish nationalism (Fenianism). The optimism that characterised the Federation decades was replaced by deep mourning. The Returned Services League became a major force in politics. Their advocacy of solider settlement schemes often proved disastrous as inexperienced farmers were given marginal farming lands with little support.

These interwar years saw major political developments. First was the creation of new parties on the right: the Country Party (1919; now called the Nationals), the Nationalist Party (1911–31) and the latter's successor, the United Australia Party (UAP) (1931–45). The formation of the Nationalist–Country Coalition in 1922 instigated a century of co-operation between the parties of the right. Second was the introduction of compulsory voting for federal elections in 1924. Third was the High Court's successive rulings in favour of centralising power in the federal government, as cases were brought to clarify constitutional powers.[13]

During the interwar years, Labor endured opposition at the federal level until finally winning government on the eve of the Great Depression. The Scullin Labor government was quickly overwhelmed and, in 1931, the party split over how the government should respond. Labor Cabinet minister Joseph Lyons defected and took up the leadership of the new UAP, winning the 1932 election. The Great Depression was particularly severe in Australia, with unemployment peaking at 32 per cent in 1932. This laid the foundation of a post-Second World War consensus, predicated on the principles of full employment and the 'fair' distribution of wealth.

War and reconstruction

The Second World War ushered in a new political era. To fight the war, the federal government asked the states to *temporarily* withdraw from collecting income tax. The states lost their challenge in the High Court, which ruled that the Common-wealth held priority over income tax. In 1946, the Chifley federal government announced that it would continue 'uniform taxation' in exchange for reimbursing the states for their forgone income tax revenue. These decisions are the origins of contemporary political conflicts in Australia, where the states are responsible for the provision of services such as health, education and transport, but the federal

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12   McLean 2013.
13   Galligan 1995.

government has more of the revenue needed to fund them. Although the High Court's decision was reversed in 1957, it proved too difficult to change existing arrangements, despite multiple attempts by state premiers and even prime ministers.

The war was fought on the principle that a new social compact would follow; postwar reconstruction would see a more equal society and a bigger state. The Curtin and Chifley Labor governments attempted to deliver on this promise by continuing the wartime command economy (a government-planned economy) to direct labour into needed public works. Labor attempted to cement this extension of the state's role in the Constitution with the '14 powers referendum' in 1944, which would have enabled the introduction of a European-style welfare state. Like its attempt to nationalise the banks, this referendum was defeated.[14]

In foreign policy, the war remade the geopolitical map, split between the capitalist West and the communist East. Even before the Cold War, Australia had shifted towards the US alliance, as a war-exhausted Britain could no longer guarantee Australia's security. Japan's military aggression during the Second World War had highlighted the vulnerability of a thinly populated Australia. Labor also required more workers to fulfil its postwar reconstruction plans. This provided the impetus to commence large-scale immigration in 1947. Attempts to induce British migrants with assisted passage were not sufficient, and Labor responded by recruiting from among the millions of refugees in Europe. The initial arrivals were carefully managed, selecting only young, blond and mostly male migrants to allay community unease.[15] By 1973, nearly three million migrants, including 170,000 refugees, had immigrated to Australia.[16]

After 1945

The long postwar economic boom made Australia more equal; both the Chifley Labor and Menzies Liberal governments broadly implemented policies that reduced relative income inequality and maintained 'full employment'. At this time, federal governments exercised substantial powers to manage the economy. Elected in 1949, Robert Menzies' Liberals favoured a regulated and subsidised private sector. The Liberals took risks on extending federal funding to Catholic schools and opening up trade with Japan, as these had the potential to split the party's own base. Menzies' rejection of the Vernon report in 1965 also signalled that Australia would not increase technocratic economic planning, which dominated practice in Western Europe. Broadly, Liberal governments supported the status quo and Australia's links with Britain.

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14   Macintyre 2015.
15   Persian 2015.
16   Jupp 2002.

Politics at this time was shaped by the threat of communism at home and within Asia. Abroad, Australians fought in Korea (1950–52), Malaysia (1964–66) and Vietnam (1962–72). At home, Menzies failed to ban the Communist Party in a referendum in 1951 but was able to capitalise on the defection of Soviet attachés Vladimir and Evdokia Petrov in 1954, winning the subsequent snap election. Inside the ALP, tensions between communist and anti-communist organisers in the union movement exploded. The ALP's organisational wing operated on a delegate model, with unions accounting for the largest share of delegates. The rival groups fought for a controlling influence over the party and the result was 'the split' in 1955. The split saw a breakaway party of Catholic anti-communists emerge, the Democratic Labor Party (DLP), mostly concentrated in Victoria.[17]

The DLP came to hold the balance of power in the Senate, capitalising on the switch to a proportional voting system in the upper house in 1949. This was the beginning of the end for governments' expectation that they could rely on a majority in the Senate. This shift was also important to the Senate's increasing tendency to utilise its full set of powers.[18] The DLP influenced the outcome of successive elections, advising its supporters to give their second preference to the Liberals rather than the ALP. This helped to keep the Liberals in power at the federal level for 23 years.

The Whitlam government

During the 1960s, the economic and social foundations of the postwar consensus began to corrode, ushering in the political debates we recognise today. The Whitlam government's (1972–75) slogan 'It's Time' both encapsulated and prefigured political forces arising from the women's and gay liberation, and environmental, ethnic and Indigenous social movements. Whitlam led a chaotic but transformative government, enacting universal health care (Medibank), free university education, multiculturalism and equal pay for equal work, establishing the family court, introducing no-fault divorce and tariff reduction, returning the Wave Hill Station to the Guringdi people and attempting to legalise abortion, to name a few. The pace of change was breakneck and the rate of spending ruinously inflationary.

The Liberal Party, unused to opposition, attacked the legitimacy of the government, using its Senate majority to force it to an early election in 1974. The Liberals continued to press the government, and a year later the now scandal-ridden Whitlam administration was locked in a game of chicken with the Senate over its budget. The 'Dismissal crisis' emerged when Whitlam attempted to break the deadlock by seeking an election from the governor-general, Sir John Kerr. But before Whitlam could ask for a new poll, Kerr sacked him. Despite the outraged crowds – typified by those who witnessed Whitlam's famous quip 'Well may we

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17   Costar, Love and Strangio 2005.
18   Taflaga 2018b.

say "God save the Queen", because nothing will save the Governor-General' – the Liberals, led by Malcolm Fraser, went on to win the 1975 election by the largest majority in postwar history.[19]

Indigenous rights

Indigenous Australians have persistently advocated for their people since first contact. Indigenous peoples defended their lands by force, petitioned Queen Victoria and government authorities, organised advocacy leagues in the 1920s and undertook freedom rides (a form of protest where Indigenous and white activists travelled around regional NSW to survey and bring to public attention the everyday racial discrimination faced by Indigenous peoples) in the 1960s.[20] In 1967, Australians voted overwhelmingly to remove the prohibition on the federal parliament legislating with respect to Indigenous people and to count Indigenous Australians in the Census. The referendum was not about granting voting rights – Indigenous people could already vote at federal elections if they held the right at the state level.[21]

Indigenous people continued to advocate for land rights and greater autonomy over their lives. Two landmark High Court cases, known as *Mabo*[22] and *Wik*,[23] overturned the doctrine of terra nullius. The latter found that pastoral leases did not extinguish native title claims. These decisions paved the way for Indigenous groups to seek native title over their land. However, the High Court's decisions also produced a backlash, particularly in regional Australia. The Howard government responded with its 'Wik 10 Point Plan', which curbed the scope of the decision and affirmed pastoral leaseholders' and miners' existing rights.

Australia in a globalised world

Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser represented a transition in Australian politics between the long boom consensus and the new politics of monetarism, deregulation and globalisation. Fraser retained, or could not unwind, most of Whitlam's reforms,[24] with the notable exception of Medibank, which was privatised. Fraser actively extended and cemented Australia's commitment to multiculturalism and antiracism, accepting tens of thousands of Vietnamese refugees. While Fraser

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19   Hocking 2012.
20   Curthoys 2002.
21   Attwood and Markus 2007.
22   *Mabo v Queensland (No 2)* [1992] HCA 23 (*Mabo*).
23   *Wik Peoples v State of Queensland and Ors; Thayorre People v State of Queensland and Ors* [1996] HCA 40 (*Wik*).
24   Dowding and Martin 2017.

set Australia on the path towards economic reform, it was the Labor Hawke–Keating government (1983–96) that truly grasped the nettle.

In the 1980s, Labor governments relinquished control over several economic levers (such as the exchange rate) to open the Australian economy to global competition. They also came to a series of 'Accords' with the union movement over wages. In exchange, these Labor governments extended the welfare state, introducing the universal health scheme Medicare. Labor navigated a 'third way' between the socialism of the postwar left and the neoliberalism of the 'new right' in the 1980s. The ALP finally succeeded in winning more than two terms in a row at the federal level, but at a cost. By 1996, many of the party's left felt that Labor's socialist credentials had been betrayed.[25]

Labor embraced postmaterial politics, adopting progressive positions on women, the environment, gay rights, Indigenous affairs and multiculturalism. By the 1990s, reform fatigue had set in. John Howard's Liberals harnessed a community backlash with their 1996 campaign slogan 'For All of Us', which rejected the politics of 'the elites' in favour of 'ordinary Australians'. Howard argued for a 'relaxed and comfortable' Australia that celebrated the nation's history and culture. This was the forerunner of today's 'culture wars'.[26]

The Howard government (1996–2007) embarked upon major reforms in its early years, introducing a goods and services tax, industrial relations reforms and strict gun control. Two events in 2001 came to dominate the government's later years. The first was the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York, which led Australia to join the 'War on Terror' in Afghanistan and Iraq. The second was the *Tampa* crisis, where the Australian government became involved in a standoff with a cargo ship that had rescued asylum seekers from a sinking vessel. The *Tampa* incident brought to a head a crisis in the immigration detention system, which had been established by the Keating government. The eventual result was the beginning of the offshore detention system. The *Tampa* crisis transformed immigration into a contestable political issue, where previous attempts in the 1980s and 1990s invited strong censure as racist.[27] Today, both major parties are advocates of offshore detention and boat turn-backs (despite the Rudd Labor government's brief liberalisation).

Finally, the emergence of the environmental movement in the 1970s crystallised into political action and party formation, first in Tasmania in 1972 and later federally in 1992.[28] Global warming was first raised as a political issue in the 1980s. Given Australia's access to cheap coal and its position as an exporter, the Howard government resisted joining global efforts to combat climate change. The

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25 Bongiorno 2015.
26 Brett 2003.
27 Taflaga 2018a.
28 Jackson 2016.

issue has continued to plague Australian politics, playing a role in the downfall of successive prime ministers on both sides of the aisle since 2007.

Conclusions

Contemporary Australia's colonial and post-Federation political history begins with the displacement of its Indigenous peoples. The mode of politics reflects, first, the adaption of British, and the development of unique Australian, institutions. These institutions have set the 'rules of the game' and helped Australia to peacefully manage the division of natural and political resources among its non-Indigenous settlers. Second, as Australian society has changed, either through immigration or by accommodating the demands for access to the public sphere by successive groups, it has continued to adapt its institutions in order to cope with new challenges and demands without serious political strife or collapse.

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