Politics, Policy Development and Political Communication during Opposition:

The Federal Liberal Party of Australia 1983 – 1996 and 2007– 2013

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Statement of originality

This study has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis.

Marija Taflaga

Abstract

This thesis argues that opposition is an opportunity to study our major political parties in the 'raw'. Parties without the support of government departments and the resources of incumbency must rely on their own internal structures and the skill set of their Senators and Members of Parliament. It is in opposition that we can truly examine and assess how well party processes function and their capabilities. The Liberal Party of Australia (LPA) represents an interesting case study for parties in opposition because its inexperience at opposition offer political scientists a rare opportunity to observe a party attempting to learn new skill sets. Through an historical comparative study this thesis examines the LPA (and to some extent its coalition partner) in opposition between 1983-1996 and 2007-2013. It examines how, over time, the LPA attempted to prepare itself for government by examining its approach parliament, internal party management, its policy-making processes and political communication strategies. The study draws on several methodological approaches in order to triangulate results — interviews with key actors, private papers maintained by leading Liberal party actors, as well as publicly available documentation and media reports.

This study finds that the practice of opposition in intensely political, contrary to most common conceptualisations in the literature. It argues for a more complex understanding of the LPA's leadership ethos — one that recognises the expectations of shadow ministers and the backbench and the reciprocal nature of the leadership in the LPA. The study also finds evidence of increasing professionalism in the LPA's use of media since 1983 and the mediatisation of politics. It explores why political parties become mediatised, arguing that the reason lies in party actors' assumptions about what will help them capture office.

The study argues that for most of the 1980s, the LPA aspired to be a credible alternative government and a constructive opposition with thought-out policy proposals. Policy was central to political actors' assumptions about effective political communication, even if it struggled to achieve this and its resources often proved inadequate to the task. Not until losing the 'unlosable election' in 1993 did the LPA abandon policy advocacy as its idealised key strategy for attempting to win office. By contrast, the opposition between 2007 and 2013 (and particularly 2010 to 2013) pursued an overwhelmingly negative approach to opposition designed to destroy the Gillard government's credibility rather than

build up its own. Political actors' assumptions about the purpose of policy had dramatically altered. Policy was no longer a vital tool to build-up credibility and win office. Instead, actors believed that strategically managing issues in the media was more important. As a result of the hung parliament and the lessons learned from the 1980s, the emphasis of the post-2007 Opposition had shifted to capturing office, because this was considered the most effective way to make political change.

Thus, the study demonstrates how the party became increasingly mediatised between 1983 and 1996 and argues that between 2007 and 2013 that the party had internalised 'media logics' to the extent where the opposition invested only minimally in policy development during this period and political success was used as a justification for limiting the amount of information given to voters about their intentions for government. This study raises important implications about whether or not parties are adequately preparing for government in opposition.

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Abbreviations

ALP Australian Labor Party

CPRS Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme

ETS Emissions trading scheme

HoR House of Representatives

LNP Liberal-National Party

LPA Liberal Party of Australia

MPs Members of Parliament

MHRs Members of the House of Representatives

NAA National Archives of Australia

NDIS National Disability Insurance Scheme

NMLS National Media Liaison Service, Also known as (aNiMaLS)

NPA National Party of Australia

Introduction

Inglorious and bereft: why study oppositions?

Since the Second World War government at the Commonwealth level has passed from one party to another just seven times in 71 years. Accordingly, in Australia the shift from opposition to government is a relatively rare occurrence. For those parties in opposition, their tenure in opposition has been for a reasonably lengthy period of time. Given the early adoption of disciplined parties and the gradual evolution of the party system over the twentieth century, Australian politics is still largely driven by the dynamics of the two-party system.[1] For the moment, competition for government still remains the preserve of the two *major* parties despite the rise of the Australian Greens. Alternation between government and opposition, or rather between government and alternative government, still remains the key mechanism for political renewal in the Australian polity.[2] The presence of an institutionalised opposition, as a legitimate source of dissent and critique of the state, plays no small part in the democratic understanding of our politics.[3] For these reasons alone, we should seek to better understand the phenomenon of opposition.

Time in opposition is an important part of a major party's life cycle, even if it remains inglorious and would rather be forgotten by those that must endure its rigours. The question of how major parties cope with the deprivations of opposition is not well explored in the Australia context.[4] The dynamics and impact of opposition on parties is far better understood in other jurisdictions such as the United Kingdom.[5] But given the opposition's importance to the overall health of the political system, how

[1] For debates about the nature of Australia's party system see Ian Marsh, ed., *Political Parties in Transition?* (Annandale, N.S.W: Federation Press, 2006); Ariadne Vromen, Katharine Gelber, and Anika Gauja, *Powerscape: Contemporary Australian Politics*, 2nd ed (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2009); Ian Ward and Randal G. Stewart, *Politics One* (South Yarra, Vic: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Narelle Miragliotta, Wayne Errington, and Nicholas Barry, *The Australian Political System in Action* (South Melbourne, Victoria: Oxford University Press, 2013); Narelle Miragliotta, Anika Gauja, and Rodney Smith, eds., *Contemporary Australian Political Party Organisations* (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University, 2015).

[2] Graham Maddox, *Australian Democracy in Theory and Practice* (Melbourne: Longman Australia, 1996), 277–78.

[3] Robert Alan Dahl, ed., *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966); Rodney S Barker, ed., *Studies in Opposition* (London: Macmillan, 1971); Eva Kolinsky, *Opposition in Western Europe* (London: Croom Helm, 1987); R. A. W Rhodes, John Wanna, and Patrick Weller, *Comparing Westminster* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Ludger Helms, *Parliamentary Opposition in Old and New Democracies* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009).

[4] Recent notable exceptions include Norman Abjorensen, *Leadership and the Liberal Revival: Bolte, Askin and the Post-War Ascendency* (Kew, Victoria: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2007); Ian Hancock, *The Liberals: A History of the NSW Division of the Liberal Party of Australia, 1945-2000* (Annandale, NSW: Federation Press, 2007); Paul Strangio, *Neither Power nor Glory: 100 Years of Political Labor in Victoria,1856-1956* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 2012).

[5] For example see Archibald Foord, *His Majesty's Opposition, 1714-1830* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964); John David Hoffman, *The Conservative Party in Opposition, 1945-51* (London: Macgibbon & Kee, 1964); R. M.

parties attempt to extract themselves from opposition can tell us much about their own political culture and behaviour. Moreover, their successes and failures can reveal much about the way party politics operates in the Australian context. The specific nature of opposition and its relation to the party system will be explored at length in chapter one.

Opposition is an opportunity to study political parties in the 'raw', sustained only by their own resources. Parties without the support of government departments and the resources of incumbency must rely on their own internal structures and the skill set of their Senators and Members of Parliament (MPs). It is in opposition that we can truly examine and assess how well party processes function and determine their capabilities. Opposition remains an important training ground for ministerial governance and acts as an apprenticeship in balancing political and public policy imperatives.[6]

The natural party of government: Why the Liberal party?

The Liberal Party of Australia (LPA) is under-studied in comparison to its main rival, the Australian Labor Party (ALP). The party's record as Australia's most successful political party is warrant enough to justify an examination of the party's history and evolution. In recent years, political scientists and historians have focused on the party's philosophy and ideology yet have left the party's internal policy-making processes less well examined even though this is the key process that transforms ideology into political action.[7] One reason for this neglect is the party's very success. There are extensive studies on how the LPA has exercised power in government through an analysis of their government structures and policy achievements and failures. The fact remains that there are relatively fewer standalone studies of the Liberal party in its own right, let alone of its periods out of government. The literature on the Liberal party will be examined in the next chapter.

Punnett, *Front-Bench Opposition: The Role of the Leader of the Opposition, the Shadow Cabinet and Shadow Government in British Politics* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1973); Mark Garnett and Philip Lynch, eds., *The Conservatives in Crisis: The Tories After 1997* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003); Nigel Fletcher, *How to Be in Opposition: Life in the Political Shadows* (Great Britain: Biteback, 2011); Timothy Heppell, ed., *Leaders of the Opposition : From Churchill to Cameron* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[6] John Uhr and John Wanna, 'The Future Roles of Parliament', in *Institutions on the Edge?: Capacity for Governance*, ed. John Wanna, Patrick Weller, and Michael Keating (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2000); Anne Tiernan and Patrick Weller, *Learning to Be a Minister: Heroic Expectations, Practical Realities* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 2010), Chapter 3; Marija Taflaga, 'The Challenges of Transitioning from Opposition to Government: Liberal Party Planning for Government 1983 – 1996', *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, accepted and forthcoming 2016.

[7] J. R. Nethercote, *Liberalism and the Australian Federation* (Annandale, NSW: Federation Press, 2001); Judith Brett, *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People* (Chippendale, NSW: Macmillan Australia, 2007); Judith Brett, *The Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class: From Alfred Deakin to John Howard* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Judith Brett, *Exit Right: The Unravelling of John Howard* (Melbourne: Black Inc, 2007); Abjorensen, *Leadership and the Liberal Revival*; *Liberals and Power: The Road Ahead* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 2008).

The Liberal party represents an interesting case study for parties in opposition. When the Liberal party went into opposition in 1983, it had dominated the Treasury benches for the overwhelming majority of the post war era. Yet, it entered opposition with an underlying sense of crisis and a lack of direction.[8] In addition, the Liberal party's organisational structures are relatively weak, a problem compounded by their long tenure in government. The Liberal party's status as the natural party of government, its inexperience at opposition and its institutional weakness offer political scientists a rare opportunity to observe a party attempting to learn some foreign skill sets. Which skill sets and institutional features did the Liberal party consider important and how well had decades of experience in government equip Liberal party members for the challenges of opposition?

The situation in 2007 was broadly analogous. The Liberal party was out of office in all states and territories, and for a short period its highest office holder was Campbell Newman, the Lord Mayor of Brisbane. After almost 12 years in government, the government appeared to be intellectually exhausted and many of its internal machinery problems remained unresolved. [9] With the benefit of hindsight, the post-2007 period proved to have more in common with the 1972-1975 years. However, this raises an important question: why did the Liberal party approach the pre-1996 and post-2007 periods of opposition in different ways?

The organisational proclivities of the Liberal party, particularly its inordinate emphasis on its leadership, means its approach to opposition will be distinct from the ALP. Moreover, other aspects of the Liberal party's political culture, such as the pride it exhibits in its ostensible 'lack' of factions and the right of members to cross the floor following their own conscience will also impact the party's interpretation of opposition. The literature has gone some way towards establishing the nature of prime ministerial party leadership in the Liberal party. [10] Yet, parties in opposition sustain different types of pressures to those in government and have to negotiate different institutional landscapes. Thus, the behaviour of parties in opposition will be different from their behaviour in

[8] Liberal Party of Australia. Committee of Review and John Valder, *Facing the Facts: Report of the Committee of Review* (Liberal Party of Australia, 1983).
[9] Wayne Errington, 'The Liberal Party: Electoral Success despite Organisational Drift', in *Contemporary Australian Political Party Organisations*, ed. Narelle Miragliotta, Anika Gauja, and Rodney Smith (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University, 2015).
[10] Katherine West, *Power in the Liberal Party: A Study in Australian Politics* (Melbourne: F.W.Cheshire, 1965); David Kemp, 'A Leader and a Philosophy', in *Labor to Power: Australia's 1972 Election*, ed. Henry Mayer (Sydney: Angus & Robertson on behalf of the Australasian Political Studies Association, 1973); Ken Turner, 'The Liberal "Iceberg"', in *Australian Politics : A Third Reader*, ed. Helen Nelson and Henry Mayer (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1973); Patrick Weller, *Malcolm Fraser PM: A Study in Prime Ministerial Power* (Ringwood, Vic: Viking, 1989); Ian Hancock, *John Gorton: He Did It His Way* (Sydney: Hodder Headline Australia, 2002); Abjorensen, *Leadership and the Liberal Revival*; Brett, *Exit Right*; Wayne Errington and Peter Van Onselen, *John Winston Howard* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Publishing, 2007); Malcolm Fraser and Margaret Simons, *Malcolm Fraser: The Political Memoirs* (Carlton, Vic: The Miegunyah Press, 2010); Ian Hancock, *Nick Greiner: A Political Biography* (Ballan, Vic: Connor Court, 2013).

government and that the skill sets which produce successful oppositions may not be the same as those that produce successful governments. It is this difference between government (that has been examined in the literature at some length) and opposition which is of interest in this thesis. Arguably, we can construct a better understanding of how parties operate when in opposition. Parties in opposition face different pressures than parties in government. Their resource scarcity also forces parties to invest in strategies and institutional features that they value most or what they feel they must, given their contextual environment. Their attempts to adapt institutional structures and conventional norms can often be more unpredictable because party actors may feel they have little to lose from attempts at renewal. An exploration of how leadership operates and interacts with other party institutions (such as the party room, shadow cabinet and leadership group) in opposition can tell us much about the nature of these institutions in the Liberal party and what political actors believe is important.

While this is primarily a study of the Liberal party, no study of that party can ignore the role of its coalition relationship with the National Party of Australia (NPA). The coalition relationship will feature as a specific area of discussion in chapter three. Also, throughout the thesis I will often refer to *Coalition* actors, reflecting the reality that they must work together to perform their responsibilities, as well as working out political tactics and strategies with the intention of winning government.

Research questions

This thesis is an empirical comparative study of the parliamentary Liberal party in two distinct periods of opposition, from 1983 to 1996 and from 2007 to 2013. The LPA has only had three periods in opposition in the post-war era. Although a comparison of all three time periods would be interesting, this study has chosen to focus on the two most recent periods because the LPA from the 1980s onwards arguably evolved into a different style of political organisation. While most of the formal institutional infrastructure remained, decline in member participation had become a growing problem. By the 1980s, many of the Liberals involved in the party's first three decades were transitioning out of the party, to be replaced a by a group that would be important to the party in the 1980s and 1990s, and in an important number of cases, into the present day. This is reflected not only in the interpretation of Liberalism by the party over the last thirty years, but also in the technological and political environment more broadly. Finally, the relatively short period of time the Liberal party spent in opposition (less than three years) and the specific circumstances surrounding the Whitlam government further complicate whether the Liberal party had a similar enough

experience of opposition during the 1970s. These features will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

A comparative study over time offers an opportunity to study both changes and continuities in the assumptions and behaviour of Liberal party actors and how well they accord with our current understandings of how oppositions behave. Moreover, studying a party over time allows for examination of how aspects of temporality and context shape actor's behaviour. This is not to mention the reality of resources and opportunities that parties can capitalise upon and how they attempt to do this. Political parties do not exist in theoretical vacuums but respond to the incentive structures that are a product of institutional, contextual and political circumstances. These do not remain static, but are constantly evolving.

Opposition and its practice is not only an important phase in the life cycle of political parties, but it is also an important institution which helps to regulate the body politic. Thus, questions about how parties behave in opposition and the lessons they learn are important beyond just understanding the behaviour of political parties. A better understanding of opposition behaviour can lead to a better understanding of how the policy process operates in parliamentary systems and how parties seek to govern. After all, in a country like Australia, the official opposition will eventually return to government. Currently these features are not well described and therefore cannot be effectively understood.

Given this thesis's interest in the behaviour of oppositions from the perspective of a political party, this thesis asks how the Liberal party approached the role of opposition in two time periods, 1983 to 1996 and 2007 to 2013. From this there are four sub-questions:

1. How does the LPA approach the role of opposition in relation to the *parliamentary* arena?
2. How does the LPA manage itself as a *political group* given the challenges of opposition?
3. How does the LPA approach *policy-making* when in opposition?
4. How does the LPA approach constructing *political narratives* while in opposition?

The aim of this study is to explore the Liberal party's experience in opposition in a holistic way and one that can go some way to engaging with the reality that multiple incentives and demands are influencing political actors simultaneously. It seeks to uncover assumptions about how political actors understand their role in the parliamentary system and how LPA actors think leadership operates in the Liberal party. It also asks what assumptions Liberals and their coalition partners have about the purpose of policy and how much effort they believe the party/parties should invest in policy. Following on from this, it asks what assumptions Coalition actors have about the relationship

between policy and political communication: why do political actors invest in some particular political communications strategies over others and how have they evolved (if at all) since the early 1980s?

This study explores the motivations and assumptions of the LPA actors themselves, based on extensive empirical analysis of their statements at the time and elite interviews with key participants. Thus, we can ask: how did the opposition actually behave in parliament and did it match the claims made by political actors? How well did the party manage to renew itself during opposition and did Liberal politicians' claims about the leadership match how events unfolded? What emphasis did party actors place on policy-making and how important was the party's attempts to communicate with voters?

Before continuing, it is important to outline what this study will *not* examine. This is primarily a study of the federal parliamentary party. While the party's organisational wing will frequently feature in this study, it will be discussed from the perspective of — and only to the extent that it is relevant to — the parliamentary party. The LPA's party organisation is of sufficient importance that it warrants a study in its own right.[11]

In addition, this study will not offer extensive engagement with the Liberal party's complicated ideological configurations during this period.[12] The party's ideological and philosophical implications are important, and are discussed in some detail in chapter one, but they are not a core focus of this study. Rather, in this study, philosophical and ideological differences and the conflict they generate are examined in terms of questions of internal party management, policy priorities and devices to signal intent to voters. That is, they are examined through the lens of party processes to manage internal disputes and policy.

Methods and sources

This study uses an historical comparative method to examine the LPA (and to some extent its coalition partner) in opposition between 1983-1996 and 2007-2013. The study also draws on several methodological approaches in order to triangulate results — interviews with key actors, private papers (diaries, letters, internal party documents etc.) maintained by leading Liberal party actors, as

[11] For studies on the organisational wing of the LPA see Ian Hancock, *National and Permanent?: The Federal Organisation of the Liberal Party of Australia 1944-1965* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 2000); Hancock, *The Liberals*; Dean Jaensch, *The Liberals* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1994).
[12] Brett, *The Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class*; Norman Abjorensen, *John Howard and the Conservative Tradition* (North Melbourne, Vic: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2008); Ian Cook, 'From Menzies to Hewson: Two Traditions of Liberalism in the Australian Liberal Party', in *Australian Political Ideas* (Kensington, NSW: UNSW Press, 1994).

well as extensive use of publicly available documentation, media reports, archive materials and important reference works. [13]

The thesis is based on 65 elite interviews. The majority (40) were undertaken with current and former Liberal party and National party Members of the House of Representatives (MHRs) and senators; some of these participants were interviewed more than once. Nine interviewees were Liberal party support staff or held official positions within parliament. The final 16 were undertaken with senior journalists in the Canberra press gallery. Interviews were undertaken between August 2012 and November 2014 and the majority of interviews occurred between August 2012 and March 2013. Julia Gillard's decision to announce the election date in February 2013 impacted on the data collection and schedule of interviews. Several interviews were postponed for some months as the LPA and NPA evoked a rule of limiting external communication in preparation for the September election. Importantly, the majority of interviews were undertaken during Abbott's ascendency and reflect the spirit of the party in opposition. If this study were to enter the field today, it is highly likely that actors would reflect on their opposition years through the prism of their time in government from 2013 onwards. Indeed, those who were interviewed after winning office did precisely that.

For the most part, interviewees are not identified by name in the thesis, as many are currently still serving in parliament. Interviewees are usually identified by their role or party title (eg, shadow minister, backbencher or party official). The major exceptions are figures from the historical past and LPA leaders who agreed to speak on the record. Given their unique perspective, attempts to render their comments anonymous would have proved futile.

This study has also made extensive use of archive materials where available. The thesis has drawn on collections held by the National Archives of Australia (NAA), including the papers of Neil Anthony Brown QC (located in Melbourne), Fred Michael Chaney AO (located in Perth), James Joseph Carlton AO (located in Canberra), Ian Malcolm Macphee AO (located in Melbourne and Canberra), Peter Keatson Reith (located in Melbourne) and Andrew Sharp Peacock AC (located in Melbourne). This study also made use of the Liberal Party of Australia's extensive archive at the National Library of Australia, in Canberra.

In the course of this study, I applied for permission to access the papers of John Winston Howard AC, OM, Dr John Robert Hewson AM, and Alexander John Gosse Downer AC. [14] Permission was denied

[13] Ariadne Vromen, 'Debating Methods: Rediscovering Qualitative Approaches', in *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, ed. David Marsh and Gerry Stoker (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

by Mr Howard and the study has not benefited from full access to his papers, although much of his recollections appear in his autobiography, and Howard did agree to an extensive interview. In the case of Hewson and Downer, after numerous requests and months of inactivity the archive was unable to process these collections in time to be of practical use to this study. Moreover, this study's access to Andrew Peacock's papers was limited by the open access period at the time of writing, and therefore it has only accessed papers until 1985.

Hence, the study's archival access has been substantial, but not without limitations. It is largely reliant on the extensive papers of Fred Chaney for an internal examination of Howard's first period as opposition leader (1985-1989), and on both Fred Chaney's and Jim Carlton's papers for the period of the leadership of Dr John Hewson. With the retirement of Chaney and Carlton in 1993 and 1994, the study lost its primary observers into the internal workings of the Liberal party over its last three years in opposition in the 1990s. As a result, and because it has been documented in other studies, this study provides more limited coverage of the 1993 to 1996 period.[15]

Moreover, it should be noted that asymmetrical access to evidence is a feature of this thesis. Where archive materials are available they offer rich insights to thinking and feelings in the moment. By contrast, the sections of this study that cover much more recent events (especially the period 2010-2013) are far more reliant on interview evidence and information available on the public record.

This study has made use of publicly available information on Coalition actors' career lengths, service in the shadow ministry and their opinion pieces and letters written for newspapers. These data are presented in chapters three and four and discussion of data collection occurs there. Finally, the study has drawn extensively on political documents and contemporary news reporting. My own experiences working as a researcher for Fairfax media since 2008 has also undoubtedly influenced my interpretation of events and how the media operates and interacts with politicians.

Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into two parts. In part one this thesis explores the political landscape from the perspective of the opposition. It uses the Liberal party as a lens into the world of opposition in the Australian context. Part two examines how the LPA approached policy development and political

[14] The archive collections of politicians in their opposition years are considered by the National Archives of Australia to be personal papers. As a result, it is possible to apply to view papers within the closed period if personal permission is obtained. I was able to secure permission from all of the above listed Liberals with the exception of Mr John Howard.

[15] See Pamela Williams, *The Victory: The inside Story of the Takeover of Australia* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1997); Errington and Van Onselen, *John Winston Howard*; Stephen Mills, *The Professionals: Strategy, Money & the Rise of the Political Campaigner in Australia* (Collingwood, Vic: Black Inc, 2014).

communication over three decades and two stretches in opposition. In the chapters on political communication three policy cases are chosen from each period in opposition reflecting the party's priorities and exploring how they tactically chose to address key policy issues (industrial relations, mid-term campaigning, and the *Fightback!* saga). For the post-2007 period the study examines the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), the Gonski educational funding commitments and the issue of boatpeople/asylum seekers arriving in Australian waters.

First, the thesis outlines its theoretical framework. Chapter one examines the relevant literature to each of the four sub-questions and outlines the theoretical framework for this study. First, it argues that to a large extent oppositions have been conceived as institutional bodies of the parliament. But there is also an important political dimension to this role; that is, that parties in opposition make *choices* about how opposition is practised. In recent times, the political dimension is at least acknowledged, though its implications often remain unexplored.[16] Second, the thesis examines the state of the literature on the Liberal party and argues that examination of the Liberal party has rightly focused on leaders. However, it further argues that the focus is often on prime ministerial modes of leadership and that the leader's relationships with their colleagues are often overlooked (studies by Patrick Weller on Malcolm Fraser and Dean Jaensch on the Liberal party out of office are probably the main exceptions).[17] Third, it argues that the literature on policy-making largely ignores the role of parliamentary actors, including the opposition, in policy-making.[18] Moreover, it makes the case that while recent studies into party policy-making structures are valuable, many of these lessons do not apply in the case of the LPA because of the privileged position the party gives its parliamentary wing as the final arbiter on policy.[19] Last, the study draws on recent research into the 'mediatisation' of politics and establishes the foundation for the remainder of the thesis to build on work undertaken by Jasper Strömbäck and Peter van Aelst and the underlying assumptions about why political actors adapt to media and become 'mediatised'.[20]

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[16] For notable exceptions see John Uhr, 'Parliamentary Oppositional Leadership', in *Dispersed Democratic Leadership: Origins, Dynamics, and Implications*, ed. Paul 't Hart, John Kane, and Haig Patapan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Philip Norton, 'Making Sense of Opposition', *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 14, no. 1–2 (2008): 236–50; Wayne Errington, 'Establishing Prime Ministerial Leadership Style in Opposition', in *How Power Changes Hands: Transition and Succession in Government*, ed. Paul 't Hart and John Uhr (Houndsmill, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Kevin Tuffin, 'Parliamentary Opposition: Theories of Opposition and the Australian Experience' unpublished.

[17] Weller, *Malcolm Fraser PM*; Jaensch, *The Liberals*.

[18] For an exception see Brenton Prosser and Richard Denniss, *Minority Policy: Rethinking Governance When Parliament Matters* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2015).

[19] See Anika Gauja, *The Politics of Party Policy: From Members to Legislators* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[20] Jesper Strömbäck and Peter Van Aelst, 'Why Political Parties Adapt to the Media Exploring the Fourth Dimension of Mediatization', *International Communication Gazette* 75, no. 4 (1 June 2013): 341–58.

Chapter two examines how an opposition tends to approach the parliament and its official roles, privileges and resources in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. It argues that despite the common conceptualisation of the opposition as an institution of the legislature, its actual behaviour is intensely political and tactical. Through an examination of parliamentary tactics in both the lower house and the Senate, the chapter argues that over time different tactics are deployed in the different chambers and that party members in each chamber foster their own political culture. Parliamentary chambers are a platform and resource for oppositions, but that depending on a political actor's position within the party and to which chamber they belong, their interpretation of the parliament's utility will be different.

Chapter three examines how the opposition behaves as a political group in opposition. It presents data on patterns of tenure and renewal in the Coalition during both opposition periods. It argues that processes of renewal were not organised in a coherent manner, but rather the federal party was particularly dependent on state divisions actively seeking to train and recruit political talent. In addition it examines how the party seeks to manage itself internally in opposition. The argument here is that Liberal leaders enjoy considerable authority but in opposition this is far more conditional and reciprocal. Authority is qualified by a leader's perceived probability of success and expectations from the parliamentary party that the leader will not overextend their authority beyond what the party room will tolerate, but without formal mechanisms to guide them. It also presents evidence to suggest that given the LPA's weak internal party structures that the process of personnel renewal are also likely impacting on patterns of factional behaviour. Finally, the thesis examines the Coalition relationship. It argues that the relationship is maintained at the elite interpersonal level (party leaders and party directors) and that the relationship is valued by these actors, even if it is resented by junior parliamentarians and rank and file members.

Given a growing focus in the literature of the importance of media and political communication to oppositions, chapter four examines the media landscape from the perspective of the opposition and how the Coalition in opposition sought to engage and use the media from 1983 onwards. It argues that political actors entered opposition in 1983 with limited media skills and had to learn over time how to manage relationships effectively. Over the course of the two opposition periods, the Coalition's approach to the media became more professional. Data is presented on the opposition's media activities in the press. The chapter argues that the nature of the opposition's engagement with the media changed as the party increasingly used the media as a means of communicating with voters, as an exercise in self-promotion, and as a tool for internal policy debate. In the post-2007 period of opposition, the party remained wary of social media, keeping their focus on dominating traditional outlets. Last, the chapter argues that changes in media practices in the post-2007 period

of opposition created a more favourable environment for the opposition to attempt to communicate with voters. The implications of this chapter will be further explored in chapters seven and eight when the LPA's political communications strategies are analysed.

In part two, the thesis examines the assumptions and practices of the Coalition's policy development processes and political communication strategies. It argues that these processes are linked and assumptions about policy making feed directly into assumptions about how the party should attempt to communicate its ideas and construct narratives about themselves and their opponents.

Chapter five is the first of two chapters to examine the opposition's attitudes to policy-making. It traces policy-making processes from 1983 to 1996 and examines the motivations and assumptions of Coalition actors. It argues that in the 1980s, shadow ministers were given a large degree of autonomy to craft policy and that shadow cabinet was an important location for policy debate. Not until John Hewson took over the leadership in 1990 did the opposition's policy-making processes become more rigorous, professional and centralised. Importantly, policy was considered central to the opposition's attempts to gain re-election.

Chapter six explores the opposition's attitudes to policy-making in the period between 2007 and 2013. It traces policy-making processes and examines the underlying assumptions of Coalition actors. It argues that after 1993, Coalition actors no longer considered policy-making to be as important as they had previously. Moreover in the post-2007 period, policy-making processes were highly centralised in the leader's office and increasingly secret — so much so that even frontbenchers were often unaware of election policy content in policy portfolios where they were not involved.

Together, Chapters five and six argue that despite changes over time, that there are five main purposes to policy-making: to help define the opposition's beliefs and future direction; to establish credibility as an alternative government; to codify policies, thus helping parties maintain discipline; to generate third party support; and, to further develop the leader's image. However, the relative importance of these purposes is interpreted by the opposition differently depending on their operating environment.

Chapters seven and eight explore the approaches Coalition actors adopted towards political communication and how the party attempted to construct narratives about itself and its opponents. Chapter seven argues that ideas and policy content were central to the opposition's political communication strategies. Through three case studies (industrial relations, mid-term campaigning and *Fightback!*), the chapter explores the way approaches to political communication changed over

the decade. It argues that Coalition actors believed that they needed to educate voters and to give them enough time to understand their policies. Until 1993, failure to win elections was interpreted as a failure to properly communicate their 'good' policy ideas to the public. After the 1993 election, in the wake of the failed *Fightback!* experiment, the party shifted towards using a small target strategy, which has been used by parties in opposition on both sides since this time.

By contrast, chapter eight argues that the way Coalition actors approach political communication has changed significantly since the 1980s. Politicians emphasise the importance of managing issues to ensure favourable media coverage. The chapter argues that Coalition actors have internalised 'media logic' and rather than attempting to *adapt* the processes of the media, they have *adopted* them. The chapter presents three cases studies which show case how the party managed issues to defend against attacks from its opponents (the NDIS and the Gonski education funding model) and how it managed its own policy response to the issue of unauthorised boat arrivals to build political momentum and undermine confidence in the government. Together, both chapters provide evidence for processes of mediatisation and go some way to providing evidence as to how and why these processes occur within parties.

Part One

The political and institutional landscape facing the Opposition

Chapter 1
How does the Liberal party approach the role of opposition?

Although the official functions of the opposition are tied to the legislature, in reality, its informal responsibilities and roles extend beyond the formal functions outlined in *House of Representatives Practice*. The same could be said for political parties themselves, whose role in the political system has slowly evolved as they became institutionalised. To date, the interaction between political parties and other institutions such as parliament or opposition emphasise formal roles and normative responsibilities. What is often sidelined is the fact that parties in opposition are subject to multiple incentives and competing relationships and interactions.

Thus, this chapter situates this study within four literatures. First it explores the role of a parliamentary opposition in Westminster systems, examining concepts of 'responsible' opposition and its relationship to the party system in Australia. Second, it discusses the Liberal party's place in the Australian party system. It further examines the implications of fusion between the Australian liberal and conservative traditions and its impact on internal party management, Liberal leadership and the coalition relationship. Third, the chapter explores the literature on the role of oppositions in policy-making processes and the LPA's own policy-making traditions. Finally, the chapter explores the mediatisation of politics and the impact of this phenomenon on the LPA's strategies for political communication. Without empirical understanding of the nature of these relationships that shape opposition behaviour we will not be able to determine a more nuanced understanding of the motivations and incentives that drive parties in opposition at an important point in a party's 'life-cycle'.

Throwing light on the role of parliamentary opposition

Opposition is a relatively neglected field of study, particularly when compared to the study of governmental power. The reasons for this neglect are numerous: tenure of parties in opposition is usually inglorious, their role is largely reactive and regularly feature failure. Moreover, the study of oppositions is often subsumed into larger studies of parliamentary systems, rather than being a subject of studies in its own right. Helms offered a persuasive reason for this — namely that given

the illusive qualities of any political opposition, and varied patterns across political systems, they were 'theory resistant'.[21]

Interest in studying the phenomena of opposition as a stand-alone subject was the product of a particular moment in the mid-1960s, when political science became interested in exploring the contrast between the totalitarian East and the democratic West. The foundation of the journal *Government and Opposition* went hand in hand with the publication of Robert Dahl's *Political Opposition in Western Democracies*.[22] In the attempt to uncover the 'patterns of opposition' Dahl and his co-authors were interested in exploring the opposition's institutional manifestations (the patterns of opposition) and also the opposition's relationship with democracy. Dahl argued that institutionalised opposition was 'one of the greatest and most unexpected social discoveries', further adding that 'one is inclined to regard the existence of an opposition party as very nearly the most distinctive characteristics if democracy itself.'[23] This normative position was not just confined to Dahl. As Ionescu and de Madariaga argued, through its capacity to channel political hostility into a set of institutionalised norms and practices, the opposition became 'the crowning institution of the fully institutionalised political society and a hallmark of those political societies which are variously called democratic, liberal, parliamentary, constitutional, pluralistic-constitutional, or even open or free.'[24] For this reason there is a rich literature on the opposition's relationship to democratisation and democratic transitions.[25]

Indeed, *Political Opposition in Western Democracies* was a seminal comparative, empirical study which focused on formal political institutions in the hope of finding similar patterns in their behaviour. By Dahl's own admission, their project generated more questions than answers concluding that there was 'no single pattern of opposition'.[26] Instead the outcome was particularity and the importance of individual country contexts.[27] Since the mid-1960s, numerous comparative and single country studies were undertaken in the non-Western world.[28] Hence, this study has been

[21] Ludger Helms, 'Studying Parliamentary Opposition in Old and New Democracies: Issues and Perspectives', *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 14, no. 1 (2008): 7.
[22] Dahl, *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies*.
[23] Ibid., xv–xvi.
[24] Ghita Ionescu and Isabel De Madariaga, *Opposition: Past and Present of a Political Institution* (London: Watts, 1968), 9.
[25] For examples see Christopher Anderson et al., eds., *Losers' Consent: Elections and Democratic Legitimacy* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Stephanie Lawson, 'Contours of a Democratic Polity', The Necessity for Political Opposition', in *A Passion for Politics: Essays in Hour of Graham Maddox*, ed. Tim Battin (Frenchs Forest, NSW: Pearson Education Australia, 2005).
[26] Dahl, *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies*, 332.
[27] Ibid., Chapter 11.
[28] For just some examples see Garry Rodan, ed., *Political Oppositions in Industrialising Asia*, New Rich in Asia (London; New York: Routledge, 1996); John Barber, 'Opposition in Russia', *Government and Opposition* 32, no.

enriched by this background literature, even though its focus is on a single political party within a single political system.

Since 1966, major comparative studies of opposition in the Western world have been sporadic. *Studies in Opposition* in 1971 continued in a similar vein to Dahl.[29] The 1987 volume *Opposition in Western Europe* added the dimension of extra-parliamentary opposition and the role of civil society and protest.[30] A decade later, Parry called into question the long-term usefulness of opposition, based on 'adversary democracy', if differences could be resolved through 'processes of deliberation'.[31]

Other scholars have revisited the importance of the institutional structures within which oppositions operate, rather than examining political systems as in Dahl's approach.[32] Helms, sought to highlight the importance of the institutional factors such as the opposition's resources, while also cautioning against an over-reliance on political structures such as electoral systems to explain and determine outcomes.[33] Kaiser's comparative study of Westminster institutions found that Australia's opposition had the weakest capacity to influence government action in the lower house, but that it was the reverse in the Senate, where it was one of the 'most powerful second chambers in world'.[34]

Historically, we should recall that the constitutional study of opposition pre-dates Dahl's modern comparative approach. Before Dahl, the study of opposition politics within a parliamentary framework was part of broader scholarship grappling with the institutionalisation of the British constitution.[35] Writing in the 1860s, John Stuart Mill reminds us that institutions 'are the work of men' and shaped by the actors who participate within them.[36] British politics at this time (and today still) was the product of accumulated convention, practice and precedent. Actors interpreted their role as they fulfilled them. Future parliamentarians drew on the past as they faced their own challenges, engendering further reinterpretations. The opposition was just one of several institutions that underwent a process of institutionalisation and codification which resulted in formal recognition as an institution of British government. Critically, as later scholars have noted, it was the

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4 (1 October 1997): 598–613; Umesh Kumar Jha, *Opposition Politics in India* (New Delhi: Radha Publications, 1997).

[29] Barker, *Studies in Opposition*.

[30] See Gordon Smith, 'Party and Protest: The Two Faces of Opposition in Western Europe', in *Opposition in Western Europe*, ed. Eva Kolinsky (London: Croom Helm, 1987).

[31] Geraint Parry, 'Opposition Questions', *Government and Opposition* 32, no. 4 (1 October 1997): 460.

[32] Ludger Helms, 'Five Ways of Institutionalizing Political Opposition: Lessons from the Advanced Democracies', *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 1 (2004): 25.

[33] Helms, 'Studying Parliamentary Opposition in Old and New Democracies', 10–12.

[34] André Kaiser, 'Parliamentary Opposition in Westminster Democracies: Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand', *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 14, no. 1 (2008): 35–36.

[35] For example see Foord, *His Majesty's Opposition, 1714-1830*.

[36] John Stuart Mill, *Representative Government* (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2001), 7.

opposition's constitutionality that mattered for the character of democratic politics, as it distinguished between 'opposing the state and opposing ministers of the state'.[37] Although Mill did not engage with the idea of the official opposition directly, he foreshadowed the role of opposition as an aid in managing dissent and as a bridge between parliament and civil society in his argument for responsible government.[38]

Walter Bagehot, a journalist working in Westminster at the same time as Mill, described 'the English constitution' as he saw it practiced and also outlined some fundamental assumptions about opposition that hold to this day —namely a periodic rotation of office in the two-party system but with a power imbalance between government and opposition in the lower house and the opposition's centrality to the enforcement of ministerial responsibility through its role as chief government critic.[39] A.V. Dicey, who commented on parliamentary politics before the solidification of the party system, described the opposition as 'the party that wishes to obtain office', and characterised two-party politics as 'party warfare' which was 'conducted by leading parliamentarians who constitute the actual cabinet or the expected cabinet'.[40] Dicey's encapsulation of an adversarial contest between government and the alternative government is easily recognisable to us today.

Conflict, adversarialism and contestation have always been present in the informed discussion of opposition, whether explicitly or implicitly. Foord notes that in the reign of George III, as 'party' politics was undergoing its slow metamorphosis, that 'to effectuate its principles for the national interest a party makes the pursuit of office its 'first purpose'.[41] The government-opposition relationship is understood as 'warfare' and Punnett tells us that opposition is ultimately power-seeking.[42] Indeed, Uhr tells us this 'power politics' is *the* lesson to draw from Bolingbroke — the first advocate of constitutional opposition in the British system. The constitutional critic, 'a modern version of the Roman tribune' is 'sobered by the partisan ambition to use criticism to build up public confidence about the merits and claims of the alternative government.'[43] For non-governmental

[37] Parry, 'Opposition Questions', 459; Lawson, 'Contours of a Democratic Polity', The Necessity for Political Opposition', 59.
[38] Mill, *Representative Government*, 34, 36, 49.
[39] Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (London: Collins, 1963), 187.
[40] Albert Venn Dicey, *Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution*, Reprint of the original 8th Edition (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1982), lxxiii.
[41] Foord, *His Majesty's Opposition, 1714-1830*, 317.
[42] Dicey, *Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution*, lxxiii; Punnett, *Front-Bench Opposition: The Role of the Leader of the Opposition, the Shadow Cabinet and Shadow Government in British Politics*.
[43] Uhr, 'Parliamentary Oppositional Leadership', 69; For the relationship between opposition and the Roman Tribunes see: Graham Maddox, 'Responsible and Irresponsible Opposition: The Case of the Roman Tribunes', *Government and Opposition* 17, no. 2 (1982): 211–20; and Graham Maddox, 'Hebrew Prophecy and the Foundations of Political Opposition', *Australian Religion Studies Review* 21, no. 1 (2008): 70–92.

parties and opposition leaders the challenge remains in finding the balance, in what Sir Robert Menzies termed 'the gentle art of opposition.'[44]

The government-opposition relationship remains a form of party struggle, but as Sartori persuasively noted in the 1970s, it was the conflict of 'quiet politics', where a constitutional opposition presupposed 'the domestication of politics.'[45] This was opposition with 'a capital O', where in a two party system the roles of government and opposition were defined and clear-cut in ways that distinguished the British system from other multi-party systems.

Therefore the opposition was also expected to behave in a 'responsible' manner. As Sir Ivor Jennings put it, the opposition is 'the government of tomorrow' and the obligation to fulfil its promises should it win office kept it responsible.[46] The opposition's responsibility was contingent upon the powers and privileges granted to the opposition as chief government critic. For Potter, the adversarial style of parliamentary politics also made government in Britain a collective enterprise driven by the uneasy partnership between government and opposition.[47] It was up to oppositions to find the balance between opposition and obstruction; it ought to be 'constructive not disruptive.' [48] The opposition was a formalised organ of the state that facilitated and institutionalised the expression of dissent. By agreeing to play by the rules, the opposition remained loyal to the state, gifted with the powers of the legislature and implored to act as the responsible handmaidens of good government.

In the wake of Potter and Jennings, recent scholars have increasingly noted the role of parties and the dimensions of partisan conflict. Denver emphasised the role of the two party system as 'inextricably linked' to Potter's understanding of opposition and that changes to the party system would change the practice of opposition.[49] Johnson argued that ideological convergence has increased the emphasis on personality politics in the contest between government and opposition.[50] While Norton suggested that parliamentary opposition is 'premised on the existence of parties', while also emphasising the importance of *relationships*: both between parties and within.[51] In contrast to Jennings and Potter, Norton's conceptualisation of the opposition is not assumed to be

[44] Robert Menzies, *The Measure of the Years* (London: Coronet Books, 1972), Chapter 2.
[45] Giovanni Sartori, 'Opposition and Control Problems and Prospects', *Government and Opposition* 1, no. 2 (1966): 33.
[46] Ivor Jennings, *The British Constitution*, 4th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 30.
[47] Allan Potter, 'Great Britain: Opposition with a Capital "O"', in *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies*, ed. Robert Alan Dahl (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 32–33.
[48] Ibid., 14–16; Sartori, 'Opposition and Control Problems and Prospects', 33.
[49] However, Denver's appears to have underestimated the resilience of the two party model in the British political system. David Denver, 'Great Britain: From "Opposition with a Capital 'O'" to Fragmented Opposition', in *Opposition in Western Europe*, ed. Eva Kolinsky (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 79, 82.
[50] Nevil Johnson, 'Opposition in the British Political System', *Government and Opposition* 32, no. 4 (1 October 1997): 503.
[51] Norton, 'Making Sense of Opposition', 237–38.

'necessarily responsible' at all times and he ventured that there may even be confusion over the opposition role on the occasions when governments prefer to turn-the-tables and assume the opposition role for political purposes.[52]

While partisan relationships and decision making are increasingly considered a factor in these conceptions of opposition, how these dynamics operate remains unexplored. The opposition is still very much understood within the institutional framework of the English parliament and its systems and logics. In this conception of opposition, the underlying assumptions that shape our understanding of opposition do not fully account for the way that these relationships and incentives play out in the real world and shape behaviour of political parties charged with the responsibility of the official opposition.

The Australian conception of Opposition

In Australia, the opposition's explicit role is often overlooked, or merely implied in accounts of the broad functions of the legislature. As just one example of many, only in the ninth edition of the university undergraduate text *Australian Political Institutions* does the opposition rate a mention (and only briefly).[53] When the opposition is examined, contemporary studies of opposition in Australia have either focused on the role of opposition leadership or its broader function within the parliamentary system. This is a curious state of affairs given the importance of the government-opposition relationship in driving political conflict or the growing importance of the Senate as a check on government. Politics in Australia is not the story of government regularly getting its own way with the key contest focused on winning control of the legislature and the executive.

The study of the British parliamentary system still remains an important starting point for the Australian study of opposition, even though the actual practice of opposition in Australia is different from its antecedent. The presence of institutional features was evident early. British political scientist, David Butler, noted in a visit to Australia in the 1960s, that there was a 'remarkable freedom' allowed to the opposition to exercise procedural manoeuvres in the house. He also remarked upon the degree of respect and provision of resources accorded to the opposition leadership team.[54] Reid and Forrest emphasised the deep institutionalisation of the Australian opposition, particularly in terms of resources, which preceded the UK and Canada.[55] For Reid and Forrest it was parties that drove forward the institutionalisation of the opposition because it

[52] Ibid., 237.
[53] Gwynneth Singleton, *Australian Political Institutions* (Frenchs Forest, NSW: Pearson Education Australia, 2009).
[54] David Butler, *The Canberra Model: Essays on Australian Government* (London: Macmillan, 1974), 21.
[55] G. S. Reid and Martyn Forrest, *Australia's Commonwealth Parliament 1901-1988: Ten Perspectives* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1989), 51.

facilitated resources and accrued status to party leaders.[56] Arguably, resourcing the opposition, also spoke to Australia's 'social laboratory' political tradition that had emerged in Australia from the 1890s onwards. Moreover, Australia's legislature was smaller and with far tighter party discipline. In this environment, parties in opposition accepted the dominance of the executive in the chamber which saw a rapid erosion of the capacities for oppositions to oppose in the lower house compared with the parliament at Westminster.[57]

Contemporaneously, Wanna and Uhr situate the opposition firmly within a broader parliamentary system when they argue that parliament provides a forum for 'alternative political assessments' and 'policy options.'[58] Yet they also note that some of the most effective oppositional politicking has come from within parties themselves, such as Paul Keating in the early 1990s.[59] Rhodes, Wanna and Weller also emphasise the opposition's relationship to the parliamentary system, particularly their legitimacy and, in an echo of Potter, their role in stabilising government by participating responsibly.[60] However, in noting the contingent nature of opposition, that its weakness might become the subject of political debate itself, there is an acknowledgement of the party-political dimensions of the opposition's behaviour, even if these implications for the work of the legislature, the act of collective government and parties in opposition remain unexplored.

A key difference between Australia and the United Kingdom's practice of opposition is the Senate, whose impact is neatly summarised by Uhr: 'everywhere bicameralism complicates by duplicating parliamentary opposition.'[61] The Senate has created its own distinct role and dynamic, which is undergirded by its constitutional position, even if the legitimacy of its opposition is questioned politically.[62] These two different modes of opposition constitute two distinct patterns that are practiced in each chamber and this may account for the relative poverty of academic discussion of opposition with a capital 'O' in Australia.[63] In part this is the product of the rise of a diverse political landscape in the upper house, which has eroded the adversarial two-party dynamic along with the traditional practice of opposition in that chamber. Additionally, oppositions that either control, or are key veto players in the upper house, may become 'necessary participants in government', but the official opposition may also be sidelined as the result of deals struck between the government

[56] Ibid., 62.
[57] Uhr and Wanna, 'The Future Roles of Parliament', 16; Reid and Forrest, *Australia's Commonwealth Parliament 1901-1988*, 62–63.
[58] Uhr and Wanna, 'The Future Roles of Parliament', 16.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Rhodes, Wanna, and Weller, *Comparing Westminster*, 206–7.
[61] Uhr, 'Parliamentary Oppositional Leadership', 71.
[62] Reid and Forrest, *Australia's Commonwealth Parliament 1901-1988*, 70–71.
[63] Kaiser, 'Parliamentary Opposition in Westminster Democracies', 23.

and minor parties.[64] Thus the work of opposition in the Senate is often more meaningful and can have higher stakes for opposition Senators compared with their colleagues in the house. But, in the Senate, the powers of opposition are not the monopoly of the Official Opposition. These factors have led Stone to conclude that the great dispersal and involvement of the opposition in Australia is the product of its strong upper houses.[65]

This has translated into a transformation of the public's perception of the role of both chambers. As Brandis has noted, whereas in the 1975 constitutional crisis Whitlam constructed the House of Representatives as 'the people's' chamber, today the house is seen as the domain of the executive opposed to a Senate that is the 'champion of parliamentarianism'.[66] One aim of this study is to explore this difference between the chambers and how actors understand the role of opposition. It will argue that Senators and MPs are socialised differently and this shapes their approach to using parliament while in opposition.

The dominant focus of scholarly and media interest in the parliament remains fixed on the lower chamber, where political theatre and 'party warfare' remain supreme. Since the 1980s, there has been a growing contention in the literature that parliament is a 'springboard to the electorate', a 'cite for political theatre' and an 'avenue back to power.'[67] Errington highlights the importance of media management skills for opposition leaders as the 'show' has moved beyond the chamber.[68] This contest, is 'fundamentally one of publicity' aimed at destroying faith in the government and building confidence in the opposition.[69] Why would such a contest matter? Because it is a contest between competing parties that transfer power not on the floor of parliament, but at the ballot box. Thus, the resources and publicity potential of parliament are tools for the opposition to use in its attempt to gain executive power.

Alternation, as Maddox has argued, is the key link knitting together institutionalised and constitutional opposition with the adversarial system.[70] It is the prospect of alternation which renders the opposition responsible — it is not merely that the opposition ought to keep its promises

[64] Bruce Stone, 'Opposition in Parliamentary Democracies: A Framework for Comparison', *Australasian Parliamentary Review* 29, no. 1 (2014): 26.
[65] Ibid., 30.
[66] George Brandis, 'The Australian Senate and Responsible Government', in *Restraining Elective Dictatorship: The Upper House Solution?*, ed. Nicholas T. Aroney, Scott Prasser, and J. R. Nethercote (Crawley, W.A: University of Western Australia Press, 2008), 88.
[67] Reid and Forrest, *Australia's Commonwealth Parliament 1901-1988*, 64; Uhr and Wanna, 'The Future Roles of Parliament'; Uhr, 'Parliamentary Oppositional Leadership', 69.
[68] Errington, 'Establishing Prime Ministerial Leadership Style in Opposition', 65.
[69] Uhr, 'Parliamentary Oppositional Leadership', 63.
[70] Maddox, *Australian Democracy in Theory and Practice*, 271.

as Jennings noted, but that opposition must believe that it has a credible claim to power.[71] Without the prospect of power, the opposition has no incentive to behave in the positive opposition mode — that is, constructively.[72] Moreover, as Maddox notes, alternation has a significant impact on party renewal, both in terms of ideas and personnel. Without regular alternation or the real threat of it, governments become complacent, the opposition becomes deskilled in the art and practical knowledge of governing, and the parliament's capacity to manage grievances suffers.[73]

As Sartori has noted, the characteristics of the party system has an important impact on the practice of opposition.[74] Following from this, Uhr has argued that scholars, such as Potter, have overlooked 'the more subtle nature of interparty rivalry.'[75] Here Tuffin's conception of opposition becomes vital to understanding this conundrum. Tuffin summarised the problem neatly stating that the 'opposition is part of parliament, but the parliamentary conception of parliament fails to recognise that the opposition also has parliamentary ambitions.'[76] Put another way, conceptualisation of the opposition's role overlooks the uneasy and competing nature of the opposition's role. On the one hand, the opposition is required 'to act as a parliamentary phenomenon — to suggest changes to proposed grievances, to inquire by committee, and to generally examine and criticise government action.'[77] It is not expected to act as 'a partisan phenomenon — that is to declare the government's program illegitimate, to spread fear and inflame prejudices, and to obstruct it whenever possible.'[78] Yet, as discussed above, parliament is a platform for the opposition to launch itself into power.

Parties are the 'agents of opposition.' Tuffin argues that while 'the opposition is part of parliament but the form is made real by the political party.' The implications of this are when we discuss opposition we 'refer to a party, and when we refer to the functions of parliament many of the most important ones have been appropriated by the opposition, that is the party occupying this component of parliament.'[79] Thus, political parties in opposition do not 'exist to promote democratic accountability', but rather to replace the government: the opposition's main political goal.[80] It is

[71] Sartori, 'Opposition and Control Problems and Prospects', 35.
[72] Maddox, *Australian Democracy in Theory and Practice*, 274.
[73] Ibid., 277–78; Stone, 'Opposition in Parliamentary Democracies: A Framework for Comparison', 29; Kevin Tuffin, 'Opposition', in *The Oxford Companion to Australian Politics*, ed. B Galligan and W Roberts (Oxford University Press, 2007), 377–79.
[74] Sartori, 'Opposition and Control Problems and Prospects', 34–35.
[75] Uhr, 'Parliamentary Oppositional Leadership', 63.
[76] Tuffin, 'Parliamentary Opposition: Theories of Opposition and the Australian Experience', Chapter 2, 18.
[77] Ibid., Chapter 1, page 11.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., Chapter 3, 2.
[80] Ibid., Chapter 3, 10.

political parties and their own partisan actors, which both interpret the role of opposition and carry out its functions.

Tuffin's conception of opposition is the point of departure for this study. This study seeks to better understand how a *party* approaches the role of opposition given the institutional factors outlined above. Its focus is not just on the role of parties within the broader institutional framework, but on understanding the *motivations* and conceptualisation of the opposition from the *perspective of individual political actors whose first point of reference is their own political party*. Decisions about opposition occur within the context of party first, parliamentary institutions second. Indeed, this is the other side of Lucy's important conception of the Australian form of government, as 'responsible party government.[81] While, most of our understanding of opposition comes from its work in the legislature and while there is growing recognition that oppositions are political actors, we do not understand how political actors make sense of opposition given the complex layering of institutional and party relationships at play in the government-opposition relationship. Nor do we understand how parties navigate and balance their parliamentary responsibilities with their partisan goals. The implications for parties who must exercise these functions while they try to regain office is important not only for their own capacity building and health but also because of the fact that today's opposition is tomorrow's government.

The study of political parties in Australia

Australia has a long tradition of studying parties and party systems. Alongside descriptions of the party system, studies of individual parties and their interactions with our political institutions, the Australian study of parties has also sought to examine how well political theories generated in the US and Europe match the Australian experience. Australia's electoral system, in which the House of Representatives is elected by compulsory preferential voting and in the Senate, which uses a proportional-preferential representation model since 1949, has produced distinctive patterns of party behaviour particular to our continent. This has led some to argue that Australia has a two-and-a-half party system (or in recent times two-and-a-quarter), or a three party system.[82] However, others such as Ward and Stewart argue that given the Nationals co-ordinated action with the

[81] Richard Lucy, *The Australian Form of Government: Models in Dispute* (South Melbourne: Macmillan, 1993), 325.

[82] See Brian Costar, 'The National Party: The Resilient Party', in *Contemporary Australian Political Party Organisations*, ed. Narelle Miragliotta, Anika Gauja, and Rodney Smith (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University, 2015), 24; Alan Siaroff, 'Two-and-a-Half-Party Systems and the Comparative Role of the `Half'', *Party Politics* 9, no. 3 (1 May 2003): 267–90; Dennis Woodward, 'Political Parties and the Party System', in *Government, Politics, Power and Policy in Australia*, ed. Andrew Parkin, John Summers, and Dennis Woodward, 9th ed. (Frenchs Forest, N.S.W: Longman, 2010), 188–89.

Liberals (a 'coalescence'), it is in effect a 'bi-polar' or even a strictly two party system.[83] Though, these conceptions fail to fully account for the impact of the Senate on Australia's party system.

A second important debate in the Australian party literature concerns party typologies. Political scientists have struggled to categorise the Liberal party in particular. Woodward argues that that the Liberal party is the closest to the cadre party type in the Australian political system.[84] Vromen, Gelber and Gauja agree that the LPA is a 'cartel party' as described by Katz and Mair because of the party's increasing detachment from civil society, its increased dependence on public funds and particularly, the emphasis on the leadership team to decide policy.[85] However, this interpretation overlooks the reality that Liberal party leaders have always been disproportionately powerful in policy-making, well before other party systems cartelised. While this does not preclude that the Australian party system may be slowly moving in the cartelised direction, this study is inclined to favour Ian Ward's interpretation. That is, the Liberal party is more akin to Panebianco's electoral-professional party model given its reliance on private funding over government sources, and its dependence on key professional political staff such as its pollsters, Mark Textor and Lynton Crosby.[86] Moreover, given the electoral-professional model is understood as an extension of Kirchheimer's catch-all model, it also aptly reflects the party's campaigning style. Compulsory voting means that the party's campaigning model remains focused on broadening its social appeal while simultaneously centralising power in its leadership.[87]

The reality remains that the Liberal party was never genuine mass membership party, even if it retains a state divisional organisational branch structure.[88] As Errington argues, the combination of a hierarchical structure in the control of personality groupings, which smaintain the façade of mass membership through branch-stacking is a 'recipe for destabilisation'.[89] Why has the party maintained this system? As Narelle Miragliotta suggests, Australian parties have retained mass-party

[83] Ward and Stewart, *Politics One*, 154.
[84] Woodward, 'Political Parties and the Party System', 190.
[85] Vromen, Gelber, and Gauja, *Powerscape*, 151, 161–62; For the Cartel party thesis see Richard Katz and Peter Mair, 'Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy: The Emergence of the Cartel Party', *Party Politics* 1 (1995): 5–28; Richard Katz and Peter Mair, 'The Cartel Party Thesis: A Restatement', *Perspectives on Politics* 7, no. 4 (2009): 753–66.
[86] Ian Ward, 'The Changing Organisational Nature of Australia's Political Parties', *The Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 29, no. 2 (1 July 1991): 153–74; See also Ward and Stewart, *Politics One*, 211; For the electoral-professional party see Angelo Panebianco, *Political Parties: Organization and Power* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
[87] Otto Kirchheimer, 'The Transformation of Western European Party Systems', in *Political Parties and Political Development*, ed. Myron Weiner and Joseph LaPalombara (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1966).
[88] Jaensch, *The Liberals*, 112; Errington, 'The Liberal Party: Electoral Success despite Organisational Drift', 18.
[89] Ibid.

features because they are vestiges of their formation.[90] Though, perhaps more cynically, parties retain organisational features until they get in the way of winning elections, much like human wisdom teeth.

The Liberal party and the Australian political science tradition

The Liberal party maintains an outstanding record of electoral success at the federal level, where it has governed for forty-five out of the last seventy-two years since WWII. Yet, in the field of academic study, the LPA and the National party are the poor cousins of Australian political science and history. The literature on the LPA is fragmented and dispersed when compared with its main rival, the ALP. Studies of the Liberal party are more likely to appear in the form of articles or chapter contributions of the above mentioned studies of parties, rather than as sustained and in depth studies of the party in its own right. Given its electoral success and its dominance of government in Australian, a more nuanced understanding of its internal workings and development is vital to better understanding how it governs.

However, this was not always the case. The 'golden age', of academic interest in the Liberal party was the product of its sustained dominance of government (with only the briefest of interruptions between 1972 and 1975) from 1949 through to 1983. Political scientists' age-old fascination with power and the active components of government rendered the Liberal party interesting and worthy of study. Katherine West's *Power in the Liberal Party* remains a classic.[91] Predicated on Michel's 'iron law of oligarchy', West was concerned with the 'actual location of power' within the LPA and the 'nature' of its power relations — an aim that resonates in the study of the LPA to this day.[92] Her conclusion that in all states 'the Liberal Party has organised on the assumption that its two wings [parliamentary and extra-parliamentary] will be integrated by strong parliamentary leadership', remains valid even after seventy-two years.[93] Although West did engage with the organisational structures of the parliamentary wing, it was party leaders (the premiers and prime ministers), and those few other great men who — for good or ill — were influential actors that remained her focus.

In the 1970s, a literature on renewal and party reform emerged. The field at this time was dominated by participants with some involvement in politics, often at the organisational level, undoubtedly spurring research in this direction. The key questions centred on the nature of the party's structures, the party's internal relationships and whether or not the party's structures would

[90] Narelle Miragliotta, 'Parties and the Mass Membership', in *Contemporary Australian Political Party Organisations*, ed. Narelle Miragliotta, Anika Gauja, and Rodney Smith (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University, 2015), 73.
[91] West, *Power in the Liberal Party*.
[92] Ibid., ii.
[93] Ibid., 184.

survive opposition.[94] When the party organisation proved itself resilient, the focus turned to how the party's development since its founding in 1944 had facilitated the party's success in 1975.

A focus on the party's philosophy was the other major area of study in the 1970s. The opposition years had prompted an overhaul of the party's platform and the requirement of facing Whitlam's Labor sparked an ongoing debate to determine the direction of liberalism after Menzies. Fraser's victory in 1975 put an end to the hopes of the so-called 'trendies', but the party had moved beyond Menzies' liberalism typified by the 'generation of joiners'. Yet, much remained the same. Dennis White's analysis of the 1946 and 1974 party platforms emphasised continuities. Namely, that the Liberal party still sought to facilitate individual progress (hence the party's strong emphasis on education).[95] White further argued that the 1974 platform emphasised the role of community in developing the 'self-determined' individual, which remained consistent with a more activist state and the rejection of *laisse-faire* economics.[96] The LPA, White put it, was not suspicious of 'big government' as such, but rather, the potential for overreach should the reins of power be left in the hands of its opponents.[97] At the same time, Peter Tiver offered an emphatically pragmatic view of LPA philosophy. Tiver emphasised the role of ideas as political tools for the party to wage political warfare, craft the party's identity and maintain morale.[98] For Tiver, the party's relationship to liberalism was functional: it was 'party ideology and not high political philosophy', and when invoked it was often 'distorted' and as a result 'now riddled with ambiguities.'[99]

By contrast, the political economist Marian Simms argued that hegemonic ideology was important to the Liberal party. Through an examination of the LPA's ideology using its relationship with business as a lens, Simms sought to get to the heart of how ideology was translated into decisions by government. Simms argued that these relationships were not static but complex and evolving. Her analysis, centred on the economic sphere, reflected growing discontinuities between Menzies' party and the LPA of the early 1980s.[100] Menzies may have done much for the interests of business, but his government had supported public enterprise where it coincided with nation building. As Judith Brett has also argued, Fraser, as the last of the 'nation building' Liberal Prime Ministers, began to

[94] Graeme Starr, 'The Liberal Party of Australia', in *Political Parties in Australia*, ed. Graeme Starr, Keith Richmond, and Graham Maddox (Richmond, Vic: Heinemann Educational Australia, 1978), 85.
[95] D.M. White, *The Philosophy of the Australian Liberal Party* (Richmond, Vic: Hutchinson of Australia, 1978), 68.
[96] Ibid., 78–90.
[97] Ibid., 130.
[98] Peter G Tiver, *The Liberal Party: Principles and Performance* (Milton, Qld: The Jacaranda Press, 1978), 7, 14–17.
[99] Ibid., 11.
[100] Marian Simms, *A Liberal Nation: The Liberal Party & Australian Politics* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1982), 54.

introduce a discourse of efficiency and advocated small government even if he remained lukewarm about the 'New Right'.[101] Although the relationship was complex, it was not uniform. It was a relationship that echoed Fin Crisp's earlier characterisation of the Australian party system as one divided between Labor and 'the parties of town and country capital'.[102]

But by the late 1970s, a significant minority within the Liberal party were no longer interested in playing the 'claims adjuster' role (as Crisp called it) in the conflicts between, capital, labour and citizens.[103] New ideas from Thatcher's Britain and Reagan's America, which centred on the retreat of government were flooding in.[104] These ideas sparked new debates amongst academics and political participants themselves.[105] Once the certainties of Bretton-Woods had broken down, the question of the future of Australian liberalism became urgent as it simultaneously became increasingly fraught.

Writing in 1980, Graeme Starr unknowingly, but rightly, surmised that the victories in 1975 and 1977 represented the party's 'high-water mark' of success.[106] There would be other great victories, notably Howard's long run, from 1996 to 2007, but the party would have to suffer in the wilderness for over a decade before remaking itself in preparation for government. Throughout the 1980s, the ideological debates which had started quietly in the late 1970s, came centre stage and were driven by internal and external forces such as the rise of the 'New Right'.[107] Significantly, the debate over the LPA's future was conducted by both academics and by Liberals themselves.[108] The debate also raged in the pages of *Quadrant*.

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[101] Ibid., 43, 150, 161; Brett, *The Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class*, 162–65.
[102] L. F. Crisp, *Australian National Government* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1983), 230–31.
[103] Ibid., 231.
[104] Simms, *A Liberal Nation*, 145–46.
[105] See Marian Sawer, ed., *Australia and the New Right* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1982); Wolfgang Kasper, ed., *Australia at the Crossroads: Our Choices to the Year 2000* (Sydney: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980); Simms, *A Liberal Nation* Chapter 8.
[106] Graeme Starr, *The Liberal Party of Australia: A Documentary History* (Richmond, Vic: Drummond/Heinemann, 1980), ix.
[107] For the development of the New Right in the mid-1980s, see Frank Bongiorno, *The Eighties: The Decade That Transformed Australia* (Collingwood, Vic: Black Inc. Books, 2015), 168–76; For the philosophical development see Lindy Edwards, *The Passion of Politics: The Role of Ideology and Political Theory in Australia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2013) Part 4.
[108] For debates on small 'l' liberalism see Chrisopher Puplick and Robert Southey, *Liberal Thinking* (South Melbourne, Vic: Macmillan, 1980); George Brandis, Tom Harley, and Don Markwell, eds., *Liberals Face the Future: Essays on Australian Liberalism* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1984); Yvonne Thompson, George Brandis, and Tom Harley, eds., *Australian Liberalism: The Continuing Vision* (Melbourne: Liberal Forum, 1986); For discussion of Australian conservatism see *Australian Conservatism: Essays in Twentieth Century Political History* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1979); Robert Manne, ed., *The New Conservatism in Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1982); Ken Aldred, Kevin James Andrews, and Paul Filing, eds., *The Heart of Liberalism: The Albury Papers* (Mitcham, Vic: The Editors, 1994); David Kemp, 'Liberalism and Conservatism in Australia since 1944', in *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society*, ed. James Walter and Brian Head (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988).

After the long period in opposition (1980-90s), the focus of the literature had moved from one seeking to unpack ideas and understand the functions of discipline within the party, to one of accounting for crisis.[109] After holding out judgement given the Liberal's renewed fortunes under the leadership of John Hewson, the party's loss in the 1993 election suggested a 'crisis confirmed'. Dean Jaensch argued that in its repudiation of its broad ideological umbrella in the face of Labor's move to the right, the LPA had given up its core strength and narrowed its appeal.[110] Hugh Emy concluded that the party was 'in deeper trouble than its leaders care to admit', but that the LPA was suffering from the malady of ideological disjuncture affecting the entire political system.[111]

Like the ideological debate before it, partisans joined the debate about party decline. Chris Puplick, a leading moderate, penned *Is the party over?*, criticising the party's shift to the right, and particularly its embrace of social conservatism.[112] Gerard Henderson, a former staffer in recounting the party's history remained contemptuous of the party's efforts to renew and revitalise the party. [113] Henderson's following book in 1995, was called *A Howard Government?* [114] The question mark underscored the party's deep anxieties after losing the 'unlosable' election, even as it was cautiously optimistic of finally defeating an exhausted Paul Keating and his ageing Labor government. A similar literature sprung up in the immediate aftermath of the 2007 defeat, but never developed as fulsomely as the Liberal's fortunes quickly turned around.

Victory in 1996, and the return of the Coalition to government, spurred research into both policy agendas and the nature of the new Howard government, rather than the political party itself.[115] The party was also examined in terms of its political organisation, whose innovations will be canvassed below and a sense that the party missed its opportunity to reform in the calmer waters of

[109] Hugh Emy and Owen E. Hughes, *Australian Politics: Realities in Conflict* (South Melbourne: Macmillan, 1988), Chapter 4; Patrick O'Brien, *The Liberals: Factions, Feuds and Fancies* (Ringwood, Vic: Viking, 1985), Chapter 10; Marian Simms, 'The End of Pragmatism? The Coalition Parties in the Early 1990s', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 29, no. Special Issue (1994): 28–41.
[110] Jaensch, *The Liberals*, 225–26.
[111] Hugh Emy, 'In Conclusion: Does the Liberal Party Have a Future?', in *For Better or for Worse: The Federal Coalition*, ed. Brian Costar (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1994), 146, 153.
[112] C. J Puplick, *Is the Party Over?: The Future of the Liberals* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1994), Chapter 4.
[113] Gerard Henderson, *Menzies' Child: The Liberal Party of Australia, 1944-1994* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1994), Chapter 1.
[114] Gerard Henderson, *A Howard Government?: Inside the Coalition* (Pymble, NSW: HarperCollins, 1995).
[115] Robert Manne, ed., *The Howard Years* (Melbourne: Black Inc. Agenda, 2004); Gwynneth Singleton, *The Howard Government*, Australian Commonwealth Administration 1996-1998 (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2000); George Megalogenis, *The Longest Decade* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2006); Paul Kelly, *The March of Patriots : The Struggle for Modern Australia* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 2011).

government.[116] Since 2000, the party has undergone and important historical re-examination, which have sought to explore the evolution of the party and its ideas.[117]

The works of Judith Brett focused on the Liberal party's relationship with the virtues of the middle classes, first through an analysis of Menzies' 'forgotten people' speech and later, a study of the relationship between protestant values, sound finance, the 'moral middle class' and its evolution over the twentieth century.[118] Norman Abjorensen's examinations of LPA ideology focused on the party's conservative tradition. Abjorensen argued the Liberal party is a centre of resistance against democratic impulses, which it fears. It acts to defend privilege and its reason for being is to keep the ALP out.[119] Conservatives in particular, while having financial means, struggled to convince Australians of the virtues of their philosophy, while the term 'liberalism' is a rhetorical device, festooned like confetti to anything that is considered 'good'.[120]

The continued 'culture wars' of the Howard era spurred interest in the broader historical evolution of a unique Australian interpretation of liberalism and its relationship with other national interpretations.[121] Marian Sawer explored the relationship between the liberalism of T.H. Green and the influence it exercised on Deakin's emphasis on policies of social amelioration and the fair go.[122] Australian liberalism produced policy innovations such as the wage arbitration system and its early introduction of aged pensions, though as Sawer notes, Australian liberalism was often deaf to the needs of women.[123] The impact of the depression and the Menzies era distrust of unregulated markets translated into social welfare policies, maintained the Curtain-Chifley minimum social safety net and encouraged 'equality of opportunity.'[124] This was complimentary to an economic model of national development and where the emphasis was on the citizen as a 'producer'. Yet, as Jonathan Pincus argues in the wake of the deregulation of the 1980s, this position has reversed to an idea

[116] Peter Van Onselen and Philip Senior, *Howard's End: The Unravelling of a Government* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 2008), 191; Errington, 'The Liberal Party: Electoral Success despite Organisational Drift', 16.
[117] For a general history of the Liberal party, see J. R. Nethercote, *Liberalism and the Australian Federation* (Annandale, NSW: Federation Press, 2001).
[118] Brett, *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People*; Brett, *The Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class*.
[119] Abjorensen, *John Howard and the Conservative Tradition*, 14, 24, 33.
[120] Ibid., 19, 144.
[121] For example, see Chandran Kukathas, 'Liberalism: The International Context', in *Liberalism and the Australian Federation*, ed. J. R. Nethercote (Annandale, NSW: Federation Press, 2001); Winsome Roberts, 'Liberalism: The Nineteenth Century Legacy', in *Liberalism and the Australian Federation*, ed. J. R. Nethercote (Annandale, N.S.W: Federation Press, 2001); Gregory Melleuish, *Cultural Liberalism in Australia: A Study in Intellectual and Cultural History* (Cambridge, UK; Oakleigh, Vic: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Ian Cook, *Liberalism in Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1999).
[122] Marian Sawer, *The Ethical State?: Social Liberalism in Australia* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 2003), 10–14, 35–36.
[123] Ibid., 54, 70–71, 75, 84.
[124] John Roskam, 'Liberalism and Social Welfare', in *Liberalism and the Australian Federation*, ed. J. R. Nethercote (Annandale, NSW: Federation Press, 2001), 267, 286.

were the market and consumer are sovereign.[125] By contrast, Gregory Melluish, argued that the term 'liberalism' had been misappropriated by the Deakin and the protectionist impulses of Liberalism.[126] Instead, Melluish argued that the conditions of truly liberal thinking have only emerged again since the late 1970s, but that it faces continued challenges from 'statism' and conservative populism.[127] In 2010, Waleed Aly, entered the debate on the relationship between the conservative and liberal tradition after the Howard government's demise and as renewed ideological warfare was breaking out within the LPA. Aly argued that in its current form, neo-conservatism was essentially a reactionary political force, and its marriage with neo-liberalism was collapsing under the weight of its own contradictions.[128]

Reflecting the on-going significance of leaders and individuals within the party, there were also a number of biographies of significant Liberal figures, such as John Howard, Robert Menzies, John Gorton, Malcolm Fraser, John Carrick, Bert Kelly, and a study of NSW premier Nick Greiner.[129] Wayne Errington and Peter Van Onselen's *Battleground: Why the Liberal Party shirtfronted Tony Abbott*, is not a traditional biography, but it explored the collapse of the Abbott prime ministership through the lens of Abbott's personal failings.[130] These studies, while offering an individual perspective of the party, did much to illuminate the party's inner workings and ethos.

These studies were complimented by a significant grey literature, written largely by 'insiders' of the political process. The most influential from the 1983 to 1996 period are, Paul Kelly's *End of Certainty* and Pamela Williams *The Victory*. Kelly traced the internal debates within the Liberal party and the ultimate triumph of the 'dries' over the 'wets'. Williams revealed significant new information about the Liberal party's electoral machine and its capacity for research, which was further researched by Stephen Mills in *The Professionals*. It remains to be seen whether Kelly's latest effort *Triumph and Demise*, or Niki Savva's *Road to Ruin* or Errington and Van Onselen's *Battleground* will come to be the touchstone for popular understanding of the Abbott's time as leader of the Liberal party. Kelly's interpretation of the significance of the conservative wing as the dominant mode of the LPA may

[125] Pincus, J.J., 'Liberalism and Australia's Economic and Industrial Development', in *Liberalism and the Australian Federation*, ed. J. R. Nethercote (Annandale, NSW: Federation Press, 2001), 266.
[126] Gregory Melleuish, *A Short History of Australian Liberalism* (St Leonards, NSW: Centre for Independent Studies, 2000), 28, 35; Brett's interpretation of the LPA's neo-liberal turn remains dominant Brett, *The Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class*, Chapter 8.
[127] Melleuish, Gregory, 'Australian Liberalism', in *Liberalism and the Australian Federation*, ed. J. R. Nethercote (Annandale, NSW: Federation Press, 2001), 38, 40.
[128] Waleed Aly, *What's Right?: The Future of Conservatism in Australia*, vol. 37 (Melbourne: Black Inc, 2010).
[129] Errington and Van Onselen, *John Winston Howard*; Hancock, *John Gorton*; Weller, *Malcolm Fraser PM*; Graeme Starr, *Carrick: Principles, Politics and Policy* (Ballan, Vic: Connor Court Publishing, 2012); Hal Colebatch, *The Modest Member: The Life and Times of Bert Kelly Colbatch* (Ballan, Vic: Connor Court Publishing, 2012); Hancock, *Nick Greiner*.
[130] Wayne Errington and Peter Van Onselen, *Battleground: Why the Liberal Party Shirtfronted Tony Abbott* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Publishing, 2015).

prove a misjudgement. Perhaps in time this period will come to stand in for the twilight of the neo-liberal-neo-conservative marriage. These texts do not benefit from the wisdom of hindsight, but they remain important chronologies nonetheless. They document information otherwise difficult for academics to access, preserving information long after it has ceased to be considered important by politicians and the public.[131] Additionally, accounts by insiders have significantly shaped the understanding of Liberal politicians and contemporary journalists, and it is often these accounts, rather than the work of academics, that informs their understanding of the past.

In a similar vein are the contemporaneous biographical studies produced by party insiders. In recent years two biographies have appeared on Malcolm Turnbull, three on Tony Abbott and one of Joe Hockey,[132] together with more journalistic accounts of past leadership contenders.[133] In recent decades, former Liberal and National party figures have reversed the long trend of not writing about their time in politics. Through their memoirs, the most notable include John Howard's *Lazarus Rising*, Malcolm Fraser and Margaret Simon's *Malcolm Fraser,* Peter Costello's, *The Costello Memoirs*, Peter Reith's *The Reith Papers,* Tony Abbott's *Battlelines* and John Hyde's *Dry: In defence of economic freedom,* they contribute to a burgeoning personal literature.[134] Like insider accounts, these texts can enlighten the political contest and shape how insiders understand each other and, in unfortunate cases, can even spark controversies.

[131] Paul Kelly, *The End of Certainty: Power, Politics and Business in Australia* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2008); Williams, *The Victory*; Paul Kelly, *Triumph and Demise: The Broken Promise of a Labor Generation* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Publishing, 2014); Niki Savva, *The Road to Ruin: How Tony Abbott and Peta Credlin Destroyed Their Own Government* (Brunswick, Vic: Scribe Publications, 2016).

[132] See Annabel Crabb, *Stop at Nothing* (Carlton, Vic: Black Inc. books, 2016); Paddy Manning, *Born to Rule: The Unauthorised Biography of Malcolm Turnbull* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Publishing, 2015); David Marr, *Political Animal: The Making of Tony Abbott*, vol. 47, Quarterly Essay (Collingwood, Vic: Black Inc, 2012); Susan Mitchell, *Tony Abbott : A Man's Man* (Brunswick, Vic.: Scribe, 2011); Michael Duffy, *Latham and Abbott* (Milsons Point, NSW: Random House Australia, 2004); Madonna King, *Hockey: Not Your Average Joe* (St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2014).

[133] For example see Russell Schneider, *The Colt from Kooyong: Andrew Peacock: A Political Biography* (London; Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1981); David Barnett and Pru Goward, *John Howard: Prime Minister* (Ringwood, Vic: Viking, 1997); Billy Snedden and Bernadette Schedvin, *Billy Snedden: An Unlikely Liberal* (South Melbourne: Macmillan Australia, 1990).

[134] See John Howard, *Lazarus Rising: A Personal and Political Autobiography* (Pymble, NSW: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010); Fraser and Simons, *Malcolm Fraser*; Peter Costello, *The Costello Memoirs: The Age of Prosperity* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Publishing, 2008); Peter Reith, *The Reith Papers* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2015); John Hyde, *Dry: In Defence of Economic Freedom: The Saga of How the Dries Changed the Australian Economy for the Better* (Melbourne: Institute of Public Affairs, 2002); Tony Abbott, *Battlelines*, Updated ed (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Publishing, 2009); Also see Christopher Pyne, *A Letter to My Children* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2015); Andrew Robb, *Black Dog Daze: Public Life, Private Demons* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 2011); Tim Fischer, *Holy See, Unholy Me! :1000 Days in Rome: Tales from My Time as Australian Ambassador to the Vatican* (Sydney, NSW: HarperCollins Publishers Australia, 2013); John Howard, *The Menzies Era* (Sydney, NSW: HarperCollins Publishers Australia, 2014).

Ideology and the party's understanding of the ideological spectrum in the Australian political system is important. Given the Liberal party is understudied, a focus on the party's ideology has become a dominant way of thinking about the party in recent times. The result has been that far too much emphasis is placed on the party's ideology as an explanatory factor for internal party dynamics and problems. To be clear, this is not in any way a criticism of the research undertaken on the party's ideology, but rather an argument that without complementary studies about structural features and interpersonal relationships it has had the effect of skewing our understanding of the party, particularly in general public discourse.

Therefore, this study is primarily concerned with how the parliamentary Liberal party navigates the political and institutional landscape. A key concern is how it manages its internal politics while also seeking to utilise tools such as parliament and the media in order to promote values, ideas and win elections. In this context, ideology rather than a central concern, is another problem to be managed by the party's institutions and personnel.

Internal party management and leadership in the Liberal Party

Three themes dominate conceptions of the Liberal party's capacity to manage its internal politics. First, the party's decentralised organisational structure and its implications, second, its political culture centred on the parliamentary party and its leader, and finally, the uneasy ideological marriage between liberalism and conservatism.

As Jaensch argues, a party may be an actor within society, but it is also a 'society and polity in its own right.'[135] Party actors undertake formal and informal activities and roles within a 'social collectively'.[136] At the same time a party is a political system, with authority structures for managing disputes, co-ordinating recruiting and policy-making and facilitating systems of representation. A critical organising principle of the LPA is its federal structure. Katherine West noted that 'there is no such thing as the Liberal Party of Australia, which in practice is a composite of seven parties' who are influenced by their environment and the personalities of its participants.[137] Although the federal parliamentary party meets in Canberra and is serviced by its own small federal secretariat, the reality of state organised pre-selections has had a huge impact on the party's culture and operation. The party is notoriously difficult to reform, and the centre has only very slowly accumulated powers, and in nowhere near the order of magnitude of the Labor party. An aim of this study is to further illuminate how processes of state renewal impact on the parliamentary party.

[135] Jaensch, *The Liberals*, 105.
[136] Ibid.
[137] West, *Power in the Liberal Party*, 261.

The organisation of the Liberal party has also influenced the relationship between the extra-parliamentary party and its parliamentary wing (not to mention the party's philosophy). As Ian Hancock's organisational histories of the federal secretariat and the New South Wales division have demonstrated, many of the patterns affecting the party today, have repeated themselves throughout the party's history. Accordingly, the extra-parliamentary party's effective capacity to exercise significant influence within the party's policy ceased between 1950 and 1954 — that is at a minimum six years after the party's founding and one year after Menzies victory in 1949.[138] Menzies' government turned toward the public service for advice and simply ignored the organisation and particularly its membership. In response, the organisation invested further in cementing its dominance over election strategy and campaigning. This relationship pattern has continued down to the present with only some changes at the margins.[139] Indeed, as Errington has noted, the party is complacent in its attitude to its organisational health and has repeatedly sidestepped opportunities to tackle major problems such as growing factionalism, falling membership, dependence on a narrow fundraising base and poor policy infrastructure.[140] While the relationship between the party organisation and the parliamentary party is important, it should be the product of a significant study in its own right. Instead, this study will primarily focus on the internal functions of the parliamentary party.

In the mid-1940s, the main organisational challenge for the Liberal party was to build a mass political organisation that could rival the ALP. This desire was born of the repeated political collapses when the LPA's antecedents lost office and the desire to create a political organisation free of ties to powerful outside interests. Indeed, a striking difference between understanding of the LPA in contemporary general studies and older general studies of the party is that the party's initial desires and embarrassment of its past (particularly by the United Australia Party (UAP)) is often overlooked. This is unsurprising, given it reflects the LPA's drift from mass party organisation and the importance of maintaining Menzies' Chinese wall between fundraisers, donors and parliamentarians.

However as Abjorensen has observed, it was not just a mass party organisation that the non-Labor forces were seeking, but the ability to produce leaders with 'far wider appeal' than previously.[141] Thus, while the party had succeeded in building a party organisation durable enough to whether a political collapse in 1972, it remained in its political culture a leadership vehicle. West's observation from 1965 remains pertinent: that Menzies had succeeded in controlling the party through

[138] Hancock, *National and Permanent?*, 120.
[139] Judith Brett, 'The Liberal Party', in *Government, Politics, Power and Policy in Australia*, ed. Andrew Parkin, John Summers, and Dennis Woodward, 9th ed. (Frenchs Forest, NSW: Longman, 2010), 234.
[140] Errington, 'The Liberal Party: Electoral Success despite Organisational Drift', 16–17.
[141] Abjorensen, *Leadership and the Liberal Revival*, 173.

'subordinating its extra-parliamentary to its federal parliamentary wing, its federal parliamentary wing to the Liberal-Country party cabinet and the federal cabinet to its Liberal prime minister.'[142] Starr explained that this was the natural consequence of the reality that the initiative for forming a new party would have had to come from the parliamentary rump of the UAP. And he pithily encapsulated the situation when he noted that unlike the ALP and or the Country party, the LPA 'was conceived as a parliamentary group in need of organisational support, rather than an extra-parliamentary body seeking legislative representation.'[143] Hence, it is hardly a surprise that the party maintained its already strong inclination towards a leader dominated political organisation and culture.

Indeed, the importance of leadership is a recurrent theme in studies of the LPA. Liberal leaders have the capacity to hire and fire their colleagues and this provides the leader with some authority, even if it is balanced by representational considerations. Yet, as Miragliotta *et al.* note, the party does not institutionalise the leader's authority; a leader must first demonstrate their electoral appeal before receiving the party's full authority.[144] For successful leaders, such as Menzies, Fraser and Howard, this produces long-lived and (mostly) disciplined governments. But as Brett as argued, it weakens the party in the long-term, retarding succession planning, policy development and giving the party an overall defensive character.[145]

Leaders in opposition, in particular, occupy a precarious position. Indeed, a study of leadership turnover demonstrated that Liberal party leaders serve for an average of four years (this figure includes Menzies) and have some of the shortest average leadership tenures in the democratic world. [146] This underlines the requirement for leaders to demonstrate immediate success and highlights the extra-ordinary success of Menzies and Howard as long-lived party leaders in comparison to leaders during the party's opposition years. Moreover, as Abjorensen has argued, leaders use personal relationships as important tools for governing the party, a theme which this study will unpack.[147] Indeed, this study aims to explore how LPA parliamentarians understand the relationship between party and leader and some of the reasons why opposition leadership is particularly difficult for the Liberal party.

[142] West, *Power in the Liberal Party*, 213.
[143] Starr, '"The Liberal Party of Australia"', 1978, 40.
[144] Miragliotta, Errington, and Barry, *The Australian Political System in Action*, 221.
[145] See Brett, *Exit Right*.
[146] Fredrik Bynander and Paul 't Hart, 'The Politics of Party Leader Survival and Succession: Australia in Comparative Perspective', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 1 (1 March 2007): 58.
[147] Abjorensen, *John Howard and the Conservative Tradition*, 75.

Despite the obvious shortcomings and challenges for Liberal leaders, they remain a dominant unit of analysis. This focus can be summed up by Kemp's declaration that 'leadership and philosophy are inseparable'.[148] Thus it is no surprise that many studies of the party have focused on leadership or have used leaders as a key unit of analysis.[149] George Brandis's neat summation provides the rationale: 'every Liberal leader has interpreted the party's core philosophical values in light of his personal beliefs and emphases'.[150] For Jaensch, it is the over-reliance on the leader that is an important link to its factional or 'tendency' system: when the leader is doing well, the party's political ideological groupings have been willing to put aside their differences in order to maintain office.[151] It is for this reason that contemporary studies of the LPA continue to highlight the fusion of 1909. The union of liberals and conservatives in opposition to labourism and socialism was enough to bind these two uncomfortable bedfellows for over a century. Yet, it was not without cost. The fusion remains a key driver of conflict within the party. During the 1980s, repeated failure proved the limitations of its leadership and ideological management structures. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the party constantly attempted to reiterate its policy preferences. A similar process was underway between 2007 and 2010, before the hung parliament injected renewed vigour into the electorally successful leadership model. The party's mythology that it does not have factions ultimately inhibits the party's ability to develop useful power-sharing machinery.[152] In its exploration of the party's policy-making and political communications processes, this study will explore the extent to which leaders and their preferences mattered.

The Coalition relationship

The relationship with the rural-based National party is an important constant companion to the Liberal party's history. The amount of attention given over to the Country party in West's account attests to the coalition partners' ability to influence and block Liberal party ambitions. The party, which began life as a social movement, in a way the LPA could never claim, profited from the gerrymander and 'country mindedness' when the rural population was still vibrant and delivered government to the Liberal party.[153] While many of the dynamics of this relationship have evolved

[148] Kemp, 'A Leader and a Philosophy'.
[149] For example consider West, *Power in the Liberal Party*; Abjorensen, *Leadership and the Liberal Revival*; Abjorensen, *John Howard and the Conservative Tradition*; Brett, *The Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class*; Brett, *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People*.
[150] George Brandis, 'A true believer in the community', *The Australian*, February 16 2010.
[151] Jaensch, *The Liberals*, 157.
[152] Errington, 'The Liberal Party: Electoral Success despite Organisational Drift', 22.
[153] Don Aitkin, 'Countrymindedness': The Spread of an Idea', *Australian Cultural History*, no. 4 (1985): 34–41; B. D. Graham, *The Formation of the Australian Country Parties* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1966).

over time, several dynamics which Hancock noted as features of the relationship in the early 1950s are recognisable to us today.[154]

The Coalition relationship is often a relationship cast in a negative light. Aitcheson characterised the relationship with the Country party as 'paying rent' and underlined what he saw as the high price for the nation, party and individuals.[155] Political scientists and historians such as Crisp and Hancock have also highlighted the tensions, even loathing, between the two partners.[156] Writing in the aftermath of the 1993 election, Jaensch even questioned why the coalition exists given that the two parties' ideologies are 'mutually antagonistic' and the Nationals ready willingness to campaign for sectional interests and 'agrarian socialism', despite the damage it causes to its coalition partner.[157] He went further arguing that during the 1980s, the Nationals had been 'a millstone', eroding the Coalition's credentials as an alternative government.[158] The party's insistence on its own distinctive values meant the coalition was an 'unnatural construct', which would only create problems for the Liberal party.[159]

More recently, the relationship is viewed more benignly, probably as a result of the National party's waning influence. Costar's interpretation of the National's predicament in the mid-1990s recognised that the party was undergoing a transition. Its identity was confused as it struggled with the loss of its electoral heartland but still steadfastly refused amalgamation.[160] Leadership instability likely further weakened its standing.[161] Indeed, Costar has explicitly argued against the negative interpretation of the Coalition relationship as one where the National party demands concessions. Rather, the relationship between the two parties is one of give and take and dependent on the political talents of National party members themselves.[162]

Two decades on, the National party has ceased to be a farmer's party, and is now firmly regional in its outlook and services a niche political constituency.[163] As Woodward observed, the party is under threat from the rise of independents, ALP voting coastal populations, its inability to deliver policies that secure regional living standards and growing encroachment of the Liberal party into its old

[154] Hancock, *National and Permanent?*
[155] Raymond Aitchison, *Looking at the Liberals* (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1974), 13.
[156] Crisp, *Australian National Government*, 261.
[157] Jaensch, *The Liberals*, 96–99.
[158] Ibid., 223.
[159] Ibid., 224.
[160] Brian Costar, 'The National Party: Revival or Extinction?', in *For Better or for Worse: The Federal Coalition*, ed. Brian Costar (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1994), 130, 133, 144.
[161] Brian Costar, 'Coalition Politics and the Policy Process', in *Policy and Change: The Howard Mandate*, ed. Scott Prasser and Graeme Starr (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1997), 136–37.
[162] Ibid., 138; Costar, 'The National Party: The Resilient Party'; Brian Costar, 'Australia's Curious Coalition', *Political Science* 63, no. 1 (2011): 29–44.
[163] Costar, 'The National Party: The Resilient Party', 25, 36.

territories.[164] Amalgamation continues to be an important area of discussion, but for many, the formation of the Liberal-National Party (LNP) in 2008 was the result of circumstances specific to Queensland.[165] Indeed, as Miragliotta *et al.* noted, at the federal level it often suited the hard-pressed social liberals to have the more conservative National party members in another party room, even if that is not a failsafe protection.[166] As a testament to its success, the Coalition has never been dissolved in government. An aim of this study is to better understand how political actors interpret the Coalition relationship, how the party's management processes operate and what limits to they place on the leader's power. It will argue that despite the 'Joh for PM' fiasco, the Coalition relationship since 1983 is a history of continuity.

Liberal values and policy: the craft of policy-making in opposition

Policy-making is largely seen as the preserve of governments. Yet, definitions suggest that policy-making functions as a means for hypothesis testing and deliberate choice-making on the part of political actors. These processes are facilitated by a set of structured processes undertaken by either the public service, or by party infrastructure. Importantly, these are choices that are conscious of the dynamic context of government and the political dimensions of policy decisions.[167] In this sense, policy's purpose is to sort out priorities and reconcile philosophical and ideological aims with real world realities. Ultimately, it is a means to an end. However, with the notable exception of a handful of political scientists, academics have largely focused on the policy-making work of governments and the third party sectors they engage with.[168]

Omitting opposition from the analysis of policy-making fails to acknowledge the role that alternative governments play in developing policy. As Brendan McCaffrie has argued, much of the success of political leaders is due to the actions of their opposition, either through ineptitude, timely support of

[164] Dennis Woodward, 'The Nationals', in *Government, Politics, Power and Policy in Australia*, ed. Dennis Woodward, Andrew Parkin, and John B. A. Summers (Frenchs Forest, N.S.W: Pearson Australia, 2010), 251–52.
[165] See Brian Costar, 'Party Futures: Independence, Coalition or Amalgamation?', in *The National Party: Prospects for the Great Survivors*, ed. Linda Elizabeth Courtenay Botterill and Geoff Cockfield (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2009). Indeed, Queensland now joins the Northern Territory and Tasmania in the ranks of states with only one conservative party.
[166] Miragliotta, Errington, and Barry, *The Australian Political System in Action*, 224.
[167] Catherine Althaus, Peter Bridgman, and Glyn Davis, *The Australian Policy Handbook* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2007), 6–7.
[168] For example, see Tiernan and Weller, *Learning to Be a Minister*; James Walter, 'Mangers or Messiahs? Prime Ministerial Leadership and the Transition to Government', in *How Power Changes Hands: Transition and Succession in Government*, ed. Paul 't Hart and John Uhr (Houndsmill, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Catherine Haddon, 'Making Policy in Opposition: Lessons for Effective Government' (The Institute for Government, 2012), http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/making-policy-opposition; Scott Prasser, 'Opposition One Day, Government the Next: Can Oppositions Make Policy and Be Ready for Office?', *Australasian Parliamentary Review* 25, no. 1 (2010): 151–61; For minority party or independent actors see Prosser and Denniss, *Minority Policy*.

policy and finally through reform consolidation.[169] This is because oppositions are seeking to replace the government and are not by default always in permanent opposition to the government's actions. Indeed, oppositions may seek, or be invited, to contribute to the development of government policy.[170] Opposition's capacity to influence outcomes is not necessarily dependent on their size, but their exploitation of opportunities that parliamentary political systems offer.[171] Given that successful governments regularly appropriate policy ideas from their opponents and adopt them with modifications, failure to consider the role of policy-making by non-government political actors does not give full credit to the political dimension in which actors that design, advocate and implement policy operate.

Yet the resources of oppositions are quite modest by comparison with government, despite the gradual institutionalisation of the notion of a 'shadow cabinet from the early 1960s in Australia.[172] Oppositions have to rely largely on their own resourcefulness. Gaining experience on the frontbench is the principal apprenticeship most policy-makers receive and one that they value.[173] Yet how much parties in opposition invest in policy-making is a moot point. Uhr detected oppositions have increasingly chosen to invest in campaign planning rather than policy work or on modifying government initiatives.[174] Indeed, a Liberal staffer Scott Prasser, has argued that perhaps we expect too much from oppositions who are ill-equipped to adequately develop policy and meet voters and interest groups' expectations.[175]

Others disagree; for instance, Catherine Haddon argued forcefully that policy-making was a key exercise for political parties in opposition. Through the policy-making process, parties interpret and renew their principles.[176] They also develop contacts with the policy sectors which they can draw upon on in government.[177] Policy-making is one of the key ways in which parties fulfil their role as educators, communicate their priorities to the electorate, and contributes to the rotational principle of alternation in government by offering voters an alternative choice at the ballot box.[178] Last, for

[169] Brendan McCaffrie, 'Understanding the Success of Presidents and Prime Ministers: The Role of Opposition Parties', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 47, no. 2 (1 June 2012): 257–71.
[170] Norton, 'Making Sense of Opposition', 246.
[171] Kaiser, 'Parliamentary Opposition in Westminster Democracies', 35.
[172] Punnett, *Front-Bench Opposition: The Role of the Leader of the Opposition, the Shadow Cabinet and Shadow Government in British Politics*, 59; Joel Bateman, *In the Shadows: The Shadow Cabinet in Australia* (Canberra: The Parliamentary Library, 2008), 9–10.
[173] Tiernan and Weller, *Learning to Be a Minister*, 66, 68.
[174] Uhr, 'Parliamentary Oppositional Leadership', 74.
[175] Prasser, 'Opposition One Day, Government the Next: Can Oppositions Make Policy and Be Ready for Office?', 154–58.
[176] Haddon, 'Making Policy in Opposition: Lessons for Effective Government', 4.
[177] Peter Riddell and Catherine Haddon, 'Transitions: Preparing for Changes of Government' (Institute for Government, 2009), 16; Tiernan and Weller, *Learning to Be a Minister*, 69.
[178] Maddox, *Australian Democracy in Theory and Practice*, 252–53, 255.

the major parties, credible policy-making also represents important preparation for transitioning into successful governments.

Studies of the Liberal party in opposition: who determines policy?

Studies of parties in opposition in Australia are limited, particularly when compared with the United Kingdom. In the Australian literature, studies of the ALP dominate as a result of that party's extensive periods in opposition, but more significantly, its emphasis on party democracy and mass membership involved in formulating the party's platform.[179] In a similar vein, Anika Gauja's comparative study of political party's policy processes sought to understand the nature of the policy-making relationship between party members and parliamentarians.[180] Gauja's study focused on social-democratic parties because of the premium they placed on the involvement of party members in policy-making — a criteria which the LPA does not meet. Jim Walter has argued that in contrast to the ALP, the LPA has tended to downplay policy development, instead favouring an emphasis on broad principles and strong leadership.[181] Walter's account overlooks much of the policy work in the 1980s by the LPA, and particularly, John Hewson's *Fightback!*. However, his conclusion is broadly accurate when the party's long term history is taken in account.

To date, there is little academic research on the Liberal party in opposition, let alone its policy-making processes. Ian Marsh described the processes that developed in the party's brief 1970s stint in opposition that were *ad hoc* and the 'bare minimum'.[182] A process that began life as an overhaul of the party platform and to extend the party's policy ideas beyond the public service, was quickly retooled to get Fraser elected as the year 1975 unfolded.[183] Other studies from the 1970s reflected Marsh's interpretation.[184] As Starr argued, the extra-parliamentary party's direct role in policy-making atrophied through disuse, but the elite policy-making committees were still an important tool for controlling the party's platform.[185]

In the 1980s and 1990s, greater emphasis was placed on the Liberal party's seeming loss of identity. For many sympathetic academics, this was often seen as the primary cause of its policy ineptitude at the time — a judgement that might seem harsh today given the unprecedented electoral success of the Hawke Labor government. Another factor was the party's isolation from quality sources of

[179] Gauja, *The Politics of Party Policy*, Chapter 7.
[180] Ibid., Chapter 8.
[181] Walter, 'Mangers or Messiahs? Prime Ministerial Leadership and the Transition to Government', 50.
[182] Ian Marsh, 'Policy-Making in the Liberal Party: The Opposition Experience', *The Australian Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (1 June 1976): 17.
[183] Ibid., 14–16.
[184] Tiver, *The Liberal Party*, 46–51.
[185] Ibid.; Starr, '"The Liberal Party of Australia"', 1978, 61–63.

advice or relationships with outside organisations that could offer its parliamentarians adequate training in the art of policy debate and *realpolitik.*[186]

There has been some discussion of the nature of the Liberal party itself and where the localities of influence and policy-making powers lie within the party. As Jaensch noted, the LPA's conception of cabinet has different origins from Labor.[187] In the first instance, it is not democratically elected, though there was a brief period of experimentation with an elected front-bench under Billy Snedden. Second, in the mid-twentieth century, there was a strong emphasis on the Burkean ideal of the independent parliamentarian. Thus, Billy McMahon, writing about cabinet in the 1950s, argued that the LPA cabinet was not a *party* cabinet, but rather the cabinet 'represents the people and not the parliament and not the party'.[188] McMahon continued that it is 'the government alone' that should decide policy.[189] And the reason for this hostility to extra-parliamentary domination was obvious enough. Labor, by contrast, according to McMahon was 'controlled from outside' and its parliamentary party 'is not representative of the electorate' nor did it 'control its own destinies'.[190]

However, it is difficult to see this popular mandate ideal still present in the 1980s, let alone today. Even as the Valder Report attempted to carve out some further influence for the party organisation it reaffirmed the parliamentary party's right to determine policy.[191] Today, this assumption goes unquestioned. The LPA's behaviour can be readily explained by Lucy's concept of 'responsible party government', where when the executive 'looks over its shoulder', and particularly in the case of the Liberal party, it sees its parliamentary party and not the House of Representatives nor the party machine.[192]

A key aim of this study is to examine how parliamentary actors understood the role of policy-making in opposition. The question is important not only because opposition is a vital training ground of governments, but also because opposition offers greater latitude for internal debate because of weaker party discipline. The degree of investment in policy also reflects what the party considers important in terms of ideas and policies and strategies that the party thinks are effective for regaining office. This study will argue that the party invested heavily (as far as its resources could carry it) in policy for its first decade of opposition (1983-1993) because it believed it to be an

[186] Scott Prasser and Mark Neylan, 'Liberal Leadership, Policy-Making and Party Organisation', in *For Better or for Worse: The Federal Coalition*, ed. Brian Costar (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1994), 122–23.
[187] Jaensch, *The Liberals*, 118.
[188] William McMahon, 'The Liberal Party', in *The Australian Political Party System*, ed. Solomon R. Davis (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1954), 49.
[189] Ibid., 46.
[190] Ibid., 43.
[191] Liberal Party of Australia. Committee of Review and Valder, *Facing the Facts*, 98.
[192] Lucy, *The Australian Form of Government*, 325–27.

essential campaigning strategy. However, after the electoral disaster of the 1993 *Fightback!* the party shifted towards a strategy of 'policy management' and small-target campaigning.

Political communication in opposition: policy as narrative

The disparity between the government and opposition's policy-making capacities encourages oppositions to develop alternative strategies. As British academic Philip Norton has argued, 'the oxygen of publicity' is the opposition party's 'most important weapon.'[193] Increasingly, the media is the key arena where parties compete. The media's central role as a hub for political communication has in turn co-opted politicians into media processes (known in the literature as 'mediatisation') and driven the professionalisation of elections.[194] Particularly, as the adversarial and two-sided conflict between government and opposition lends itself easily to pro-and-con media coverage.[195] As media collectively have become more important to political communication, the opposition is judged as much by its capacity to manage the media as it is able to manage the parliament.[196] Indeed, Uhr argued that for the opposition 'the confidence-vote that really matters … is the vote of public confidence.'[197] How then do oppositions understand the relationship between their policy work and their political communication needs?

Political communication and the 'mediatisation of politics'

Values and policy ideas make up a large part of a political party's branding efforts. Without executive power, oppositions are even more dependent on ideas, values and symbols. The process of deciding what ideas and when they are released helps parties in government and opposition set out their credentials and colours in the narrative the party wants to tell about its capacity to govern. But the devil is in the detail, or rather, the policy detail. Parties can present broad appeals that harness fuzzy principles and values, or at another extreme, present comprehensive manifestos, backed up by detailed economic modelling. Deciding what the balance should be is the key communication task for political parties.

Just as the organisation of political parties have changed over time so too has the relationship between political actors, citizens and the media. Julianne Schultz has described how the Australian press went from diligently reporting the words of important men to a more critical posture that went hand in hand with the industry's professionalisation.[198] In the late twentieth century political

[193] Norton, 'Making Sense of Opposition', 245.
[194] Ward and Stewart, *Politics One*, 253, 255.
[195] Johnson, 'Opposition in the British Political System', 496–98.
[196] Uhr, 'Parliamentary Oppositional Leadership', 67.
[197] Ibid., 70.
[198] Julianne Schultz, 'The Press', in *The Media & Communications in Australia*, ed. Stuart Cunningham and Graeme Turner (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2002), 113.

scientists have increasingly discussed the 'mediatisation of politics'.[199] Mediatisation is a phenomena of modernity' and globalisation and the companion to other trends in society such as individualisation, secularisation and economisation to name a few.[200]

As a term, mediatisation is not settled on specific definition, but rather, it is a cloud of common concepts and ways of understanding media's impact on political communication. What is agreed is that mediatisation is a *process*.[201] This process is it not unidirectional and it relies on media becoming, first, an independent institution within society, and then, a pervasive force facilitating both political and cultural communication. Put another way, mediatisation is interested in the empirical study of how politics has changed because of two factors. First, how has politics changed as the media has become citizens' primary source of information about politics. Second, how has media pervasiveness impacted on the behaviour of political actors when seeking to communicate with voters. In the literature this is often operationalised as 'media logic' gaining the upper hand over 'political logic'. I will discuss media and political logic further below, but first it is important to explore the concept of mediatisation in greater depth.

Disagreements about mediatisation focus on operationalising the concept for empirical study rather than its definition. Winfried Schultz, sought to emphasize the relationship between media and social change drawing attention to four processes: first, the way media extends human communication; second, the way media can partially or completely substitute existing social interactions and change their character; third, amalgamation or the way the lines between media activities blur, 'merge and mingle' with everyday life and; finally, accommodation or the reality that media through its very existence 'induces social change'.[202] Additionally, Blumler and Kavanagh have emphasised temporal change, conceptualising mediatisation into three phases.[203] Each age is defined by technological change and advancement, which also broadly align with the way political scientists conceptualise the evolution of political parties as mass, catch-all, and today, cartelised parties. Blumler and Kavangah's first age was the period where media, were for the most part, dependent on political actors. The

[199] For some examples see Gianpietro Mazzoleni, 'Media Logic and Party Logic in Campaign Coverage: The Italian General Election of 1983', *European Journal of Communication* 2, no. 1 (1987): 81–103; Kees Brants and Philip van Praag, 'Signs of Media Logic: Half a Century of Political Communication in the Netherlands', *Javnost - The Public* 13, no. 1 (2006); Hans Mathias Kepplinger, 'Reciprocal Effects: Toward a Theory of Mass Media Effects on Decision Makers', *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 12, no. 2 (2007): 3–23.
[200] Stig Hjarvard, 'The Mediatization of Society A Theory of the Media as Agents of Social and Cultural Change', *Nordicom Review* 29, no. 2 (2008): 108; Jay G. Blumler and Dennis Kavanagh, 'The Third Age of Political Communication: Influences and Features', *Political Communication* 16, no. 3 (1999): 210.
[201] Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp, 'Conceptualizing Mediatization: Contexts, Traditions, Arguments', *Communication Theory* 23, no. 3 (2013): 197.
[202] Winfried Schulz, 'Reconstructing Mediatization as an Analytical Concept', *European Journal of Communication* 19, no. 1 (1 March 2004): 88–89.
[203] Blumler and Kavanagh, 'The Third Age of Political Communication', 211–13.

second saw the emergence of the media as an increasingly independent institution, which saw parties increasingly focus their energies on producing content suitable for the media. The third age, which is emerging around us, the media has become all-pervasive.

To date political scientists have sought to develop further the concepts driving mediatisation — namely, 'media logic and political logic'. Media logic, first defined by Altheide and Snow, was described as:

> A form of communication; the process through which media present and transmit information. Elements of this form include the various media and the formats used by these media. Format consists, in part, of how material is organized, the style in which it is presented, the focus or emphasis on particular characteristics of behaviour, and the grammar of media communication. Format becomes a framework or a perspective that is used to present as well as interpret phenomena.[204]

Political logic on the other hand is a term poorly defined by the literature and centres on policy dimensions, governance questions or put simply the idea of governing well and for the common good. In general, mediatisation is seen as a negative development for democracy, for example Mazzoleni and Schultz even go so far as to define mediatisation as the 'problematic concomitants or consequences of the development of modern mass media.'[205] The emphasis on media logic has generally meant that political logic is instead understood loosely as the inverse of 'media logic', and therefore, a less pejorative term.

Drawing on Blumler and Kavangah, Strömbäck argued that mediatisation should focus on the power relations between political and media actors and how they had evolved over time.[206] He argued that the relationship between political and media actors can be divided into four phases, which were not necessarily temporal as Blumler and Kavanagh's three ages, but rather focused on the balance of power between actors. In his first two phases, political actors and 'political logic' dominate media actors' behaviour, though critically in phase two, media actors are increasingly asserting their independence from political actors.[207] In these first two phases, personal interactions are still important and may even be the dominant source of information about politics for citizens. In phases

[204] David Altheide and Robert Snow, *Media Logic* (Beverly Hills, Calif: Sage Publications, 1979), 10.
[205] Gianpietro Mazzoleni and Winfried Schultz, '"Mediatization" of Politics: A Challenge for Democracy?', *Political Communication* 16, no. 3 (1999): 249.
[206] Jesper Strömbäck, 'Four Phases of Mediatization: An Analysis of the Mediatization of Politics', *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 13, no. 3 (2008): 228–46.
[207] Ibid., 236–37.

three and four, it is the media that increasingly has the upper hand.[208] In response to this shift in power, political actors increasingly *adapt* their behaviour to the needs of the media or 'media's logic'.[209] The critical distinction between phase three and four as conceptualised by Strömbäck is that political actors retain important 'political logic' considerations about responsible governance in the third phase, which by the final phase they have largely abandoned and instead have *adopted* and internalised media logic as part of their everyday response to political events .[210] In this way, we can see why Meyer would argue that the media 'colonise politics'.[211] This fourth phase of mediatisation is synonymous with permanent campaigning, professionalised politics and an emphasis on public relations.[212] Critically, scholars are at pains to note that mediatisation is not a unidirectional process — in fact, it ebbs and flows across time and it is not uniform across all of society.

The most recent literature has honed in on the meaning of media and political logics. As Marcinkowski has recently suggested, mediatisation is not the product of history, nor is it simply a process effecting politics, rather it is created as a result of 'the deep structure of [a] functionally differentiated Society'.[213] That is, Macinkowski sees media logic as ultimately a means to gain publicity in a world where information is voluminous and so specialised it has profoundly affected political actors' attempts to gain attention:

> The mediatisation of politics is nothing else but the reaction to an essential deficiency within the political system: the typical deficit of attention given to politics in modern society, in which growing parts of the potential public turn away from politics and towards other attractions. Politics counters this threat to its own foundations of legitimation with affection towards that functional area which is, like no other area, able to bundle public attention: the media.[214]

Landerer is also critical of the way that 'media logic' and 'political logic' are used and has sought to create a more nuanced definition of mediatisation which lends itself more readily to operationalisation.[215] Instead of media and political logic, Landerer suggests, normative logic and market logic which encompass both media and political actors. For media actors, market logic is the

[208] Ibid., 237–41.
[209] Ibid., 239.
[210] Ibid., 240.
[211] Thomas Meyer and Lewis P. Hinchman, *Media Democracy: How the Media Colonize Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press ; Malden, MA : Blackwell, 2002).
[212] Strömbäck, 'Four Phases of Mediatization', 240.
[213] Frank Marcinkowski, 'Mediatisation of Politics: Reflections on the State of The Concept', *Javnost - The Public* 21, no. 2 (2014): 18.
[214] Ibid.
[215] Nino Landerer, 'Rethinking the Logics: A Conceptual Framework for the Mediatization of Politics', *Communication Theory* 23, no. 3 (2013): 239–58.

axis by which 'audience-oriented' and 'commercial' concerns govern and dominate news production. On the other hand, normative logic is informed by the concept of the public good: the media as the fourth estate acts as scrutineer-in-chief of powerful interests.[216] For political actors market logic is defined by office seeking behaviours as opposed to normative logics governed by the public good and responsible government and opposition.[217]

Landerer's conception is useful because it draws our attention to the multiple and competing tensions at play when parties craft policy and construct narratives. Different policy actors will conceive of these processes in different ways and it is these competitive tensions which explain why mediatisation is not a unidirectional process. That is, local conditions, skills sets, fashions and norms, in conjunction with the ambitions and the persuasiveness or dominance of key political actors will all effect how the particular alchemy between media and political logic, and the emphasis on either market or normative logics at any one time. Put another way, politicians react to their environment and experiment to determine what the 'market' can bear — or more put more cynically still — what is effective and what they can get away with.

Accordingly, researchers are increasingly interested in the role of media in shaping the behaviour of political actors and its impact on the practice of democracy. Previous research has largely focused on the most visible aspect of this process, including changes to how media organisations cover politics and how political actors have adapted their public communication techniques.[218] Less is known about how parties actually negotiate the changing media circumstances over time. Strömbäck and Van Aelst have begun attempting to theorise these processes, arguing that parties adapt to media environments to suit their own goals which are multifaceted.[219] Thus, in the electoral contest, parties want to maximise votes, but in their own internal party management, they seek to minimise media exposure.[220] This thesis is an empirical study of these processes at the party level. It will argue that during the 1980s, there was growing awareness of the need to adapt to media processes, but

[216] Ibid., 245.
[217] Ibid., 247.
[218] For examples see Brants and van Praag, 'Signs of Media Logic'; Christian Elmelund-Præstekær, David Nicolas Hopmann, and Asbjørn Sonne Nørgaard, 'Does Mediatization Change MP-Media Interaction and MP Attitudes toward the Media? Evidence from a Longitudinal Study of Danish MPs', *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 16, no. 3 (2011): 382–403; Bo Laursen and Chiara Valentini, 'Mediatization and Government Communication Press Work in the European Parliament', *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 20, no. 1 (1 January 2015): 26–44; Melanie Magin, 'Shades of Mediatization Components of Media Logic in German and Austrian Elite Newspapers (1949–2009)', *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 20, no. 4 (2015): 415–37; Andreu Casero-Ripollés, Ramón A. Feenstra, and Simon Tormey, 'Old and New Media Logics in an Electoral Campaign The Case of Podemos and the Two-Way Street Mediatization of Politics', *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, forthcoming 2016, 1–20.
[219] Strömbäck and Aelst, 'Why Political Parties Adapt to the Media Exploring the Fourth Dimension of Mediatization', 345.
[220] Ibid., 347–50.

that the process was not uniform or even readily apparent to actors. However, by the post-2007 opposition period, the opposition was highly attuned to media processes to the point where they neglected the requirements of political logic, such as developing a comprehensive plan for government.

Literature on the LPA and its communication strategies

The literature on the Liberal party and its engagement with the media or campaigning is similarly relatively slim. Stephen Mills' landmark studies into the professionalisation of political campaigning in Australia, most notably *The New Machine Men*, documents the LPA's embrace of direct mail and new marketing techniques in the mid-1980s, but demonstrates that it campaigning technology was ultimately inferior to the ALP.[221] In *The Professionals*, Mills traced the LPA's pre-eminence in polling under both Textor and Crosby leading to its dominance in the mid-1990s and 2000s, only to see its position come under threat by new campaign techniques adopted by the ALP.[222]

In the 1980s, academics were increasingly discussing the impact of television on political communication and parties. Rodney Tiffen and Keith Windschuttle both argued that the media had become increasingly focused on leaders.[223] Tiffen also argued that parties were using less policy in their election campaigns.[224] Though he acknowledged Howard's attempts at policy differentiation in 1987 and was writing before the LPA launched *Fightback!,* Tiffen's arguments suggest the Liberals were often out-performed by Labor's political communications strategies which conferred political advantage.

The personalisation (sometimes presidentialisation) of politics is a world-wide trend.[225] Leaders are increasingly important as the connecting bridge between voters and parties at election times. Instead of choosing between parties, voters instead choose between party leaders. In the Australian context, the increasing focus on leaders was initially noted in the Australian campaign literature at the beginning of the 1980s. [226] By the 2000s, the emphasis on leaders was discussed explicitly as

[221] Stephen Mills, *The New Machine Men: Polls and Persuasion in Australian Politics* (Ringwood, Victoria; Penguin Books, 1986).
[222] Mills, *The Professionals*.
[223] Keith Windschuttle, *The Media: A New Analysis of the Press, Television, Radio and Advertising in Australia* (Ringwood, Vic: Penguin, 1988), 312–17; Rodney Tiffen, *News and Power* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989), 140–44.
[224] Tiffen, *News and Power*, 140–43.
[225] Paul Webb and Thomas Poguntke, *The Presidentialization of Politics: A Comparative Study of Modern Democracies* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Lauri Karvonen, *The Personalisation of Politics: A Study of Parliamentary Democracies* (ECPR Press, 2010).
[226] For early discussion of the increasing dominance of leaders in political campaigns see Murray Goot, 'The Media and the Campaign', in *Australia at the Polls: The National Elections of 1980 and 1983*, ed. Howard Penniman (Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), 183–85; Colin Hughes, 'A Close Run Thing', in *Australia at*

personalisation.[227] This study will shed new light on how the Liberal party's relationship with its leaders and demonstrate how leaders (to the cost of ministers) increasingly became the focus of party's political communication strategies first as symbolic avatars of the party's policy ideas and eventually, as the corporate voice of the party.

Television was also impacting political parties. In 1974, the LPA began its two-decade project to develop effective national campaigning. As Jim Jupp argued as early as 1982, television was contributing to the erosion of parties as mass political organisations.[228] Ian Ward argued that parties were organs of mass political communication, funnelling messages from party elites to its branch members and through them to the wider public and *vice versa*. Television, Ward argued, undercut these links by rendering this human mediated form of communication cumbersome and inefficient.[229] The relationship between the party organisation's capacity to support campaigns and the growing weakness of its organisation will be explored in this study.

The Liberal party itself has also made some limited commentary on its political communication capacity. In government, the party emphasised the advantages of incumbency such as party leadership and policy rather than its political communication strategies.[230] Unsurprisingly, when the party is in opposition, there is a greater tendency for the party to focus on political communications innovations, such as research, information management after its victory in 1996 and its embrace of new communications technologies in 2010 and 2013.[231]

There are also some academic studies of LPA and campaign innovations. In the early 1980s, Rawlinson and Hughes outlined the Fraser government's campaign infrastructure during the 1980 and 1983 campaign, demonstrating the party's embrace of political research, electronic media

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the Polls: The National Elections of 1980 and 1983, ed. Howard Penniman (Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), 298–99.

[227] Marian Simms, 'The Leaders and the Press', *Australian Cultural History* 28, no. 1 (1 April 2010): 23–30; Ian McAllister, 'The Personalization of Politics in Australia', *Party Politics*, 2013, 337–45.

[228] James Jupp, *Party Politics, Australia 1966-1981* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), 174.

[229] Ian Ward, *Politics of the Media* (South Melbourne: Macmillan, 1995), 217–19.

[230] Lynton Crosby, 'The Liberal Party', in *Howard's Agenda: The 1998 Australian Election*, ed. John Warhurst and Marian Simms (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 2000); Brian Loughnane, 'The Liberal Campaign', in *Mortgage Nation: The 2004 Australian Election*, ed. Marian Simms, John Warhurst, and Richard Nile (Perth, W.A: Australia Research Institute, Curtin University of Technology, 2005).

[231] Andrew Robb, 'The Liberal Party Campaign', in *The Politics of Retribution: The 1996 Australian Federal Election*, ed. Clive Bean (St. Leonards, NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1997), 35–38; Brian Loughnane, 'The 2010 Federal Election: The Liberal Party', in *Julia 2010: The Caretaker Election*, ed. Marian Simms and John Wanna (ANU E-Press, 2012); Brian Loughnane, 'The Liberal Campaign in the 2013 Federal Election', in *Abbott's Gambit: The 2013 Australian Federal Election*, ed. John Wanna and Carol Johnson (Canberra: ANU E-Press, 2015).

monitoring and attempts for national co-ordination via the telex service.[232] The Van Onselens demonstrated how the Coalition used secure websites to co-ordinate and passively discipline media messages.[233] Errington and van Onselen also explored how the Coalition deployed their resources and exploited the additional firepower of its larger Senate team to support Coalition campaigns in marginal seats.[234] They have also argued that by 2004, the Howard government had perfected the 'permanent campaign' in Australia, through a use of parliamentary mailing entitlements and the resources available to Senators, along with government advertising and the co-ordination of the government members secretariat with the extra-parliamentary wing of the Liberal party.[235] The effect of permanent campaigning was to deliver a substantial advantage to the government over the opposition.[236] Elsewhere, they have argued that Howard's personal discipline and attention to detail gave him a natural advantage in the age of intensive modern campaigning.[237] However, how did LPA actors view the use of media during their opposition years pre-dating the Howard governments, and what lessons and skills did they take from the Howard government into opposition?

Conclusion

The intention of this chapter is to locate the empirical research for this thesis firmly within a long established tradition of using historical analysis to explore relationships and processes of change within the party's institutions. This study's aim is to broaden our understanding of opposition beyond the legislature and to engage with the reality that oppositions are party-centric institutions. As our examination of the Liberal party has demonstrated, there are many important literatures that relate to the study of the party in opposition, from philosophical underpinnings (including the struggle between liberalism, conservatism and pragmatism), to party behaviour, the importance of leadership, and communication strategies.

Beyond the fact that there remain many gaps in our knowledge of how oppositions, and specifically how the Liberal party prepares itself for a return to office, the implications these questions raise are important phenomena that we must better understand. We have seen how there is some acknowledgement of the complex sets of relationships and motivations that underpin party's

[232] Martin Rawlinson, 'The Liberal Party', in *Australia at the Polls: The National Elections of 1980 and 1983*, ed. Howard Penniman (Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1983); Hughes, 'A Close Run Thing'.
[233] Ainslie van Onselen and Peter van Onselen, 'On Message or out of Touch? Secure Web Sites and Political Campaigning in Australia', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 43, no. 1 (1 March 2008): 43–58.
[234] Peter van Onselen and Wayne Errington, 'Shock Troops: The Emerging Role of Senators in House of Representatives Campaigns', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 40, no. 3 (1 September 2005): 357–71.
[235] Peter Van Onselen and Wayne Errington, 'The Democratic State as a Marketing Tool: The Permanent Campaign in Australia', *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 45, no. 1 (2007): 81–87.
[236] Ibid., 90.
[237] Peter van Van Onselen and Wayne Errington, 'From Vitriolic Criticism to Ungainly Praise: Locating John Howard's Political Success', *AQ: Australian Quarterly* 79, no. 2 (1 March 2007): 8.

behaviour in opposition, but we do not understand the overt and subtle motivations that shape decisions within party structures. In turn, we do not properly understand how decisions made by parties in turn shape the practice of parliamentary behaviour. The question of how parties attempt to manage these tensions, interpret the logics and norms of parliamentary practice, the government-opposition relationship and electoral politics go to the heart of how politics operates in the Australian context. Without a clearer understanding of these dynamics, our assumptions about how politics operates in Australia may prove faulty.

Therefore, this study draws on this rich but diverse literature to develop insights into (i) the ways a centre-right party conceptualises the role of opposition in our parliamentary democracy; (ii) the Liberal party's recent political experiences in opposition; (iii) the degree to which the development of policy devised in opposition helps prepare such a party for a return to government; and (iv) how the Liberal party has sought to communicate with voters.

Chapter 2
The Opposition and Parliament: Juggling legislative versus political agendas

Introduction

This chapter examines the way the Coalition approaches the two federal parliamentary chambers when in opposition. Building on the previous literature review, it argues that although the opposition's roles are considered to be functions of the legislature, the political actors responsible for running the day-to-day operations of the opposition are in fact motivated by political considerations. It is argued that theoretical conceptions of the roles of the opposition have only recently begun to come to terms with the party-political dimensions of opposition behaviour. When exercising their responsibilities and opportunities within the legislature, oppositions tend to prioritise and operate in a *party-political*, rather than an *opposition-legislative*, frame of reference.

This chapter will first outline the roles of the opposition — both formal and informal — along with its resources and privileges. Second, it will explore the parliament's capacities, outlining why parliament remains an important site for political contestation for political parties, even when consigned to opposition. Third, by examining the behaviour of the Coalition in both chambers this chapter will explore the impact of growing coordination of parliamentary tactics between the House of Representatives (HoR) and the Senate . It will argue that tactics in the HoR are based on a negative model of opposition and are largely rhetorical. It will also examine how parliamentary tactics were altered by the hung parliament from 2010-2013. By contrast, in the Senate, this chapter will argue that tactics in that chamber are more focused on information gathering with the aim of utilising the information extracted to attack the government. Last, it will argue that there is a cultural difference between to two chambers that has an important impact on how actors co-operate together and approach parliamentary tactics.

Formal roles of the opposition

With the exception of its role to 'unmake government', the official roles of the opposition, as listed by *House of Representatives Practice* are, in effect, those of the legislature:

• unmaking the Government—the Opposition, by definition, seeks to defeat a Government or cause a Government to resign;

• scrutiny of, criticism of, and suggestion of improvements to, legislation and financial proposals;

• examination of expenditure and public accounts;

• seeking information on, and clarification of, government policy (principally questions with and without notice);

• surveillance, appraisal and criticism of government administration;

• ventilating grievances;

• petitioning; and

• examination of delegated legislation. [238]

Beyond 'unmaking government' all of the above roles could be exercised by individual parliamentary actors either loosely aligned or atomistically differentiated. Parties are not essential to the successful execution of these tasks, but through the formalisation and discipline of the party system, parties have become crucial components in shaping the way the parliament operates, particularly in the lower house.[239] Parties may arguably improve the capacity of the opposition to prosecute the government through pooling of resources, more effective prioritisation of goals and co-ordination of parliamentary attacks. On the other hand, it is equally arguable that disciplined parties subsume the representative capacities of individual members of parliament, and in turn, compromise their capacity to criticise, probe and seek redress from government on issues of importance to their constituents.

Informal roles and privileges in the House of Representatives

The list of roles above does not account for the informal roles of the opposition, its resources and privileges, which are considerable when compared to the crossbench members of the HoR. The leader of the opposition was not officially recognised by the house or its *Standing Orders* until 1920, yet the role itself was firmly established and widely understood by all political actors. [240] Indeed, the silence in Australia's Constitution regarding the existence of parties, despite their significance to our

[238] B. C. Wright and P. E. Fowler, eds., *House of Representatives Practice* (Canberra: Dept. of the House of Representatives, 2012), 81, http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/House_of_Representatives/Powers_practice_and_procedure/Practice6.

[239] Ibid., 52; Peter Loveday, Allan Martin, and Robert Parker, eds., *The Emergence of the Australian Party System* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1977).

[240] Wright and Fowler, *House of Representatives Practice*, 77 Although, the title of Leader of the Opposition was used in Hansard from 1901.

understanding of Australian politics, highlights the need to examine these informal roles and how they are exploited by political actors in opposition.

In addition to its formal roles, the opposition has a significant number of privileges, from which its informal roles derive. These privileges provide the opposition with a profile and visibility in the parliamentary system and with a platform to mount political challenges to the government. The informal roles the opposition embraces emerge from both parliamentary and public expectations of non-government actors and the motivations these actors display in engaging the government of the day. Arguably, an opposition's capacity to engage a government in office is dependent largely on the privileges it enjoys and the ways in which they prosecute them.

So what are the key privileges available to an opposition? First, after the government the opposition enjoys preferential recognition in the legislative chambers. As the largest non-government group it is designated the title of 'official opposition' (or even 'Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition'), which also implies further preferential recognition by the speaker of the house. The leader of the opposition will be given the call before other non-government members, and will also likely be granted the indulgence of the chair to make personal explanations over other members of the house.[241] Recognition of the opposition also extends to the way debate is conducted in the house. The 'call' will alternate between government and opposition, and both sides will receive the same amount of speaking time.[242] Opposition members will also be represented on all HoR and Senate committees.

Recognition of the opposition is also reflected in the remuneration of parliamentarians. Of the twenty-one officially recognised roles in the HoR and Senate, nine relate to the opposition, including the leaders in each chamber, shadow ministers and opposition managers of business and whips.[243] This entitles executive members of the opposition to additional pay, for example the leader of the opposition is paid an additional 85 per cent of the base salary, while the deputy leader and leader in the Senate leader are both paid an additional 57.5 per cent. [244] The Belcher review into parliamentary entitlements and resources argued for an increase in the salary of shadow ministers (previously they received no additional salary) given their greater responsibilities and well defined

[241] Ibid., 80.
[242] Ibid., 81.
[243] Ibid., 54.
[244] Cathy Madden and Deirdre McKeown, 'Parliamentary Remuneration and Entitlements: 2014 Update' (Canberra: Parliamentary Library, 2014), 8, http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/library/prspub/3564874/upload_binary/3564874.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22library/prspub/3564874%22.

parliamentary role.[245] This recommendation was implemented in 2014, resulting in an additional 25 per cent increase on the base salary of shadow ministers.[246]

Official recognition of the opposition also entitles the opposition to specific resources, many of which were available only to the opposition and not to other third parties or independents until 2014. Indeed, recognition of the role of the opposition leader in the *Standing Orders* was the direct result of the parliament's recognition that the responsibilities of the opposition required more remuneration and resources if they were to be carried out effectively.[247] Given the parliament's historical power to issue and administer resources, disputes between government and opposition have been important in their codification and regulation by independent bodies such as the remuneration tribunal covering salaries and entitlements. The codification of entitlements into law was a direct result of a High Court challenge made to the Hawke government's use of the stamp allowance by the Coalition in opposition during the late 1980s.[248]

However, the resources allocated to the opposition, important as they are, are far inferior to those commanded by the government and this imbalance creates asymmetries of information, personnel and capacity. As Tiernan argued, one of the most important resources available to the opposition is additional political staff.[249] These staff are allocated to the opposition by the prime minister, and then redistributed to shadow ministers at the leader of the opposition's discretion. Since the early 1990s, the proportion of support staff was set at 21 per cent of the total number of government staff.[250] This proportion remains in place currently, but as a result of the Belcher review, the proportion is now designed to reflect the government's overall staffing profile rather than just raw numbers. This has increased the number of senior advisors available to the opposition, in turn increasing its capacity as an alternative government.[251]

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[245] Committee for the Review of Parliamentary Entitlements, 'Review of Parliamentary Entitlements' (Canberra: Dept. of Finance and Deregulation, 2010), 59, http://www.finance.gov.au/publications/review-of-parliamentary-entitlements-committee-report/docs/review-of-parliamentary-entitlements-committee-report.pdf.
[246] Madden and McKeown, 'Parliamentary Remuneration and Entitlements: 2014 Update', 6.
[247] Wright and Fowler, *House of Representatives Practice*, 79.
[248] Committee for the Review of Parliamentary Entitlements, 'Review of Parliamentary Entitlements', 28.
[249] Anne Tiernan, *Power without Responsibility: Ministerial Staffers in Australian Governments from Whitlam to Howard* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2007).
[250] Committee for the Review of Parliamentary Entitlements, 'Review of Parliamentary Entitlements', 97.
[251] Ibid.; Gary Gray, 'Boost to Transparency and Integrity for Parliamentary Entitlements' (Special Minister of State, 24 March 2011), http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/media/pressrel/1063065/upload_binary/1063065.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22media/pressrel/1063065%22.

The opposition also is entitled to assistance with its telecommunications strategies, including electronic and digital equipment such as smart phones, with assistance in the production and maintenance of websites, issuing of printed materials and social media monitoring. However, as these taxpayer-provided resources are specifically designed for parliamentary, rather than party-political purposes, they place the opposition at a disadvantage compared to government ministers who have access to departmental staff and budgets for assistance, and systematic media monitoring through their departments.[252] During the pre-1996 opposition years, this asymmetry in media monitoring was exaggerated of the establishment of by the Hawke government National Media Liaison Office (NMLS, also popularly known as aNiMaLs), and was a constant source of criticism and tension between government and opposition.

The opposition also has access to policy support, though this is not an exclusive privilege of the opposition.[253] The opposition can draw on the research capacity of the parliamentary library. As a result of changes arising out of the hung parliament, the opposition can access the parliamentary budget office, which can cost policies using government data. This represents a major increase the resources of all non-government parties, which for the first time can cost policies which draw on accurate budget figures.

A further set of resources available to the opposition relate to travel. This includes access to Commonwealth car services and, in the case of the opposition executive, an entitlement to domestic and overseas air travel. Shadow ministers are entitled to 55 nights away from their electorate (or the electorate where the home base is if they are a Senator). Access to domestic travel is pooled and redistributed at the discretion of the leader of the opposition.[254] The opposition's modest entitlement to overseas travel only applied to the leader and deputy leader of the opposition when it was first extended. However, since 2014, the opposition's overseas travel entitlement has increased (and has extended beyond the opposition to third parties), and can be pooled and spent at the discretion of the party leader. [255]

The second conventional privilege that the opposition enjoys is one of consultation and negotiation. Oppositions expect that they will be consulted and have an opportunity to influence the running of

[252] Dept. Finance, "Part Three: Accommodation and Office Facilities, 3.12, Printing and Communications", *Senators and Members Entitlements,* http://maps.finance.gov.au/entitlements_handbooks/senators-and-members/Part_Three_Accommodation_Office_Facilities_-_3.12_Printing_and_Communications.asp
[253] Minor parties can also access similar resources.
[254] Prime Minister and Cabinet, 'Remuneration Tribunal Determination 2015/12 - Members of Parliament - Travelling Allowance', 2015, https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2015L01294.
[255] Madden and McKeown, 'Parliamentary Remuneration and Entitlements: 2014 Update', 9.

the house. The opposition is entitled to representation on the privileges and select committees, which are responsible for governing and deciding the order of business in the HoR. The managers of government and opposition business are responsible for negotiating the order of bills presented before the chamber and the number of speakers that will speak in the debate. The chief government whip negotiates with their opposition counterpart in relation to business in the federation chamber.[256] Furthermore, the opposition also has some input in dictating the terms of attendance by parliamentarians through the pairing arrangements, which seeks to keep the numbers between government and opposition in balance. During the hung parliament of 2010-13, the Abbott-led opposition initially exploited its right to consultation by insisting on a set of very narrow conditions before it would offer a pair to the government. In doing so, the opposition maintained maximum pressure on the minority Gillard government to constantly guard against the loss of divisions.

The third set of privileges relate to the opposition's preferential treatment (in comparison to other non-government actors) when exercising its capacity to exploit the powers of parliament, especially its capacity to initiate bills and move procedures to challenge the government. The opposition is able to initiate matters of public importance, suspension of *Standing Orders* and censure motions.[257] The opposition is also able to propose bills and amendments to legislation, though without the numbers it has no capacity to bring forward bills for debate unless the government accedes. The opposition is also given almost half the questions in Question Time in order to directly scrutinise and demand information from the government. By contrast, members of the cross benches have to share their minimal access to Question Time. However, it is in this realm of privileges that the opposition's impotence is usually most deeply felt. The reality of numbers renders many of the opposition's potential powers to initiate and exploit the procedures of parliament largely theoretical. The opposition may try, but so long as the government maintains its majority on the floor of parliament, party discipline ensures the opposition will be unsuccessful.

Special Privileges in the Senate

Similar formal privileges are extended to the opposition in the Senate, such as alternation during debates and preferential treatment for opposition Senate leaders.[258] However, the opposition enjoys considerably more informal powers and scope for influence in the Senate. This is illustrated by the fact that a discrete list of opposition official roles only exists for the House of Representatives — in the Senate, the government rarely has a majority, and must seek support from the official opposition

[256] Wright and Fowler, *House of Representatives Practice*, 56.
[257] Ibid., 81–82.
[258] Harry Evans and Rosemary Laing, eds., *Odgers' Australian Senate Practice*, 13th ed. (Canberra: Australian Govt. Publishing Service for Dept. of the Senate, 2012), 168, 173, 241, 447, 448, 450, 45354, 457, 460–61, 478–88, 631.

or other forces within the chamber. For example, during the pre-1996 opposition period, the Coalition successfully convened a select committee into the allegations surrounding former Labor Attorney-General and High Court judge Lionel Murphy against the government's will. [259]

At times, the opposition is also able to exercise and shape Senate *Standing Orders* and procedures in its own interests. For example, in 1992, the Coalition used tactics such as taking note of an answer after question time to effectively extend the period under which the government was under direct scrutiny.[260] This action by the opposition was resisted by the government, but resulted in changes to the standing orders relating to taking note of questions that was more favourable towards the opposition than the government had intended.[261] In other instances, the opposition successfully extended Senate question time by using a suspension of *Standing Order* motion and it was the actions of opposition Senator Amanda Vanstone that saw the Senate televised.[262] Thus, it is not just at the well-publicised committee level that Senators can exercise significant power and influence on the operations of the Senate chamber and the government.

Opposition capacities and opportunities in parliament

By exercising its privileges and exploiting the capacities of parliament, the opposition's informal roles have evolved and increased. The opposition's right to address the parliament when foreign leaders make an address to the chamber is the result of its privilege of recognition, as is the Address in Reply to the government's budget. Recognition (or equal standing) also entitles the opposition to be present at events and official functions such as sending troops overseas or national events of memorial. This right also extends to more mundane situations, such as the privilege of delivering a light-hearted speech at the annual press gallery mid-winter ball. Exclusion of the opposition regularly draws criticism of the government, just as poor behaviour or abuse of its privileges by the opposition during official functions attracts similar censure. Recognition, in combination with the opposition's right of reply and the principle of equal time, have resulted in the institutionalisation of the opposition leader's budget reply, which grants the opposition half an hour of free television time in which to attack the government and lay out the opposition's alternative fiscal strategy.

The opposition is a recognised part of the parliamentary system and is able to extract resources which allow it to consolidate and build upon its dominant position against other third parties. During sitting weeks, the opposition has ready access to the media and a greater capacity to exercise direct influence on national affairs. It may have less power than the government, particularly in the HoR,

[259] Ibid., 661.
[260] Ibid., 663.
[261] Ibid., 644.
[262] Ibid., 102, 630.

but the opposition's privileges and powers are significantly greater than those of a minor party or independent member. Parliamentary sittings give the opposition its best opportunity to confront the government as the gathering of political actors in one location increases the newsworthiness of anything the opposition might say.

Yet, the diminishing profile of the parliament *vis-à-vis* other forms of media have also affected the way the opposition uses parliament. The lower house increased in size from 124 members in 1983 to 150 members by the time of the 1996 election. Arguably, the parliament's pre-eminent position as the key political and policy battleground has declined since federation, and more rapidly still since 1983. Policy debate has moved outside of the House of Representatives to the 'third chamber': the media studios of the television networks and increasingly into online platforms, which is elaborated further in chapter four.[263] While the televising of parliament has arguably contributed to its diminishing status as a forum for policy debate, it has conversely elevated its role as a site of political theatre. This is not to suggest that the parliament was previously dominated by dry policy debates — political theatre has always played an important role in parliament. Rather, the televising of procedures has changed the way parliament behaves and is reported. The opportunity to show parliament on television news altered the incentives for political actors and the journalists who reported upon them, a factor which is further explored in chapters seven and eight of this study. The rise of television encouraged short 'grabs' and the use of attention seeking props rather than eloquent speech making or witty word-play that is dependent on longer-news formats.

However, changes to the parliamentary system were not uniform across both chambers. In 1983, the minority status of the government in the Senate could still be considered unusual and the idea of government control of both houses was not an unrealistic goal. This assumption was reversed by 2007, where it is now the norm for governments to hold minority status in the upper house. The rise of minor parties in the Senate has also seen the Senate's importance as a house of review and the site for serious policy discussion increase. Moreover, voting changes (above the line voting and party organised preference deals) in the Senate also impacted on the political composition of the Senate. Over the last three decades, the Senate committee systems have become important weapons in the opposition's arsenal. Finally, the rise of third parties has also dramatically shifted the way tactics have played out in the Senate. The contest in that chamber is not binary: it must also account for other players. Thus, while the overall importance of parliament as a political battleground has declined since federation, it remains an important national platform. How then do opposition actors

[263] Marija Taflaga, 'A More Aggressive Parliament? An Examination of Australian Parliamentary Behaviour 1996 to 2012', in *Australian Political Studies Association Conference* (University of Tasmania, 2012).

in both the house and Senate understand their role as the opposition? How have they used their privileges and what, if anything, has changed in these two periods of opposition?

Using the available instruments: Coalition behaviour in the parliament

Opposition actors in the Coalition have interpreted the role of opposition differently between the pre-1996 and post-2007 periods of opposition. As noted in this study's literature review, opposition has both positive and negative roles. Indeed, it enjoys a set of formal roles and privileges that is open to interpretation by the opposition. That is, the opposition can choose to use its parliamentary tools to attack and oppose the government's agenda (negative opposition) or it can seek to ameliorate and improve legislation and present its own alternative policy agenda (positive opposition). How oppositions balance the positive and negative aspects of opposition is, not only a choice, but also a trajectory. This choice is a reflection of their party's political culture, the nature of what the government is proposing and the overall political climate. This section will examine why oppositions invest in parliamentary tactics before exploring how tactics are organised and practiced in each chamber.

Why do oppositions invest in parliamentary tactics?

This chapter has already examined the opportunities that parliament presents to oppositions, now let us consider specifically, why political parties invest in parliamentary tactics. We should not overlook an obvious reason, which is that it is expected that the opposition should participate fully in parliament. Parliamentary tactics are an outgrowth of their role as both chief government critic and alternative government. However, the efficacious exploitation of parliament has sound political advantages.

Primarily, parliamentary sittings make the government available to the opposition in a public venue and in front of the media. Ministers can be quizzed and eyeballed in an adversarial forum. Availability represents an opportunity 'a bit like a magnifying glass in the sun' to 'magnify the issue and set it alight.' [264] Attendance in the chamber (especially in Question Time or over censure debates) provides an opportunity for head-to-head political combat between both sides of politics where members of both teams are present along with the media. Outside of election leaders' debates, the chamber, particularly the HoR, is the only platform where the prime minister and the leader of the opposition interact without intermediaries. Parliament still remains an important political stage for the overall understanding of the political contest. Media organisations devote

[264] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on March 14 2014.

extra resources to reporting parliament, including analysis, sketch pieces, live blogs and twitter feeds. A win in the chamber translates into positive reporting and builds political momentum for the opposition. Whitlam's capacity to dominate Billy McMahon in the parliament, contributed to the growing sense that the government was exhausted, out of touch and that 'it's time' to change the government. The party backbench is constantly assessing the performance of the executive.

For politicians themselves, the head-to-head contest is a psychological battle between government and opposition and also source (or drain) of morale. The capacity for the government to offer an effective defence of its policy agenda breeds frustration in an opposition team that struggles to gain momentum. Conversely, an opposition leader who can take the debate up to the government motivates their team to stay disciplined and focused on winning the next election. Strong performances in the chamber build authority for party leaders. Alexander Downer struggled against an ascendant Paul Keating's mockery, so much so, that the whips were sent round to quell the chortles of Coalition backbenchers. Even the most casual examination of the body language of MPs during question time demonstrates the importance of a strong performance. For much of the hung parliament (2010-13), the government benches were dejected and looked as if in a state of siege. When Labor lured the Liberal MP, Peter Slipper, into the speakership, and at a stroke, gave the government an additional number in the house, their demeanour was noticeably different and remarked upon. An angry and dejected opposition frontbench under Nelson and Turnbull was transformed into a hungry and fired-up group under Abbott's aggressive leadership.

Strong parliamentary performances are also a way for political parties to inspire confidence and demonstrate their competence to govern. Outmanoeuvring the government in parliament, achieving important changes to legislation, embarrassing the government as a result of incompetence or scandal all increase the opposition's currency as a credible alternative government. By dictating events to the extent that an opposition is able, it can build momentum and confidence that they can replace the government.

The importance of parliamentary performance and tactics is aptly demonstrated by the preparations undertaken by the plotters in the now infamous 1989 Liberal leadership change. The plotters considered Peacock's performance in the chamber significant enough that Wilson Tuckey was tasked with responsibility to have both a Question Time strategy and a number of Matters of Public Importance speeches ready to go that same day. It was Tuckey's job to ensure that in the event of Howard being defeated in a leadership ballot on the Tuesday morning of a sitting week, the front bench led by Peacock would not fall flat in the hours and days following the switch. He recalled that:

> On the day previous I had identified people who would be asking questions at Question Time, people who would participate and the subject matter of the matter of public importance debate. We were determined having won the day, we weren't going to be branded a mob of buffoons within a few hours, by having started to stumble in the parliament.[265]

Tuckey further explained that the speaker and her office were 'surprised' to receive notice of a matter of public importance debate from the opposition, as 'she didn't think she'd be receiving one that day.' As Peter Shack, another important figure in the 1989 leadership change explained, effective parliamentary performances was considered important, 'we were very concerned to have a seamless, strong and a directional transition, … because it was going to happen while Parliament was sitting. It was almost like, 'The king's dead. Long live the king.'[266] Effective use of the parliament was a tool to demonstrate the competence of the opposition's new leadership team and to counter any narratives of chaos arising out of the leadership change. How could a party, that cannot even co-ordinate itself in the chamber, hope to govern a nation?

Parliamentary tactics in action

Parliamentary tactics are unusually focused on the house. In that chamber, the theatre and combat of politics are paramount because of the opposition's relative powerlessness. By contrast, interest in the Senate only piques interest when scandal surrounds a minister, government legislation is imperilled or Senate estimates are underway. Given the power of oppositions in the Senate, and the lack of concrete outcomes that result from Question Time theatrics in the lower house, it is strange that the public's major focus remains the lower house. The configuration of party numbers in the Senate, its vast powers and its capacity to block the government's agenda should rightly make it of greater interest. Yet, it is over shadowed by the largely rhetorical (and sometimes entertaining) contest between the two leaders and their respective front benches.

This intensive focus of attention on the lower house illuminates the reality that different cultures exist within each chamber. These in turn produce different parliamentary tactics and strategies by the opposition. The remainder of this chapter will explore the differences between the two chambers, how they use parliamentary tools and which they choose to emphasise in order to further the interests of the opposition. It will also demonstrate how opposition members working in separate chambers attempt to co-operate and reveal how these different parliamentary cultures operate.

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[265] Wilson Tuckey quoted in Marian Wilkinson, 'True Believers', *Four Corners,* Australian Broadcasting Corporation, May 15 1989, http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/stories/2011/08/08/3288506.htm?site=50y

[266] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on March 14 2014.

Using tactics in the House

Parliamentary tactics are devised at the highest levels of the LPA party machine, signifying their importance to the party's overall strategy. The day-to-day tactics are managed by the party's leadership group, along with a few additional important actors, such as the federal director of the Liberal party, the manager of opposition business and the whips. The leadership group, in conjunction with the leader's office and the federal secretariat are also responsible for managing the party's overall parliamentary strategy. Unlike the day-to-day tactics, the shadow cabinet are consulted and discuss the broad direction of the overall strategic direction of the opposition.

The primary focus of parliamentary tactics revolves around planning for Question Time, because 'the whole parliament, the public, focus is [on] what the opposition's going to do in Question Time.' [267] Preparing for question time structures the workday of members of the leadership group and several staff are allocated to assist with the formulation of questions. The leadership group meets well before the parliamentary day commences, between 6am and 8am, to discuss the potential avenues for attack on the government. This is followed by a further meeting chaired by the manager of opposition business at 10am with the smaller tactics group, consisting of a few shadow ministers and a handful of staff. This group begin to draft questions, which are then refined at a further meeting held at midday when questions would be finalised.[268]

Much of the tactical work of Question Time relates to deciding how to pursue an issue in parliament. These considerations happen at two levels. The first relates to the broad thematic thrust of questions. The conundrum for the opposition is to balance the temptation to follow the headlines of that day's paper and the 'expectation' that the opposition 'will pursue the government on the issue' with the possibility of facing the retort that 'you just got up and read *The Australian* this morning,' instead of pursuing an original agenda.[269] The opposition invests significant resources into Question Time, often having a staffer spend most of the day researching the details and gathering statistics for a 30-second question, which may never be asked.[270]

[267] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on April 10 2013.
[268] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on December 12 2013.
[269] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on April 10 2013.
[270] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on December 12 2013.

Yet, despite this, for the most part, questions are decided on the basis of political expediency:

> Often it was how to damage the other side more severely. How to appease the media, how to be popular, how to be liked, how to be nice. They were some of the guiding principles. … On occasions, the merits crept in, as well.[271]

Question Time is a useful device for the opposition — it is a privilege and a responsibility granted to the opposition as its role as legislative scrutineer. But it is also, simultaneously, a useful political device. Long-serving tacticians emphasised flexibility and the capacity to be 'a bit unpredictable'.[272] Yet, there was also a bank of tricks to draw upon 'when you were really stuck.' One such strategy was to 'just give them something to deny: "will the minister rule this out?" Get him to put it on the record. Then the journos would have a field day.'[273] Parliamentary tactics are the stuff of parliamentary theatre and making the government uncomfortable is both tactically sound and guaranteed to receive positive media coverage.

The second aspect of deciding tactics relates to how many questions would be asked, who would do the asking, and to whom. The targets of parliamentary attacks are based on an assessment of the particular weakness within the government that an issue or a minister presents:

> If you regard a minister as not very good on their feet or prone to lapses, then you focus on the minister. If you believe that the prime minister is vulnerable, you get your leader to pursue it, or the shadow.[274]

Indeed, who asks the questions is an important signifier of the potency of an attack. By having the leader of the opposition undertake an attack, the opposition signals the importance of their arguments or claims. Mounting an attack on the prime minister or a senior minister comes with considerable risk. Turnbull's ill-judged attack on Prime Minister Kevin Rudd over the misuse of funds to hire a ute seriously damaged the opposition's leader's credibility when it was revealed that the opposition's claims were based on emails forged by a disgruntled public servant.

The seriousness of launching an attack on a prime minister's credibility is further demonstrated by the opposition's pursuit of Prime Minister Julia Gillard over the alleged misuse of Australian Workers Union funds. Given the circumspect nature of the evidence, it was deputy leader Julie Bishop, not

[271] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on December 17 2013.
[272] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on March 5 2013.
[273] Ibid.
[274] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on April 10 2013.

Tony Abbott, that led the questioning of the prime minister in the house.[275] Indeed, the opposition's tactics came under severe scrutiny after Bishop overextended by accusing the prime minister of knowingly committing fraud for her own benefit. This put the opposition's own tactics under intense pressure.[276] After transcripts were released by her former employer, Slater and Gordon, Abbott himself attacked the prime minister on morning television, which prompted Gillard to force Abbott into directly attacking her in the parliament by suspending *Standing Orders*. [277] Gillard invited Abbott to 'put up or shut up'. Abbott used the opportunity to attack Gillard's character but refrained from making direct allegations, given their seriousness and the lack of evidence to substantiate the opposition's attacks.[278] Importantly, the Royal Commission into union corruption later cleared Gillard of any wrong doing, yet the opposition's capacity to exploit the prime minister's vulnerability was a major tactical victory for the opposition. It not only further damaged Gillard's trustworthiness in the community, but Gillard spent months denying claims of wrong doing. It robbed the government of the capacity to dominate the agenda and shape the political narrative on its preferred terms.

Another important factor in deciding tactics is the number of questions asked on any particular topic. Given the opposition has only a fixed number of questions, the decision of how many to dedicate to any one issue is of strategic importance. During the pre-1996 opposition years, there was less executive dominance of Question Time. It was not uncommon for the leader of the opposition refrain from asking a question until well into the session. Shadow ministers with a low profile and backbenchers were also more likely to ask a question, and notably, the National party also had a greater opportunity to ask questions, no doubt reflecting their greater numbers, particularly in the mid-1980s. In the post 2007-period Question Time was dominated by the executive ranks of the opposition. Questions became more negative and focused on rhetorical attacks. [279] It was rare for more than one backbencher to ask a question, and not uncommon for Question Time to conclude without a single question from the backbench. Question Time was not just a matter of strategic significance but also a question of internal party management. Thus, tactics must balance strategic capacity to damage the government and the egos of parliamentarians.

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[275] Alexandra Kirk, 'Gillard: I did nothing wrong', *PM*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, November 262012, http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2012/s3641211.htm

[276] Samantha Hawley, 'Opposition digs deeper on AWU', *PM*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, November 27 2012, http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2012/s3642176.htm.

[277] Sabra Lane, 'Opposition exploit documents relating to AWU scandal', *AM*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, November 29 2012, http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2012/s3643370.htm.

[278] Samantha Hawley, 'Gillard and Abbott go head to head on AWU' , *PM*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, November 29 2012, http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2012/s3644002.htm

[279] Rasiah Parameswary, 'Can the Opposition Effectively Ensure Government Accountability in Question Time? An Empirical Study', *Australasian Parliamentary Review* 25, no. 1 (2010): 170.

During the hung parliament, under the leadership of Tony Abbott, the opposition took a hard negative turn in their interpretation of the role of opposition. Philip Norton, has argued that there is an 'equilibrium of legitimacy' in the parliament, where neither government nor opposition can upset the balance without creating a threat to their own position.[280] Abbott took a risk in adopting a strategy of maximum confrontation, which was successful in the short term. His rationale was predicated on the assumption that 'we are unlikely to replace the government by agreeing with it.' Abbott further rationalised 'we have to pick our battles carefully but we shouldn't try to avoid them.'[281] This interpretation of the role of opposition translated into the tactics adopted during Question Time.

Taflaga's analysis of parliamentary tactics during the hung parliament demonstrated that Abbott not only increased the number of censures and the suspension of standing orders used, but also used these parliamentary procedures differently.[282] Abbott regularly launched an attempt to suspend *Standing Orders* during the televised portion of Question Time, rather than waiting till the conclusion of Question Time. In turn the opposition relinquished the opportunity to ask all the allotted questions available to the opposition. Censures were also more likely to occur during Question Time than at the start of parliamentary business, as they had under previous parliaments. The tactic was effective because without a majority on the floor of the parliament, the government was unable to gag the opposition. Free of a gag order, the opposition had up to 15 minutes in which to attack the government without interruption. It also aided the opposition's broader political strategic goals. As one long-serving tactician noted, the opposition is 'trying to control the story of the day', but it labours under the government's greater capacity to produced newsworthy material and responses to questions. Thus, by asking 'four questions, all on the same topic', followed by a suspension of standing orders or a censure motion, 'it looks like the government is not in control' and, the 'government doesn't get its good news out' during their questions.[283] Parliamentary tactics are not simply a question of playing out a procedural role or conforming to parliamentary obligations, they are opportunities for political parties to use parliamentary tools, procedures and privileges to advance political strategies and agendas.

Abbott extended this aggressive approach to other areas of parliamentary privilege and organisation such as the system for pairing MPs to ensure that the relative numbers in the house remain

[280] Norton, 'Making Sense of Opposition', 243.
[281] Tony Abbott quoted in Lyndal Curtis, 'Working Together, up to a Point', *PM* (Radio National, September 21 2010), http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2010/s3018063.htm.
[282] Taflaga, 'A More Aggressive Parliament? An Examination of Australian Parliamentary Behaviour 1996 to 2012', 19.
[283] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on March 5 2013.

consistent with the electoral outcome. After failing to form government, the opposition quickly reneged on its agreement to pair the speaker's vote and imposed 'tough' restrictions on pairs.[284] Consequently, a number of ministers were unable to attend to official business or events of cultural significance. Stephen Smith was unable to deliver the keynote speech at the Australia-India roundtable; and neither the Minster for the Arts Simon Crean, nor close friend Malcolm Turnbull, were able to attend the funeral of artist Margaret Olley.[285]

Abbott intensified the opposition's narrow interpretation of its parliamentary privileges to maintain maximum pressure on the government during the carbon tax debate, declaring that 'only in the most extraordinary circumstances will pairs be offered' during the vote.[286] As a result a number of MPs were forced to return to Australia from overseas and there was considerable debate about whether or not embattled MP Craig Thompson would be granted a pair in order to attend the birth of his child.[287] It would be on the 'heads' of the government 'if they are foolish enough to schedule the vote at a time when Mr Thomson can't be there'.[288] Indeed, the opposition was relentless in their perusal of Thompson so much so that Christopher Pyne demanded additional medical evidence before the opposition would grant the MP a pair.[289] Up to mid-September 2011, the government had rejected 1 out of 27 requests for pairs compared with the opposition rejecting 60 out of 185 requests.[290]

Yet, the opposition did not exploit other opportunities the hung parliament presented, such as the capacity to pass legislation with the support of the independents. Abbott's 'wild rivers' private member's bill failed to pass the house. The opposition's proposed judicial inquiry into the Building the Education Revolution failed on the voices and the opposition declined to test it in a division. Likewise, in 2011, the opposition was outraged by the Gillard government's so-called attack on

[284] Chris Merritt and Patricia Karvelas, '"Pairing" Speaker a Recipe for Chaos, Legal Experts Warn', *The Australian*, September 18 2012, http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/pairing-speaker-a-recipe-for-chaos-legal-experts-warn/story-fn59niix-1225925638642.
[285] Matthew Westwood, 'Friends Lay Bouquets in Memory of Margaret Olley', *The Australian*, August 25 2011, http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/friends-lay-bouquets-in-memory-of-margaret-olley/story-e6frg8n6-1226121550483; Katrina Curtis, 'Stephen Smith Denied Pair for Australia-India Roundtable Speech', *The Australian*, September 19 2011.
[286] 'Abbott Won't Guarantee "Pair" for Thomson If Wife Gives Birth', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 8 2011, http://www.smh.com.au/national/abbott-wont-guarantee-pair--for-thomson-if-wife-gives-birth-20110908-1jz5l.html.
[287] Stephanie Peatling, 'Liberal Forced to Foot Bill in Abbott's War on Pairs', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 18 2011, http://www.smh.com.au/national/liberal-forced-to-foot-bill-in-abbotts-war-on-pairs-20110917-1kesc.html.
[288] Pyne quoted in Samantha Donovan, 'Pairs Controversy Looms for Carbon Tax Debate', *PM* (ABC Radio National (Australian Broadcasting Corporation), September 8 2011).
[289] Heather Ewart, 'Opposition Searches for Credit in Craig Thomson Illness', *7.30* (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, March 19 2012).
[290] Peatling, 'Liberal Forced to Foot Bill in Abbott's War on Pairs'.

'aspirational Australia' in its budget. The opposition's rhetoric suggested that they would seek to block parts of the budget, yet it was passed by the Coalition with little fanfare. The opposition always has to contend with the reality that the government chooses when legislation is considered by the house. Coalition MPs complained that opposition bills, 'sat there for months and months', until they became 'irrelevant.'[291] The opposition argued that given the government 'has got the money' and therefore had a greater capacity to make deals with the independents, it was futile to seek the passage of legislation. Yet, given the hostility between the Coalition and the country independents, it is possible that the Coalition judged it a poor investment of time and resources.

The hung parliament and minority government reduced the incumbency advantage of the government and challenged its previously unassailable dominance of the legislative agenda in the house. In response, the government was both cautious and risk averse. It is unsurprising that the opposition chose to pursue parliamentary tactics in line with a negative interpretation of opposition — there is less work involved in building a negative case than a positive case. Although Abbott was cognisant of the fact that he had more MPs than Labor, there was a distinct feeling of distrust between the country independents and the Coalition. In a rare act of co-operation, the Abbott-led opposition did co-operate with independent Andrew Willkie to bring forward legislation on whistle-blowers, forcing the government to speed up its deliberations and the bill was passed in July 2013.[292]

With the exception of rare hung parliaments, the opposition is at a constant disadvantage in terms of resources, personnel and in the *Standing Orders* of the house.[293] This has necessitated that tactics are focused on Question Time and are aggressive because, as outlined above, these are the most successful tactics for this environment. Thus, MHRs are socialised into a chamber dominated by negative modes of opposition and it is therefore unsurprising that they would use its instability to full effect. Finally, the minority parliament demonstrated that even in an insecure parliamentary environment, the government could retain its advantage in control when legislation was brought forward and had a greater capacity to engage in deals with the cross-benchers.

Using tactics in the Senate

The (usual) minority status of the government in the Senate, along with the upper house's considerable powers, alters the way the oppositions organise parliamentary tactics. While the same

[291] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on February 7 2013.
[292] Mary Anne Neilson, 'Historic New Whistleblower Protection Laws', *FlagPost*, July 18 2013, http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/FlagPost/2013/July/Historic_new_whistleblower_protection_laws.
[293] For further exploration of the imbalance in the government-opposition relationship in the house in relation to Question Time in particular see Parameswary, 'Can the Opposition Effectively Ensure Government Accountability in Question Time? An Empirical Study', 171–73.

negative tactical repertoire (Question Time, censure motions, suspensions of *Standing Orders*) is available to the opposition in the Senate, these are just some of many tools available. Moreover, Question Time in the Senate is less politically potent given that the leaders of the government and the opposition are in the other chamber. Instead, tactics in the Senate rely on transforming legislative functions into political tools. Thus, the information extraction powers of Senate committees and Senate estimates also represent an opportunity for the opposition. As does the Senate's ability to block and disrupt the government's agenda. While the HoR may focus almost exclusively on its criticising functions, Senators are engaged in both negative (criticism and blocking) and positive (amending legislation and extracting information) roles of opposition. While all of these roles are bound in the traditions and responsibilities of the legislature, Senators have more opportunity to exercise their role as legislators given they are not the centre of political conflict in the same way as actors in the house. Indeed, co-ordinating action across both chambers is a major challenge that must overcome the different cultures that exist within the two chambers.

Tension between House and Senate

The level of tactical co-ordination between the Representatives and the Senate leadership has become more orchestrated since 1983. During the pre-1996 period, the Senate did not run an 'independent line' and voted the same way in both houses, but Senators serving at that time insisted that they were 'quite independent' when formulating their tactics. The Senate leadership team would participate in the general leadership group meetings, so there would be 'cross over', but as Fred Chaney outlined, 'we largely ran our own race in matters of public importance and in deciding what questions to ask', and they were able to work cooperatively with the Nationals most of the time.[294] For those who had entered parliament during the Fraser years, where the Senate had been a source of considerable internal opposition to the government, there remained a strong independent culture among Senators who 'objected to' and 'fought against' the growing centralising tendencies of leaders.[295]

By the mid-2000s, the Coalition's parliamentary tactics were 'more organised and directed from the top'.[296] As one senior Liberal explained, a shadow minister in the Senate will 'try to get as much license as he or she can' in running tactics. The Senate leadership team engages in 'a lot of tick-tacking with the leader's office' or the 'shadow minister in the house'. Undoubtedly, this is aided by modern telecommunications technologies and increased staffing levels in the leader's office. Given the higher number of disciplined actors in the Senate (multiple parties and independents) during the

[294] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 18 2013.
[295] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 5 2013.
[296] Ibid.

post-2007 opposition years compared with the pre-1996 opposition, the necessity for quick responses from the leader became ever more critical, 'because situations will arise where you didn't anticipate' how parties will react to legislation and 'you can't call another party room meeting to resolve what the Coalition's position' will be.[297]

Managing the government's agenda

Assisting or hindering the passage of legislation is an important weapon in the Senate opposition's tactical arsenal, particularly because Australia's sitting periods are relatively short. Slowing down the passage of legislation or referring it for further committee work reduces the government's capacity to appear as an effective administrator. Moreover, Senate committees can call into question the assumptions or workings of legislation, forcing greater scrutiny upon the government.

On a basic management level, if the government is seeking the passage of multiple bills, but finds that a bill the government hoped would pass in 'an hour', instead takes all day, then 'the government's program is blown.'[298] This forces the government into a set of tactical responses it would not have otherwise had to consider:

> Then the government's got to sub. Does it seek extra time? Does it dump bills? From an opposition point of view … making life difficult for the government is a measure of your success.[299]

Through parliamentary tactics, the opposition can frustrate the government's agenda and even force through changes via the committee process or through amendments. In its capacity to produce tangible outcomes, it is considerably more efficacious than the largely rhetorical tactics available to the opposition in the lower house.

Capacity for tactical manoeuvring is not limited to question time, but applies to 'the whole parliamentary program.'[300] However, it is not wholly within the opposition's control and relies on the opposition's capacity to work effectively with the crossbench. In order to successfully use a motion or refer to committee the opposition must 'get the cross benchers on board.'[301] Since the political situation in the Senate is in 'constant play', the capacity of the opposition to collaborate with the crossbenchers is a measure of its success. This can produce unlikely and interesting alliances when the parties are not of the same political persuasion.

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[297] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on April 10 2013.
[298] Ibid.
[299] Ibid.
[300] Ibid.
[301] Ibid.

However, the challenge of co-ordinating across two chambers can produce serious internal difficulties when there is a split on policy between the House and Senate, such as the Turnbull-led opposition's negotiation of an emissions trading scheme (ETS). The Rudd government lacked a majority in the Senate and it therefore needed to make a deal with either the Coalition or the Greens in order to pass its Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS). The Coalition was divided on how it should approach the CPRS and this flowed directly into disputes over how the opposition should tactically respond in the Senate: to either block the bill entirely, seek to delay the legislation or pass flawed legislation and allow the government reap the consequences.[302] By August 2009, the opposition had voted down the CPRS once, obstructing the government's agenda for three months and forcing the government back to the negotiating table with the opposition. If the opposition voted against the CPRS a second time it would gift the government a double dissolution trigger and a platform to fight an election on the issue of emissions trading.[303] For Turnbull personally, his position was invidious — caught between a hostile party-room and delivering a major win for the ALP should the bill pass. These tactical considerations represented important decision making points for Turnbull and were not just procedural formalities.

Internal disagreement over the opposition's approach to the Rudd government's CPRS was compounded by a concentration of opposition to emissions trading among Senators.[304] The Senate leadership team wanted to 'go in on the attack in the Senate', because from the Senate team's perspective the government was 'quite vulnerable in relation to its climate change policy and [we] wanted to pursue it.'[305] However, given the disagreement over how to respond to the CPRS, the Senate team found itself 'constrained', because there was 'less enthusiasm' by the Turnbull leadership group and other MHRs who felt that the opposition's policy was not 'all that different to the government's', position.[306] Yet, the Senate team restrained its tactical manoeuvrings against the CPRS while Turnbull remained leader because although, 'the Senate can do its own thing', the business of opposition remained a 'corporate team effort.'[307] If the leadership teams in both houses failed to keep 'in sync', then the media would highlight 'what they perceive to be differences' in the

[302] Philip Coorey, 'Opposition split over trading-scheme tactics', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 26 2009 http://www.smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/opposition-split-over-tradingscheme-tactics-20090525-bksg.html.
[303] Philip Coorey, 'Senate kills emission trading scheme bills, *The Sydney Morning Herald,* August 13 2009 http://www.smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/Senate-kills-emissions-trading-scheme-bills-20090813-eiyc.html.
[304] Chris Kenny, 'Liberal Senator's upper hand spoils the party', *The Australian*, December 12 2009 http://www.theaustralian.com.au/opinion/liberal-senators-upper-hand-spoils-the-party/story-e6frg6zo-1225809556051.
[305] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on April 10 2013.
[306] Ibid.
[307] Ibid.

Coalition's operation. While several factors had to be balanced, including a leader's personal preferences and their willingness to be 'flexible', as one Liberal put it, at 'the end of the day, the leader has got to prevail'.[308]

However, in the case of the CPRS, the will of the leader did not ultimately prevail. Turnbull's demise, following a series of resignations, including Senate leader, Nick Minchin, along with Tony Abbott, demonstrated the limits of the leader's prerogative. The introduction of legislation can force decisions upon oppositions that they could choose to defer or ignore in government.

How the opposition chooses to interact with the chamber reveals the party's thinking, and its capacity to manage itself effectively. The debacle that saw only five opposition Senators vote in favour of the shadow cabinet's position on the government's $26 billion Building Australia fund in December 2008 further demonstrates the importance of parliamentary tactics in the Senate and the role of effective cooperation between both houses. The Coalition was attempting to amend legislation that would incorporate a $2 billion telecommunications fund established by the Howard government to reassure the National party during the sale of Telstra into Labor's new infrastructure fund. The on-going continuation of a separate telecommunications fund was a key policy position for National party Senators. The opposition had spent much of December 4 2008 passing amendments to the government's legislation with support for some of their amendments by other non-government parties.[309] However, after the bills were rejected and returned to the Senate at 10pm, the cross benchers remained in support of the opposition's amendments. This presented the Coalition Senate leadership with a dilemma because as Senate leader, Nick Minchin explained, 'we'd had a shadow cabinet decision that was essentially premised on us not being successful.'[310] Minchin returned to the leader's office to explain that 'we're going to actually win this.' And that the opposition should 'insist on our amendment if the government takes it back into the house and brings it back into the Senate again.' However, the official position remained that the bill should not be blocked. The reason given was that the government would falsely assert that the Coalition were 'responsible for denying infrastructure funding for every road, bridge and port in the country'.[311]

The result was total confusion by the time of the vote in the early hours of the morning. The National party was incensed that their coalition partner would not support its own amendments and crossed the floor along with two other Liberal Senators. Many more Liberals chose to abstain and were seen waiting outside the chamber, one Senator even did a lap of the chamber before the doors

[308] Ibid.
[309] Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, Senate, December 4 2008, 8155.
[310] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on April 10 2013.
[311] Nick Minchin, quoted in Lyndal Curtis, 'Senate rebellion: coalition splits over Telstra cash', December 5 2008 http://www.abc.net.au/news/2008-12-05/Senate-rebellion-coalition-splits-over-telstra-cash/229928.

were locked.[312] Minchin himself missed the vote.[313] As Minchin explained, 'When the government brought it back in, we didn't insist on our amendment. The cross benchers thought 'you've left us out to dry'.'[314] Senator Nick Xenophon claimed that 'the Liberals didn't just blink; they rolled over and went into a foetal position'.[315] The government sought to capitalise on the Coalition's discomfort by claiming the vote was a full-blown rebellion against Turnbull's leadership.[316]

Only five Liberals voted with the government, meaning that several members of the frontbench had failed to vote with the shadow cabinet position. There was significant confusion as some Senators appeared not to know what the opposition's position was; others, such as frontbencher David Johnson, abided by the discipline of the shadow cabinet: 'my understanding was there'd be an agreement made that simply shadow cabinet members and frontbenchers were required to attend'; while others who knew the opposition's official position chose to abstain. Minchin explained his absence as the result of an ill-timed trip to the bathroom, and moreover, that he did not need to attend 'Mickey Mouse votes', especially 'where my vote is not needed … because the Government has got the numbers'.[317] Needless to say, the Coalition spent much of the next day dealing with a mess of its own creation. Now retired, Minchin reflects that the incident was 'a complete mess,' and that the party would have been able to manage the situation more effectively 'if we'd changed, had the flexibility and capacity to change our position and insist on our amendment to preserve that fund.'[318]

Committee work

Committee work is another area where Senator's engagement is qualitatively different from the experience in the House because it is not subject to the majority rule of the government. Senators' work in committees is not only an opportunity to gather vital information and scrutinise government, but it also offers rewarding work for opposition Senators. As Fred Chaney, who served in both houses noted, 'in the Senate you could have some hope of rationally contributing to

[312] Ibid.
[313] Ibid.
[314] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on April 10 2013.
[315] Nick Xenophon quoted in Kirren McKechnie, 'opposition disarray over dumping of Telstra fund', *PM*, Radio National, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, December 5 2008, http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2008/s2439346.htm.
[316] Chris Evans quoted in in Kirren McKechnie, 'opposition disarray over dumping of Telsra fund', *PM*, Radio National, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, December 5 2008, http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2008/s2439346.htm.
[317] Minchin quoted in Sabra Lane, 'Coalition leaders deny party split', *The World Today*, December 5 2008. http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2008/s2438721.htm.
[318] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on April 10 2013.

improving legislation, whereas in the Reps space they basically shouted at each other.'[319] The emphasis on the Senate's role as a house of review led other Senators to conclude that 'in some ways Senators in government, sometimes, who were not on the front bench, found government more frustrating than opposition'.[320] Committees, particularly estimates hearings, are an opportunity for the opposition 'to try and identify weaknesses in government's policy processes and expose them as having been a failure'. [321] Estimates, a tool of the legislature, can also work equally hard for the interests of a political party.

However, the work of committees can also offer members the chance to contribute to improving legislation. As a Senator explained, 'there would certainly be people advocating to us, and lobbying us in terms of what they wanted fixed in legislation,' because they think that they 'would get a better hearing from the Opposition or the Greens than they would from government.'[322] Moreover, opposition Senators are also able to have a meaningful say in the running of that chamber. During the pre-1996 opposition years, the Senate committee system was overhauled with significant participation by the opposition.[323] For some Senators, 'there was a sense that the chamber had been developed to do more than just a party political role and Senators from both sides saw that as improvement.'[324] Until the hung parliament, this kind of meaningful committee work was not available to opposition MHRs on a regular basis.

Yet, most Senators felt that MHRs did not really understand the Senate or its potential as a tool for the opposition. Many Senators felt that there was a certain 'disconnect' between the chambers, and that MHRs 'don't have a clue about how the Senate works or virtually what it is.'[325] Indeed, some Liberal Senators felt that

> MHRs, tend to treat Senators a bit with contempt. They think we get an easy life … I think I saw some Labor person say the other day that if you really want to cruise through life just be an opposition back-bench senator.[326]

Another Senator reported that there was a lack of appreciation for the work of Senators by MHRs, 'except if you came up with something that was really politically useful, then you might get a

[319] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 18 2013.
[320] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 5 2013.
[321] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on 20 February 2013.
[322] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on 25 February 2013.
[323] Evans and Laing, *Odgers' Australian Senate Practice*.
[324] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 5 2013.
[325] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on February 20 2013.
[326] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on April 10 2013.

grudging acknowledgement.'[327] This sentiment reflects the different approaches to opposition and the sense that of cultural difference of 'the other place'.

Exploiting Senate estimates is a set of practices that the Coalition had to learn over time when newly entering opposition. Estimates tactics were subject to low levels of central co-ordination. Senate committee members, the leader's policy advisors, relevant shadows, and at times, the leader would meet to discuss the opposition's priorities in a particular policy area, though at other times, Senators were left to co-ordinate with shadows on their own.[328] Depending on the personality of the shadow minister, some Senators would be granted discretion to choose their own lines of questioning, particularly if they were recognised has having a high degree of specialised knowledge in the policy area. The shadow minister's interest, and/or perhaps seniority, would also have an important impact on shaping relations and how involved (or hands-off) they were during committee work. As one Senator reported, when their new shadow minister was also part of the senior ranks of the opposition, the emphasis in their committee work shifted further towards generating 'political mileage', rather than scrutiny and information gathering.[329]

Senators experienced in the process of estimates needed to 'educate' new shadow ministers appointed from the house. Senators informed MHR shadows that 'Senate estimates is coming up, you need to tell me what it is you want to prosecute. What are the lines required, what issues you're interested in."[330] For some MHRs the challenge was first learning how the estimates process operated and then learning how work cooperatively with their Senate counterpart in order to get the best outcomes for the opposition. The fact that media organisations continue to invest in reporting Senate estimates is an indication of its on-going importance to the overall conduct of politics. An important story out of Senate estimates can develop into a major issue or can launch a political career, such as Bronwyn Bishop's now infamous interrogations of Tax Office officials during Senate estimates in the late 1980s.

The electoral cycle can also become the dominant factor. For example, as one Senator noted, 'going into the 2010 election, we weren't as focused on costings, as we have been this time [2012].'[331] This was a reflection of the process of becoming more disciplined and 'learning to be an opposition'.[332] In their second term of opposition (2010-13), and as political momentum flowed the Coalition's way,

[327] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 5 2013.
[328] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on February 25 2013; Personal communication with the author, interviewed on February 20 2013.
[329] Ibid.
[330] Ibid.
[331] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on February 25 2013.
[332] Ibid.

the opposition had 'become more focused' in their approach to estimates. The political success of the Coalition under Abbott meant that Senators 'used the last two estimates very much to look at costings and to drill down into things we perceive that we might be able to make savings when we're in government to fund other policies or programs.'[333] Such was the Coalition's confidence of victory that their approach to estimates changed from 'political mileage' to preparation for government. Finally, the leader's approach to opposition also mattered, as one Senator noted 'under Brendan Nelson and Malcolm [Turnbull], I don't think the kind of determined critical opposition, 'take no prisoners' kind of attitude, that Abbott subsequently brought to opposition, was as strong.'[334]

The sense of 'disconnect' between the two houses reported by participants in this study highlights the significant differences in the cultures of the two chambers. Managing these differences remain a permanent challenge to managing the opposition's approach to the parliament specifically and more broadly, to its overall political strategy. There are important structural reasons, beyond the procedures and cultures of the chambers that also feed into the differences between actors in each chamber. Senators are generally pre-elected by a very narrow sub-set of party officials and are elected to the chamber via a party list system where personal branding is less significant than party branding. Thus, Senators are more likely to have been 'tested' by party processes and 'more exposed to internal debates'.[335]

Given the selection processes Senators must undergo are different from their MHR counter-parts and the nature of the work activities that Senators undertake emphasise examination and investigation of political problems, it is unsurprising that the Senators are more likely to be ideologically motivated and focused on the 'nitty-gritty of things'.[336] From a Senator's point of view, MHRs tend to be 'a mixture of people who fit that category [ideologically and policy driven] for sure, but also you have more people in the house who simply serve to be good local representatives.'[337] These differences speak to different types of representation work and different emphasis in work practice.

Unlike their colleagues in the lower chamber, Opposition Senators' votes can, and often, do matter for policy outcomes. If Senators are serving on relevant committees of inquiry, then they are also likely to be far better informed on specific policy areas than many MHRs. When issues of great public concern are before the parliament, such as the CPRS, the weight of responsibility upon Senators is

[333] Ibid.
[334] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on February 20 2013.
[335] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on October 30 2012.
[336] Ibid.
[337] Ibid.

evident in a manner different from their colleagues in the lower house. Both Senators Judith Troeth and Sue Boyce emphasised the weight of evidence and responsibility felt, which drove them to cross the floor in support of the CPRS and in defiance of their party.[338] Decisions dilemmas of this nature, and of this magnitude are rarely, if ever, faced by a backbench MHR in Opposition. In its approach to parliament, the opposition must account for all these tendencies.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how parliamentary tactics have increasingly become orchestrated since 1983. It has also outlined how much of the tactical repertoire in the house is focused on rhetorical attacks rather than information seeking. By contrast, in the Senate, the emphasis is on information gathering and then using this information to embarrass the government. These different tactics are not just the product of relative powers between government and opposition and procedural differences between the chamber, but also the product of how members are elected and socialised.

The manner in which the Coalition in opposition has approached parliamentary tactics is somewhat at odds with the conception of the opposition's role as laid down by *House of Representatives Practice*. Whilst the official documentation emphasises the opposition's legislative roles, in practice Coalition parliamentarians regularly use the parliament to progress political goals, as this chapter has demonstrated. To be clear, this is not a pejorative interpretation or one that can only be made of the Coalition, but rather an acknowledgement of the reality of opposition parliamentarians' actual practices and priorities in contrast to those set out in *House of Representatives Practice*. When considering how oppositions *actually* behave as opposed to how we expect them to behave, we might remember Tuffin's contention that oppositions are made-up of political parties and have a right to desire power. Moreover, we should factor in the opposition's actual behaviour when we conceptualise opposition and its role in the parliamentary system.

This chapter has already begun to uncover some aspects of how party dynamics impact on the opposition's behaviour within the chamber. The next chapter will examine how the Liberal party (with some reference to the National party) operates as a political group and examines how members' socialisation effects the way they behave in opposition.

[338] Judith Troeth, *Commonwealth Senate Debates*, November 30 2009, 9588; Sue Boyce, *Commonwealth Senate Debates,* November 30 2009, 9595.

Chapter 3
The Liberal party as a political group

Introduction

Australia is governed by a system of 'responsible party government', predicated on the principle of alternation between party groups.[339] For the system to work effectively and to encourage parties to behave responsibly, parties must feel they have a genuine chance at power. Given the institutionalisation of parties into Australia's political system, healthy parties are an important foundation stone for the effectiveness of the overall system. However, governments in Australia are generally long-lived and parties can spend many years in the wilderness with constrained resources and without hope of governing. Moreover, as noted in chapter one, the LPA has weak internal institutional structures compared with other political parties in Australia. What then are the implications of the LPA in opposition and how does the party seek to constructively manage its internal political dynamics when faced with the stresses of opposition?

This chapter will explore how the multi-term periods in opposition impacted on the Liberal and National parties. First, through an analysis of cohort groups it will examine how changes in personnel have an impact on the Coalition's ideological direction and its overall renewal. It argues that the cohorts entering between 1990 and 1996 were an important influence on both periods of opposition. Second, the chapter will examine the relationship between coalition partners, highlighting the relative stability in the relationship between 1983 and 2007 and the importance of interpersonal relationships for its ongoing maintenance. Third, the challenges of running the opposition will be explored. It will argue that since 1983 the influence of the leader has increased while the influence of the shadow cabinet has declined. It will also emphasise the importance of the leader's internal party management skills. Finally, it is important to note that changes in the party machine will not be explored as they are beyond the scope of this study.

The career lifespans of Coalition MPs: Managing changing party demographics

The particular combination of philosophy and policy preferences of the federal Liberal party are highly dependent on the specific composition of the parliamentary party at any point in time. Key individuals and groupings matter in the Liberal party, more so than in the Labor party where a

[339] Lucy, *The Australian Form of Government*, 325–27; Maddox, *Australian Democracy in Theory and Practice*, 274–78.

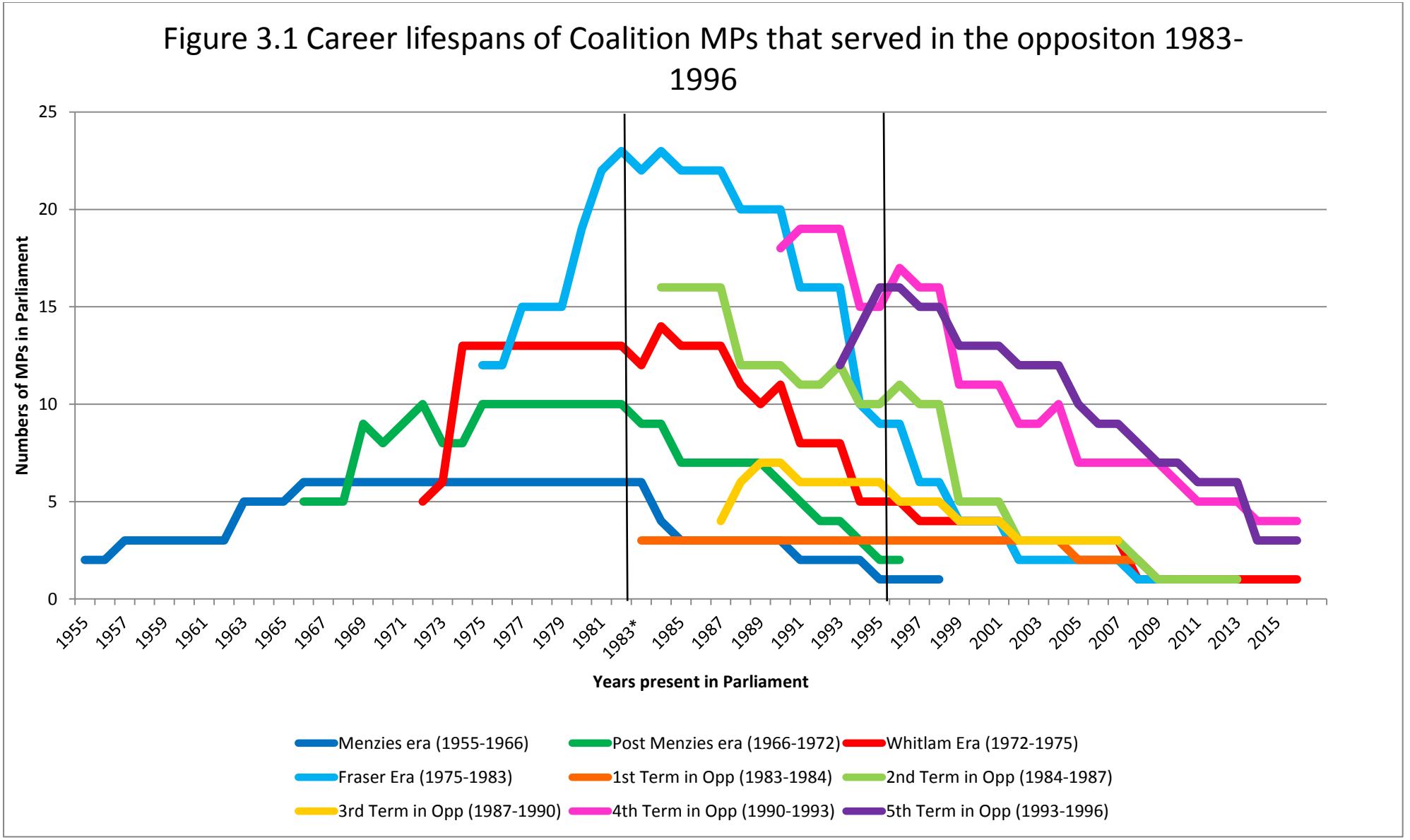
substantial trade union movement provides both a philosophical anchor and the personnel to stand for parliamentary office. The Liberal party is after all the party of the 'individual' and this is reflected in the party's ideological approach and political organisation. The degree of personalised influence in the Liberal party reflects the historical antecedents of the centre-right political movement in Australia. The fusion of the liberal and conservative elements of Australian politics in 1909 bonded two not wholly compatible philosophical strains into one unit. Moreover, the party organisation's inability to dominate and control its parliamentary members means that the parliamentary party has the final say on its policy direction.[340] The crafting of a *mass* party model for the new Liberal party by Menzies and others in the mid-1940s saw the continuation of long-held non-Labor beliefs, such as individualism, personal freedom and liberty, entrepreneurship, the sanctity of decentralised federalism, and an aversion to Labor's pledge. [341] At the same time, the party's emulation of Labor also acknowledged the structural weaknesses of its organisation compared with the ALP.[342]

The result was a party organisation which maintained a localised party branch structure, raised funds in order to run elections, but one which failed to insist on its policy role. It first acquiesced, and then justified, the prerogative of its parliamentarians to dictate the policy direction of the party.[343] The consequence of these choices, many taken at the party's founding, has exaggerated the importance of leadership personalities and individual philosophical values within the parliamentary party itself. The natural progression of this tendency manifests itself in 'personality' factions, the search for 'messiahs' and the elevation of the leader's values to dominate and speak for the whole party.

The loose — almost confederated — structure of the Liberal party means that even where states are highly factionalised such as New South Wales or South Australia, the natural linkages that facilitate the maintenance of factions which are apparent in the ALP are not present in the Liberal party at the federal level.[344] The Liberal party's greater tendency to preselect non-political apparatchiks (a trend which is decreasing today) means that the socialisation of many Liberal party MPs occurs *after* arriving in Canberra.[345] As Pickering notes, cohorts clustered around the year of entry can be important in shaping the character of a political party, particularly when the group is large.[346] The

[340] Brett, *The Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class*, 27–34; Hancock, *National and Permanent?*, 120.
[341] Brett, *The Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class*, 20–27, 35, 41.
[342] Abjorensen, *Leadership and the Liberal Revival*, 17.
[343] Hancock, *National and Permanent?*, 120.
[344] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on March 26 2014.
[345] Narelle Miragliotta and Wayne Errington, 'Legislative Recruitment and Models of Party Organisation: Evidence from Australia', *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 18, no. 1 (2012): 34.
[346] Paul Pickering, 'The Class of 96: A Biographical Analysis of New Government Members of the Australian House of Representatives', *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 44, no. 1 (1998): 95.

Figure 3.1 Career lifespans of Coalition MPs that served in the oppositon 1983-1996



* Due to the short length of the thirty-third parliament (1983-1984), MPS that were defeated in 1983 and were re-elected in 1984 were not coded for 1983 to reflect the fall in the number of Coalition MPs.

importance of the 'class of 96' in Howard's capacity to maintain his prime ministership is a case in point, demonstrating how MPs arriving in parliament during similar periods or at a particular political moment can develop a shared consciousness.[347] Indeed, the regular celebration of anniversaries by cohort groups attests to their shared sense of commonality.

The different organisational culture (despite its similar organisational structure) among the Nationals, which is often characterised as a 'brotherhood', with a high premium on loyalty, smaller size and significantly lower levels of factionalism may lessen the importance of entry year cohorts for the Nationals. National party parliamentarians are influenced by bigger generational factors that shape values and approaches to political problems. Ultimately, the nature of the coalition relationship meant that National party members had to engage with debates underway within the LPA and could not remain entirely separate.

Cohorts in the House

The following figures show the career lifespans of Coalition MPs and Senators serving in both the pre-1996 and post-2007 periods of opposition. Using data from the parliamentary handbook, Coalition members were coded for each year they were present in the parliament. An exception was made for those MPs who were defeated at the 1983 election but returned in 1984. These MPs were removed from the data set for the year 1983, due to the short length of the thirty-third parliament.

Figure 3.1 shows the career life span of Coalition members of the House of Representatives that served at any time during the pre-1996 period. The figure illustrates the cohort or generational makeup of the Liberal party, revealing the presence of nine different cohorts from the Menzies cohort (1955-66)[348] though to the Coalition's fifth and final term in opposition (1993-96). Figure 3.1 illustrates importance of both the Whitlam era and Fraser government cohorts to the opposition until the early 1990s. Indeed, just over a quarter of those elected in 1984 were returning members elected either between 1966 and 1982, such as high profile Liberals Neil Brown, Jim Short, Peter Shack and Peter Reith. The expansion of parliament at the 1984 election also accounts for the large intake of MPs in the Coalition's second term in opposition (1984-87).

After the 1990 election, as Figure 3.2 demonstrates, all pre-1983 cohorts see major declines as a changing of the guard occurs, bringing in a new wave of MPs between 1990 and 1996. The post-1990

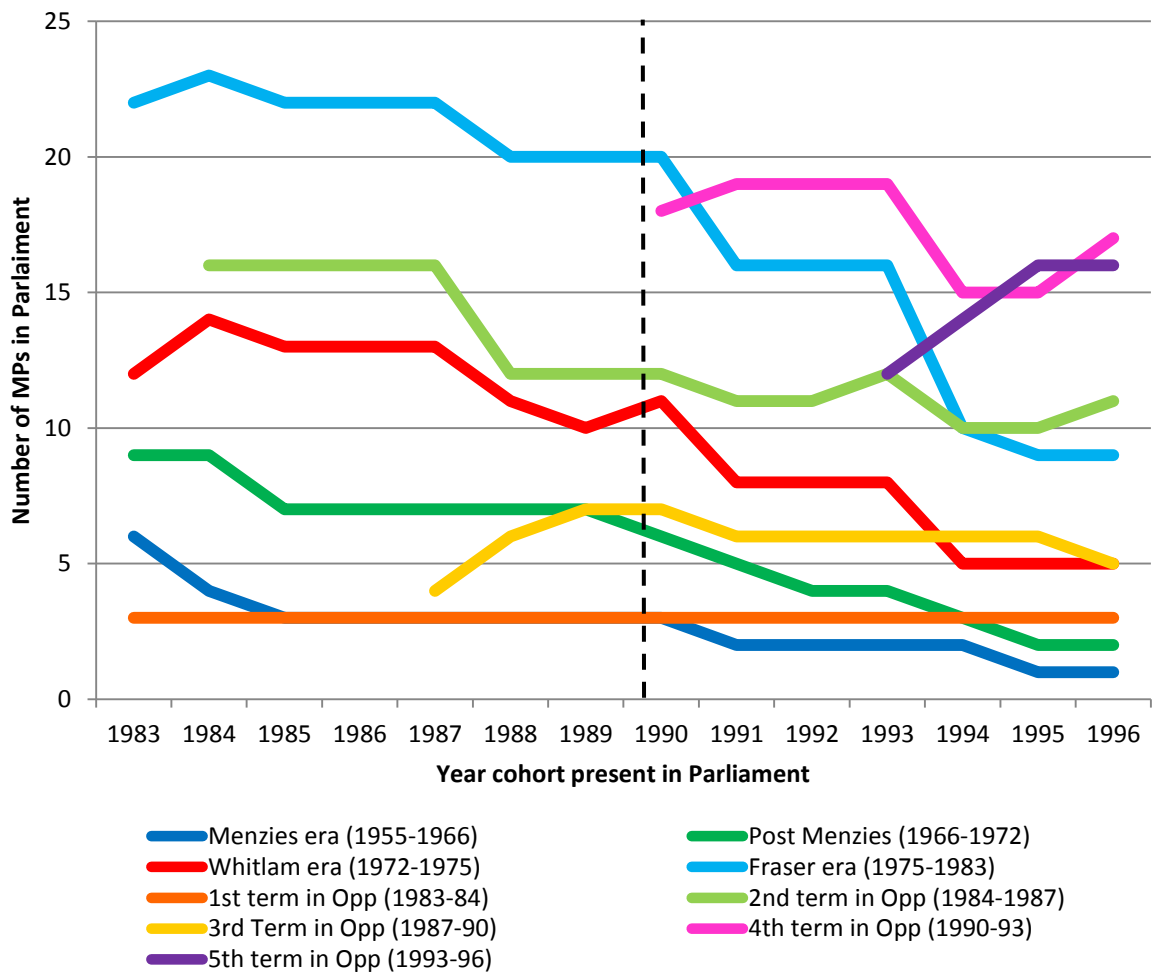
[347] See Errington and Van Onselen, *John Winston Howard*; Pickering, 'The Class of 96'.

[348] Given the small number of MPs still in parliament in 1983 who started their parliamentary career during the Menzies or post-Menzies years (here defined as the Holt, Gorton and McMahon prime ministerships), they have been collapsed into a single cohort. The Menzies era starts in 1955 as this is the earliest career start of any serving MPs at the 1983 election, (Billy Snedden and Jim Killen). The same condensing of cohorts has occurred with the Fraser years in order to aid reader interpretation of data. Yet, as this is a study of the Liberal party in opposition, individual opposition cohorts have been preserved.

cohorts saw the arrival of influential figures such as Peter Costello, Ian McLachlan and David Kemp. The relative size of the pre-1983 cohorts compared to the first (1983-84) and third term cohorts (1987-90) reflects the fact that a majority of those elected before 1983 held safe seats.

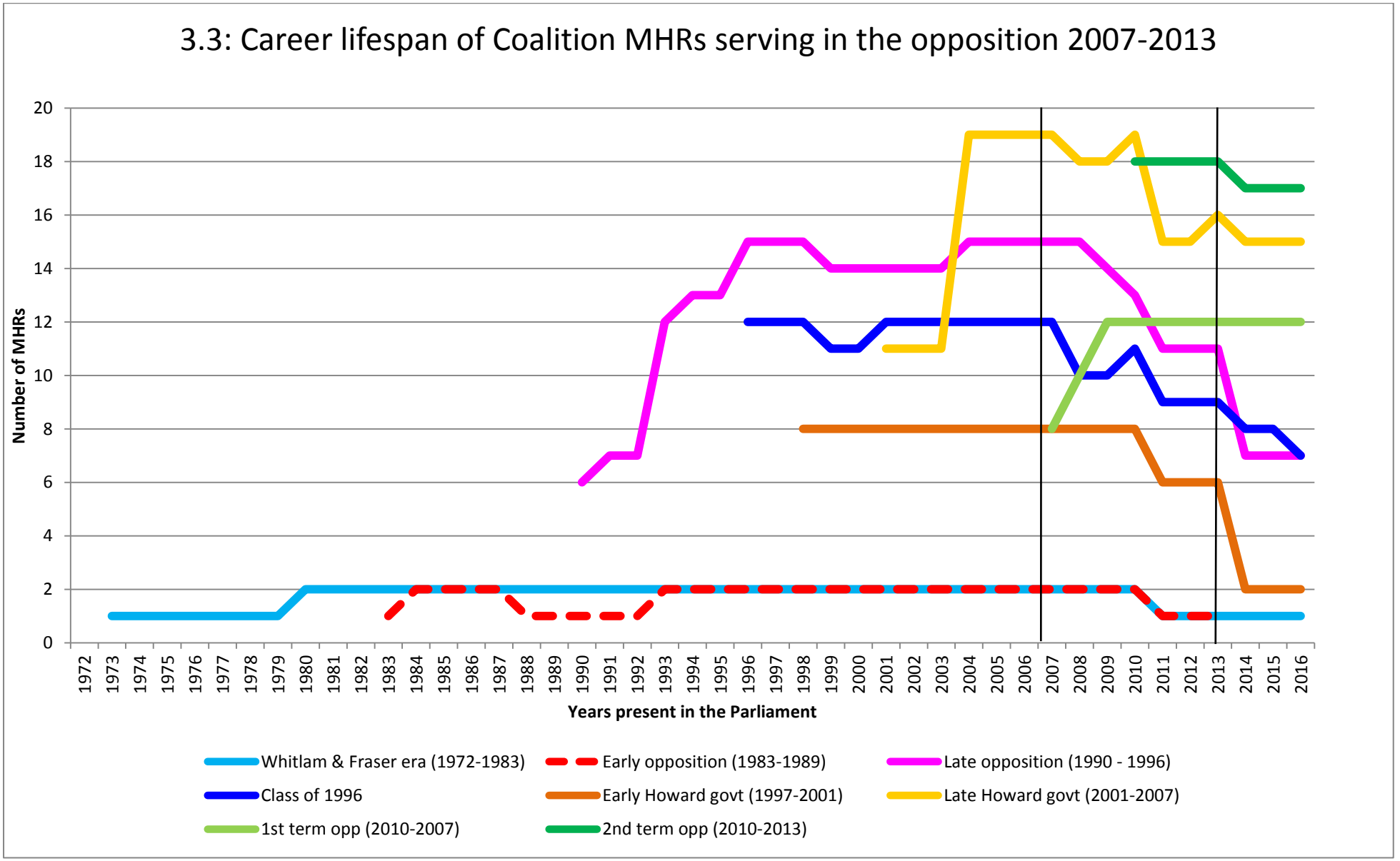
Importantly, many of the MPs that arrived between 1990 and 1996 would become leading figures in the Coalition's post-2007 opposition period, such as party leaders Tony Abbott and Warren Truss, and Christopher Pyne. Again, the size and resilience of the 1990 to 1996 cohorts into the second period of opposition is due to the high prevalence of those cohort members holding 'blue ribbon' seats.

Figure 3.2: Opposition Coalition MPs by cohort, 1983-96



Indeed, as figure 3.3 shows, the 1990-96 cohort remain a significant proportion of parliamentarians in the post-2007 opposition. The prominence of this generation is second only to the late Howard government cohort (2001-07), particularly for the post-2007 opposition's first term in opposition. For

3.3: Career lifespan of Coalition MHRs serving in the opposition 2007-2013



the post-2007 opposition, the 1990-96 cohorts occupy a similar generational role as did the pre-Whitlam era cohorts during the Coalition's 1983-96 opposition years. Unlike the 1980s, the range of political experience in the Coalition is narrower post 2007 as MPs serve shorter periods of time in the parliament. Given the low numbers of pre-1990 cohorts, the character of the Nelson-Turnbull-Abbott opposition era is shaped by a leadership dominated by the 1990-1996 cohort and a ministerial and backbench pool dominated by those MPs whose only experience of politics was of the Howard government.

Cohorts in the Senate

Similar career trajectories also occurred in the Senate (see figures 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6), but with some important differences. Senators serving during the pre-1996 opposition were overwhelmingly dominated by Senators taking up their position during the Fraser government compared to other cohorts (see figure 3.4). The Fraser cohort also remained the dominant group until 1995, a year before the Coalition returned to office (see figure 3.5). Unlike in the House, the 1990 to 1996 cohort was not as important for the Coalition opposition in the 1980s and 1990s.

Figure 3.4: Career lifespans of Senators serving in the opposition between 1983-96

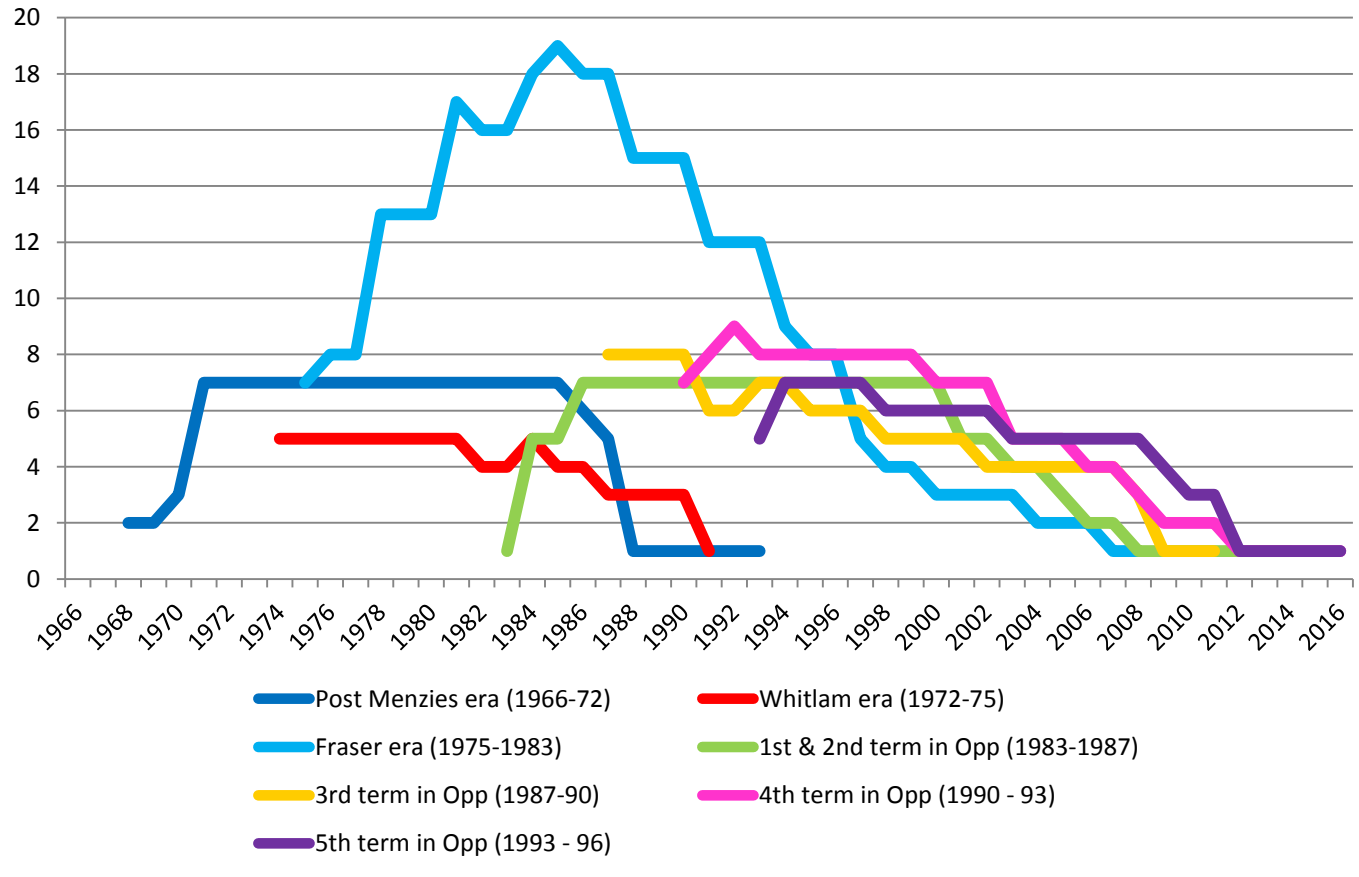


Figure 3.5: Opposition Senators by cohort, 1983-96

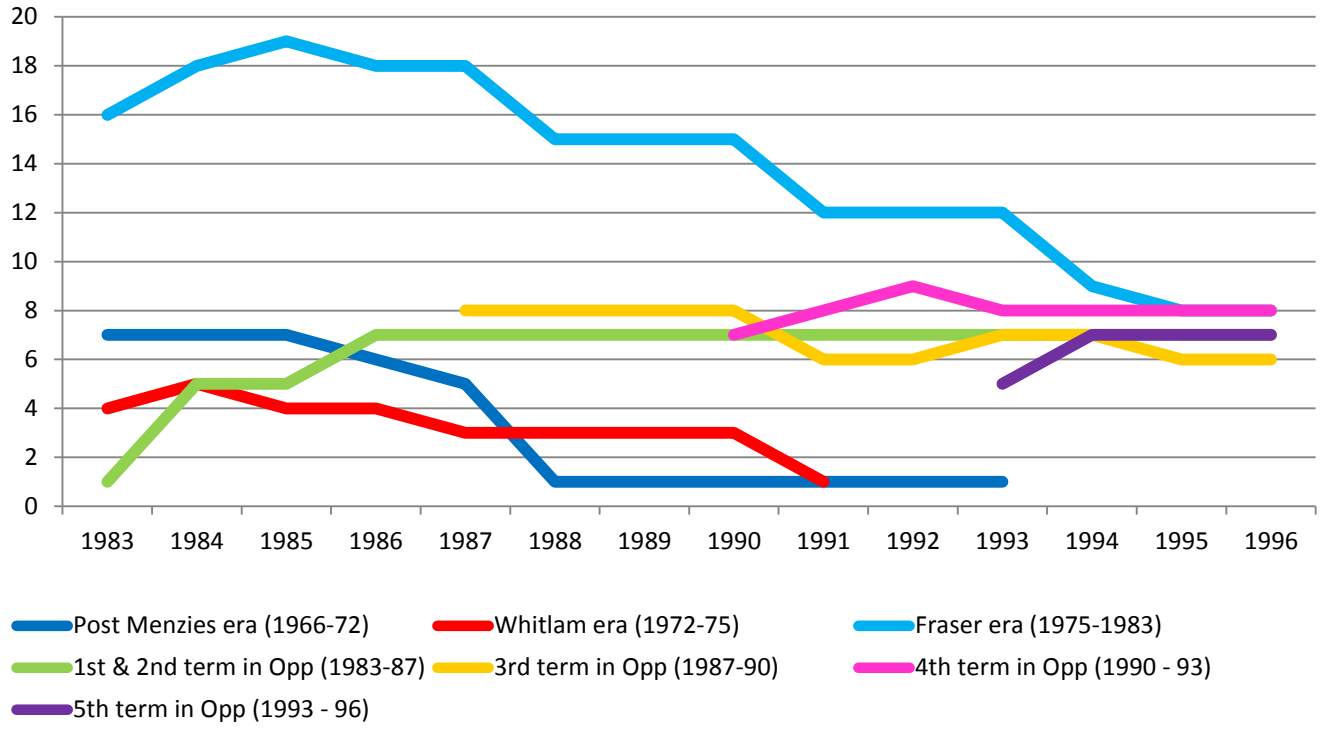
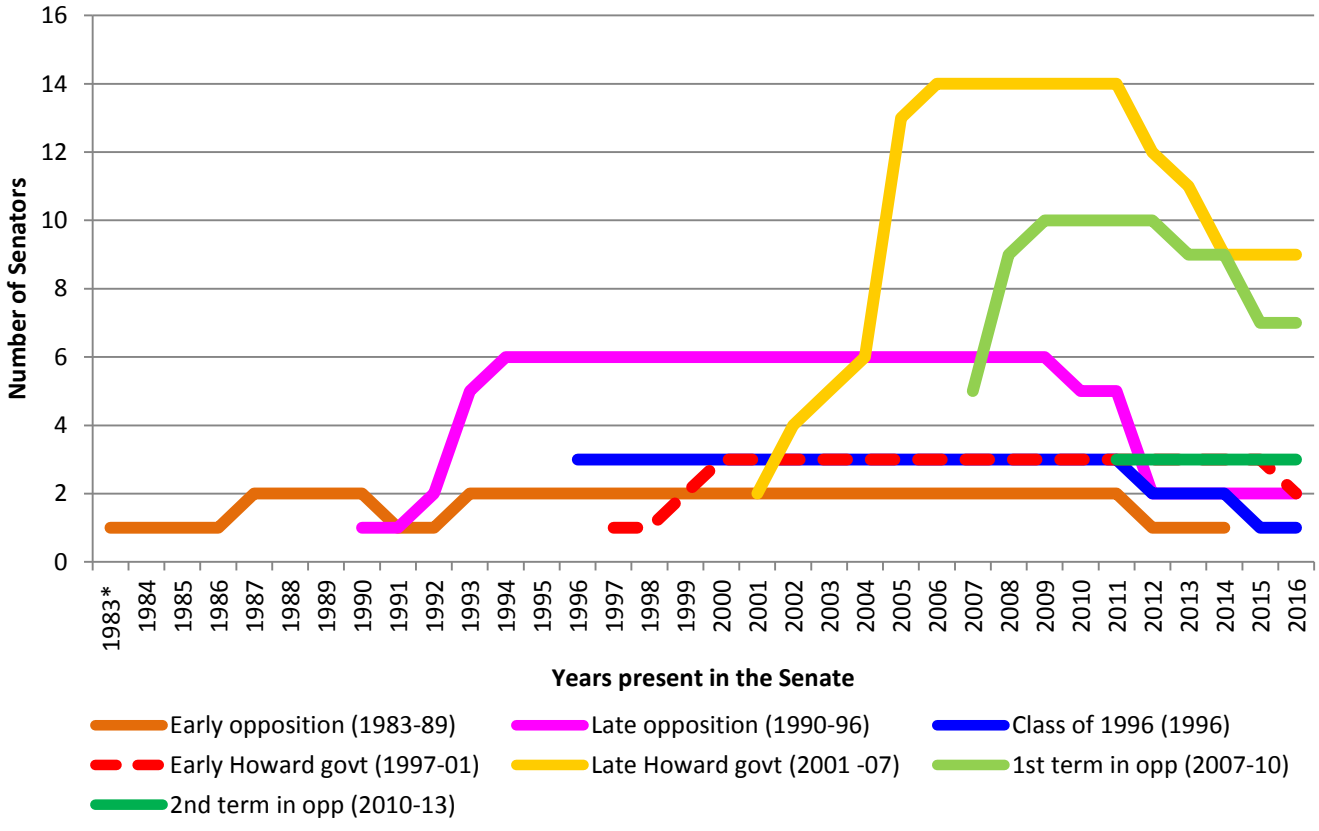


Figure 3.6: Career lifespans of Senate serving in the opposition from 2007-13



With the exception of Nick Minchin, few senators of this cohort proved to be central to the Howard government. Only Minchin and Abetz held significant leadership posts during the post-2007 opposition years. Like the House during the Nelson-Turnbull-Abbott Opposition, the Senate was dominated by those elected during late Howard government (2001-2007) (see figure 3.6).

A distinct feature of the Liberal party is that it does not have *formalised* factions. LPA figures prefer to distinguish political groups within the party has 'personality' groupings.[349] Without formalised structures to socialise incoming parliamentarians into organised factions the inter-personal dimension of political conflicts can come to more effectively encapsulate internal party conflict. Thus when key groups of actors leave, the conflicts which they sustained and energised lack the capacity to remain important without the presence of cohorts within the parliamentary party. Thus much of the ideological geography of the party is contingent on the composition of the party room. Without formal structures, it remains harder for those outside the parliamentary party room to exert long-term influence compared with parties like the ALP.

Therefore, examining the lifespans of Coalition MPs reveals insights to the likely dominant thinking within the Coalition in a given year of opposition. Figures 3.1 through 3.6 reveal that those socialised into the parliaments of the 1970s were the most dominant until they gave way to a new cohort in the early 1990s. It is unsurprising that the key economic debates within the Liberal party during the 1980s were divided between those committed to an older ideal of Australian social liberalism and those interested in the rise of monetarism in the late 1970s. It is also unsurprising that when a cohort loses its critical mass, the ideas or conflicts that characterised that cohort also fall out of the LPA's internal debates. The nature of factionalism in LPA will be discussed further in this chapter.

Yet, what is not explicitly captured by these graphs is the resulting change in the religious makeup of the LPA over the thirty years between1983-2013, which has also notably shaped the ideological character of the LPA. As Brett outlines, Protestantism was once a key cultural and organising principle of the Liberal party. The Liberals were so overwhelmingly protestant that Menzies would remark whenever Sir John Cramer, the only Catholic member of his cabinet, entered the room, 'Hush, boys. The papist is among us'.[350] As Pickering notes, by the mid-1990s, the number of Catholics representing the LPA in parliament had increased markedly.[351] This trend ran closely alongside a growing linkage of religious observance with the conservative side of politics in an increasingly secular age. As Abjorensen observed, when the Coalition opposition first elected its

[349] See O'Brien, *The Liberals* for a lengthy disucssion on this topic.
[350] Brett, *The Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class*, Chapter 3; Norman Abjorensen, 'When Did Catholics Take over the Liberal Party?', *Crikey*, December 5 2007, http://www.crikey.com.au/2007/12/05/abjorensen-when-did-catholics-take-over-the-liberal-party/.
[351] Pickering, 'The Class of 96', 100.

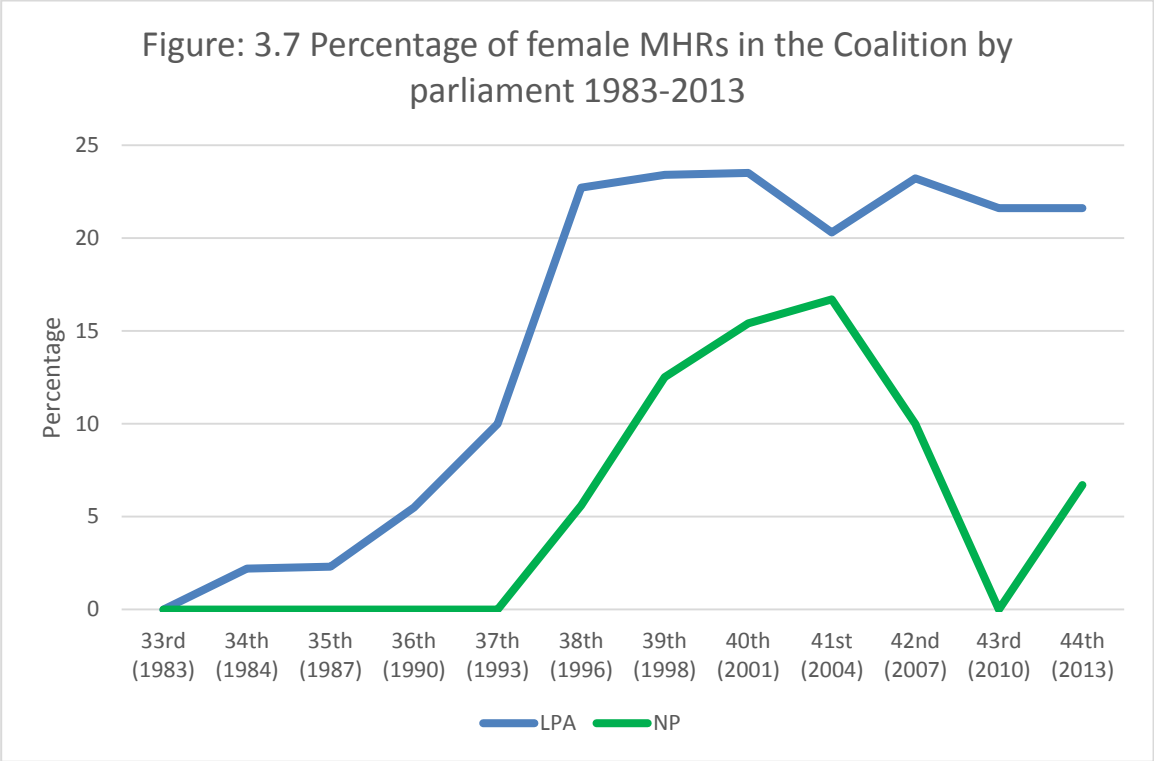
leader in 2007, all the leadership contenders were Catholics, as were two of those running for the deputy position.[352] An analysis by *The Sydney Morning Herald* found the trend has continued into the Abbott government, where eight out of nineteen cabinet ministers were Catholics.[353] It is no coincidence that groups such as the Lyons Forum have their origins in the early 1990s. The growing Catholicisation of the LPA and the prominence of the 1990s cohorts in the leadership of the 2007-2013 oppositions goes some way to explaining the party's reluctance to take on and accommodate itself to questions of culture and ethics such as same-sex marriage. It also marks the beginning in an important shift in the representation of Catholics in the parliament within the Australian party system.[354] Thus, cohort groupings alone only go so far to explaining aspects of internal party management within the LPA.

A continuing poor record on gender

Ironically, until recent decades the Liberal party and its antecedents were pioneers of female political activity (albeit in small numbers).[355] Women were central to the establishment and organisation of the Liberal party, securing guarantees of representation on Liberal party state and federal organs.[356] Menzies harnessed lower and middle class women's values of cosy homes and respectable frugality for the Liberal party. It was women from the Liberal party that dominated the ranks of those entering parliament for the bulk of the 20th century.[357] Yet, during the course of the period under study, the LPA would lose the lead on gender representation and participation. Indeed, gender representation points to a sorry continuity between the two periods of opposition — or their intervening years in government — of continuing low levels of female representation. As figure 3.7 shows, female representation reached only 10.2 per cent at its highest point during the Liberal Party's 1983 to 1996 opposition's years. While this compares favourably with Labor's 12.5 per cent at its highest point, Labor's female representation never fell below 8 per cent during the entire period, whereas the LPA had no women elected to the House of Representatives in 1983. Yet, the LPA's record does compare favourably with the National party, which failed to elect any

[352] Abjorensen, 'When Did Catholics Take over the Liberal Party?'
[353] Johnathan Swan and Lisa Vistin, 'Coalition celebrates a religious Easter: Eight of 19 cabinet members are Catholic', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April 20 2014, http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/Coalition-celebrates-a-religious-easter-eight-of-19-cabinet-members-are-catholic-20140419-36xn4.html; Matt Wade and Gemma Khaicy 'Catholics mark Liberals' turnaround', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 21 2013. http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/catholics-mark-liberals-turnaround-20130920-2u5hf.html.
[354] See Murray Goot and Ian Watson, 'Explaining Howard's Success: Social Structure, Issue Agendas and Party Support, 1993–2004', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 2 (June 2007): 270.
[355] Margaret Fitzherbert, *Liberal Women: Federation to 1949* (Annandale, N.S.W: Federation Press, 2004); Brett, *The Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class*, Chapter 4.
[356] Margaret Fitzherbert, *So Many Firsts : Liberal Women from Enid Lyons to the Turnbull Era* (Annandale, N.S.W: Federation Press, 2009), Chapter 1.
[357] Brett, *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People*.

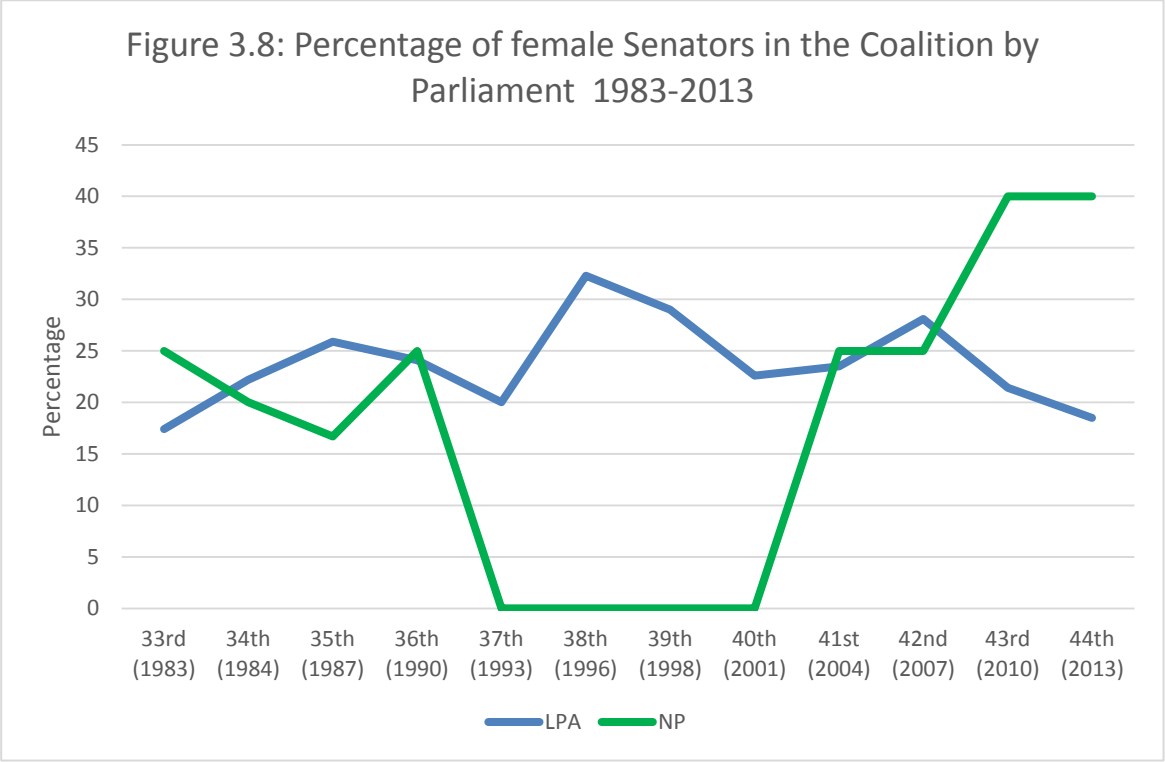
female MPs between 1983 and 1996.[358] As Costar notes, women made up a large share of the membership and were better represented in the extra-parliamentary wing, electing the first female director of a political party in 1981 and following this up with several appointments of women to state directorships.[359]



In the wake of electing the most female representatives ever in 1996, the LPA congratulated itself on improving female representation without imposing quotas. Instead, it cited its mentoring programs in NSW and other states as its preferred strategy. Yet as figure 3.7 illustrates, female representation has not improved since 1996.

However, in the Senate, female representation in the Coalition is stronger. As figure 3.8 shows, women were already present in the Senate when the Coalition went into opposition — even the National party enjoyed the presence of Flo Bjelke-Petersen. The importance of the Senate as an avenue for women entering parliament is further demonstrated by the fact that the only woman elected by the LPA to the lower house in 1984 was Kathy Sullivan, who had previously served nine years in the Senate. During the post-2007 period of opposition, female representation has remained fairly stable for the LPA, but has improved dramatically for the National party, with two women out of five in its Senate team.

[358] The NPA's small party room in effect means the election of one or two female MPs can dramatically improve the NPA's representation.
[359] Costar, 'The National Party: The Resilient Party', 30–31.



Renewal during opposition did not address questions of gender directly, despite an ongoing, if low-level, internal party debate. Failure to act was a product of both the party's individualistic philosophy and its governing structures. Sadly, the major difference between the Coalition's return in 1996 and 2013 is the lack of female representation in cabinet. It has proved to be an embarrassment rather than a source of triumph.

State representation and renewal

Each state arguably has its own individual political culture and its own internal dynamics that shape the character of members serving in the federal parliament. As noted in chapter one, when Katherine West sought to study power in the Liberal party in the late 1960s, she deemed the differences between states important enough to differentiate her analysis by state.[360] Furthermore, different political cultures in New South Wales and Victoria are also used to explain different ideological approaches in the Liberal party.[361] The importance of this divide was illuminated by the rivalry between the suburban Sydneysider John Howard and the urbane Melbournian Andrew Peacock which dominated the LPA from 1983 until Peacock's retirement in 1994. If the Victorians dominated the Liberal party for most of its first three decades, it is NSW that has dominated the party since 1996. Indeed, since John Howard was re-elected leader in 1995, all of the party's leaders have hailed from Sydney.

[360] West, *Power in the Liberal Party*, ii.
[361] See Abjorensen, *John Howard and the Conservative Tradition*.

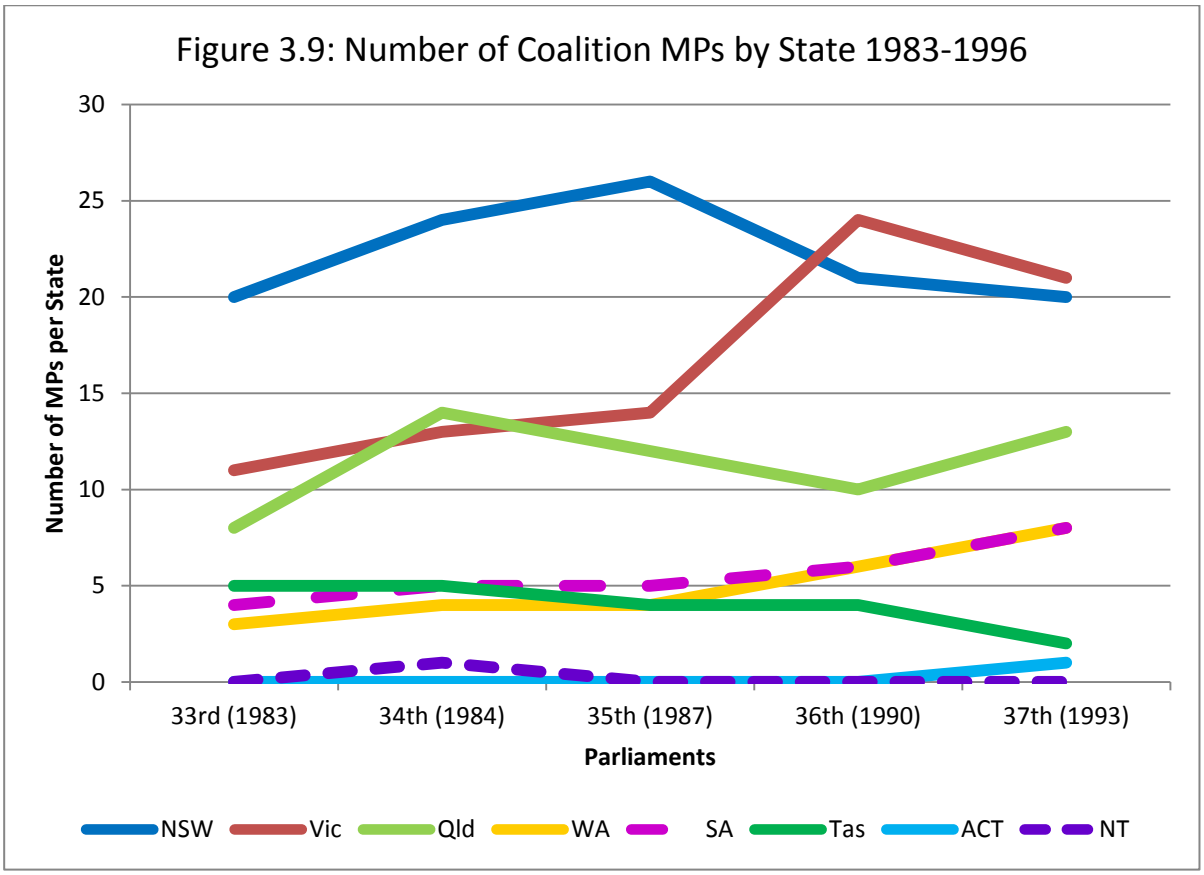


Figure 3.9: Number of Coalition MPs by State 1983-1996
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
Number of MPs per State
33rd (1983)
34th (1984)
35th (1987)
36th (1990)
37th (1993)
Parliaments
NSW
Vic
Qld
WA
SA
Tas
ACT
NT

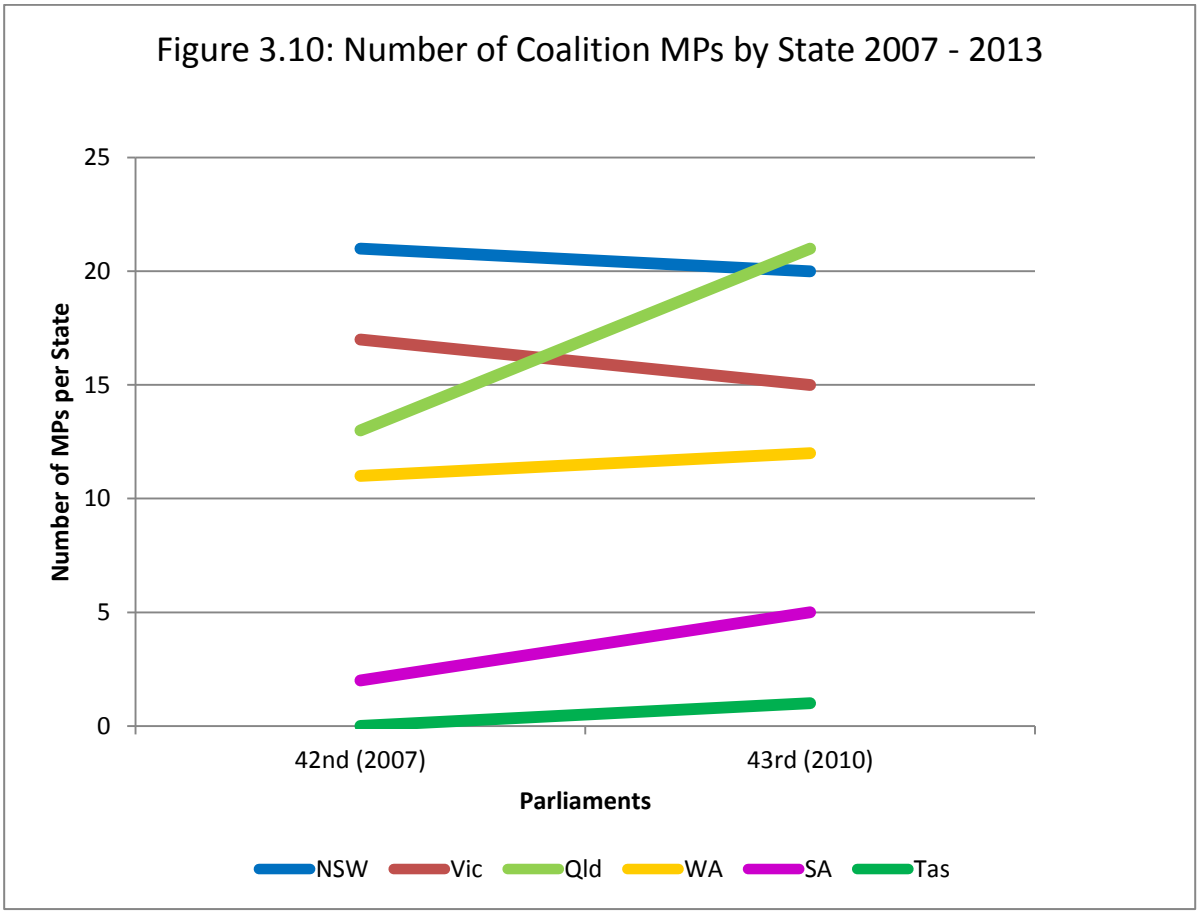


Figure 3.10: Number of Coalition MPs by State 2007 - 2013
25
20
15
10
5
0
Number of MPs per State
42nd (2007)
43rd (2010)
Parliaments
NSW
Vic
Qld
WA
SA
Tas

Figure 3.11: Percentage of turnover in each parliament by Coalition MPs, 1983-1996

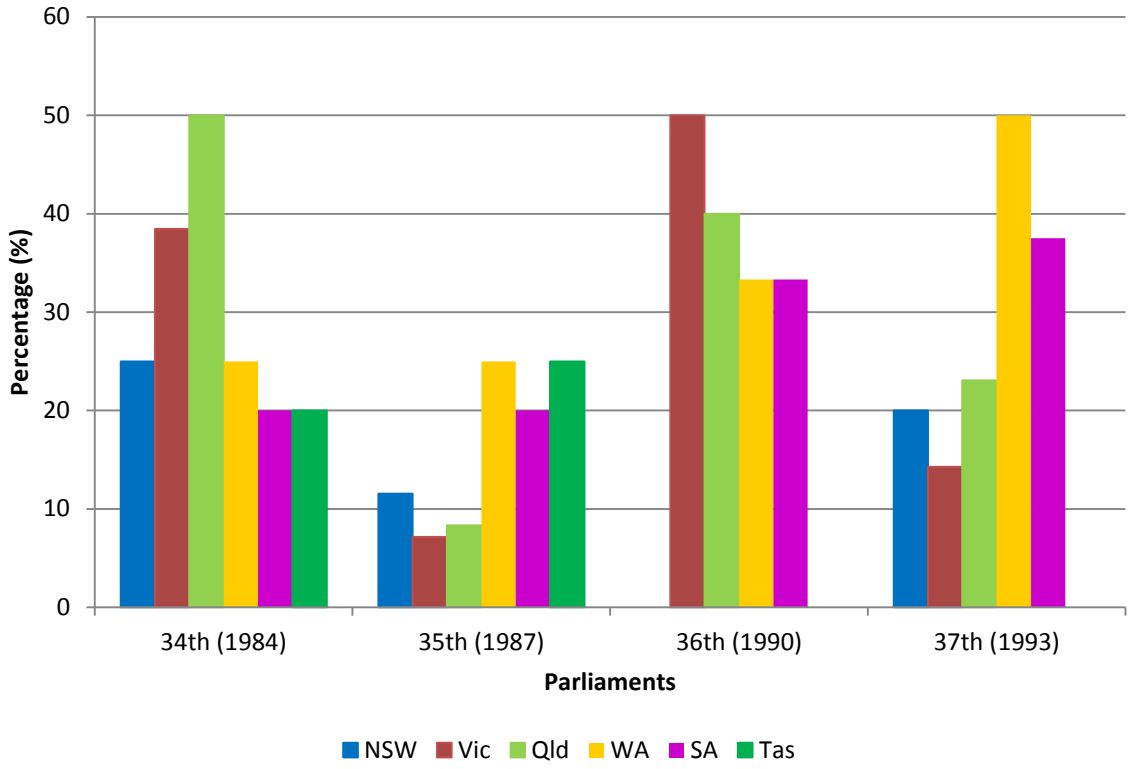
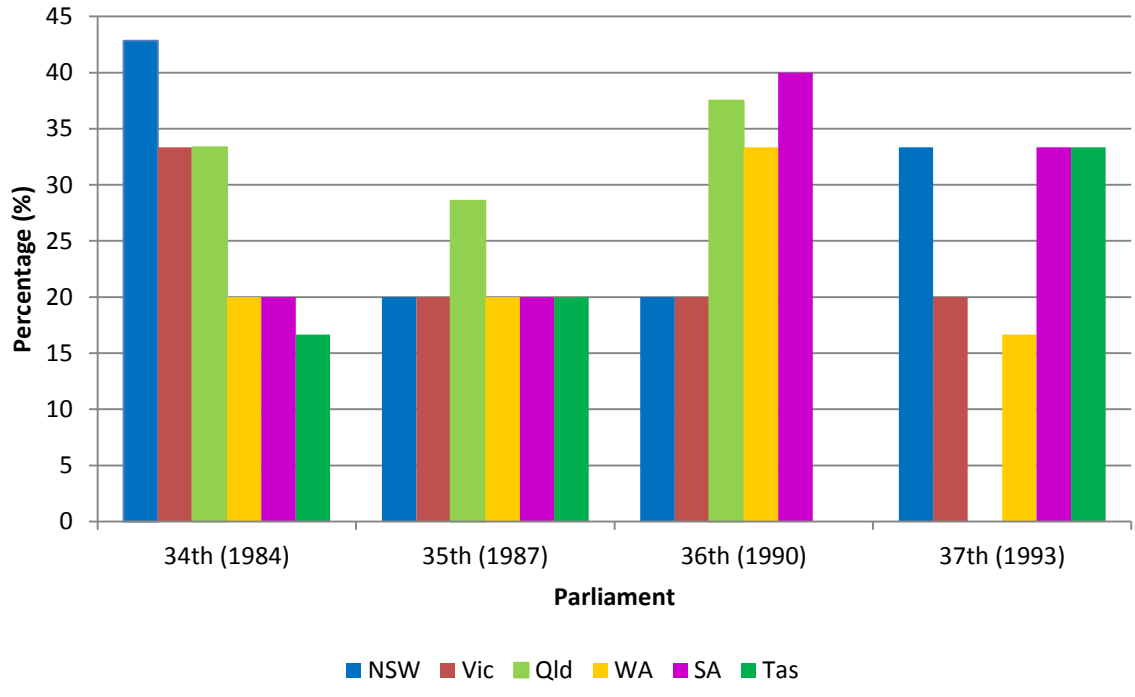


Figure 3.12: Percentage of turnover in each parliament by Coalition Senators, 1983-1996



The 1980s represented a decade of tension and transition and the beginnings of new trends which would see the Liberal party's strongholds move from the 'AFL states' (Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia) to Queensland and Western Australia (see figures 3.9 and 3.10). Having dominated Tasmania for much of the 1980s, the Liberals lost ground after 1990 and did not perform well in Tasmania during the post-2007 opposition period. Queensland was volatile in both periods, and made up the largest state grouping from 2010 to 2013. Victoria only had more numbers in the thirty-sixth and thirty-seventh parliaments (1990 -1996), no doubt benefiting from the rise of Jeff Kennett in Victoria while the Liberals in NSW suffered from the unpopularity of reforms unleashed by Nick Greiner. Contemporaneously, the Victorians have continued their relative decline given the number of seats available in the state when compared to the strength of the LPA in Western Australia. Victorians no longer hold either the leadership or the deputy leadership of the party.

Examining patterns of turnover or renewal by MPs and Senators at the state level is also revealing of different political cultures within individual state divisions of the Coalition parties. Queensland saw renewal of 50 per cent in 1984 after recovering from its losses at the 1983 and as a result of capitalising on the expansion of the parliament in 1984 (see figure 3.11). In contrast, the large turnover in Queensland in 1990 was the result of the retirement of long-serving members, political scandals at the state level and leadership turmoil in both the Liberal and National parties. In Victoria, a turnover of 50 per cent in the thirty-sixth parliament (1990) was the product of a strong electoral performance in conjunction with the controversial campaign to renewal the Victorian division by then President Michael Kroger. High turnover in the thirty-seventh parliament (1993) of Western Australia was the combination of the retirement of high profile Liberals Fred Chaney and Peter Shack from safe seats, and victories in the seats of Stirling and Cowan. On the other hand, New South Wales, South Australia and Tasmania experienced relatively consistent levels of turnover throughout the pre-1996 opposition years.

Turnover amongst Senators (see figure 3.12) is more consistent over time. Turnover until 1990 was almost exclusively the result of retirement by Senators elected in 1975 or earlier. Higher levels of turnover in Queensland, Western Australia, and South Australia in the thirty-sixth (1990), and additionally New South Wales during the thirty-seventh (1993) parliaments, were the product of a further exodus of pre-1983 cohort members. Given the smaller size of state cohorts, it is difficult to unpick specific state wide trends in the Senate compared with the Lower House.

The Liberal party did succeed in attracting quality candidates during the pre-1996 years, either for their technical expertise (such as John Hewson, John Stone (NPA), Ian McLachlan, David Kemp and Peter Costello) or their political acumen (such as Peter Reith, Nick Minchin, Petro Georgiou or Tony

Abbott). However, several star recruits went on to have lacklustre careers. It was the smaller states whose women were more successful in the ministry, such as Amanda Vanstone (South Australia) and Jocelyn Newman (Tasmania). Before the 1980s, the party had argued against recruiting political officers, a view that was challenged throughout the 1980s.[362] By the 1990s, in New South Wales in particular, the emphasis on the talented political outsider was replaced by a system much more focused on the factional implications of preselection. Timer-servers were more common, though this is not to suggest that talent was no longer selected. It was simply harder to bring in, and in most cases it would still require patronage in order to navigate the complex politics of the branches. Indeed, New South Wales left its process of renewal rather late, and only began the process in earnest after 1993.

The process of candidate selection in New South Wales between 2007 and 2013 can at best only be charitably called 'renewal', given that challenges to preselection in that state were more often than not the product of internal battles for control of the state council. Turnover in Queensland was more the product of the reverse of Labor's political fortunes after its stunning win in 2007, rather than the product of a concerted campaign on the part of the LNP. In the National party, cycles of renewal occurred as a response to major losses in 1983 and 1987. It was fortunate to recruit several future leaders and ministers in the following elections, such as Charles Blunt and Tim Fischer in 1984 and Warren Truss and Bruce Scott in 1990.

Victoria was the exception. It underwent divisive reform in the late 1980s which produced fourteen new MPs in 1990, five of which went on to serve in the ministry, and three served in the cabinet. After the 2007 defeat, Victoria led the way in recruiting quality candidates to refresh its ranks, many of whom are now serving in the ministry.[363] Victoria benefited from its larger size compared with the smaller states and because it was relatively free of factional warfare that was beginning to corrode the New South Wales division. Significantly, the LPA has built up some capacity for training its MPs. This is mostly achieved through recruiting from amongst former political staff, industry associations and think tanks, most notably the Institute of Public Affairs.[364]

The Liberal party has not had a coherent strategy to manage renewal in its ranks and to secure quality candidates. Renewal was not an active policy on the part of state divisions after 1983, with large numbers of MPs returning in 1984 in Victoria and Queensland. A similar pattern was repeated in New South Wales by its Senators. The recruitment of star candidates does not appear to the

[362] Liberal Party of Australia. Committee of Review and Valder, *Facing the Facts*, 84; Starr, *Carrick*.
[363] For example, Josh Frydenburg, Kelly O'Dwyer, Alan Tudge and Dan Tehan.
[364] For data on patterns of recruitment see Miragliotta and Errington, 'Legislative Recruitment and Models of Party Organisation'.

product of a sustained campaign to garner quality candidates. Rather, the processes were *ad hoc*, and entirely reliant on the state divisions to co-ordinate. After 1993, this was the cause of some lament, with the party's virtue of eschewing co-operation with other organisations recast as a significant problem. The LPA did not have the same training grounds through unions and other political and research support networks that Labor could draw upon.[365] Observers such as Prasser or Henderson have argued that Liberal recruits had shallow political experience and were unable to compete with Labor in policy debate.

Managing a political coalition

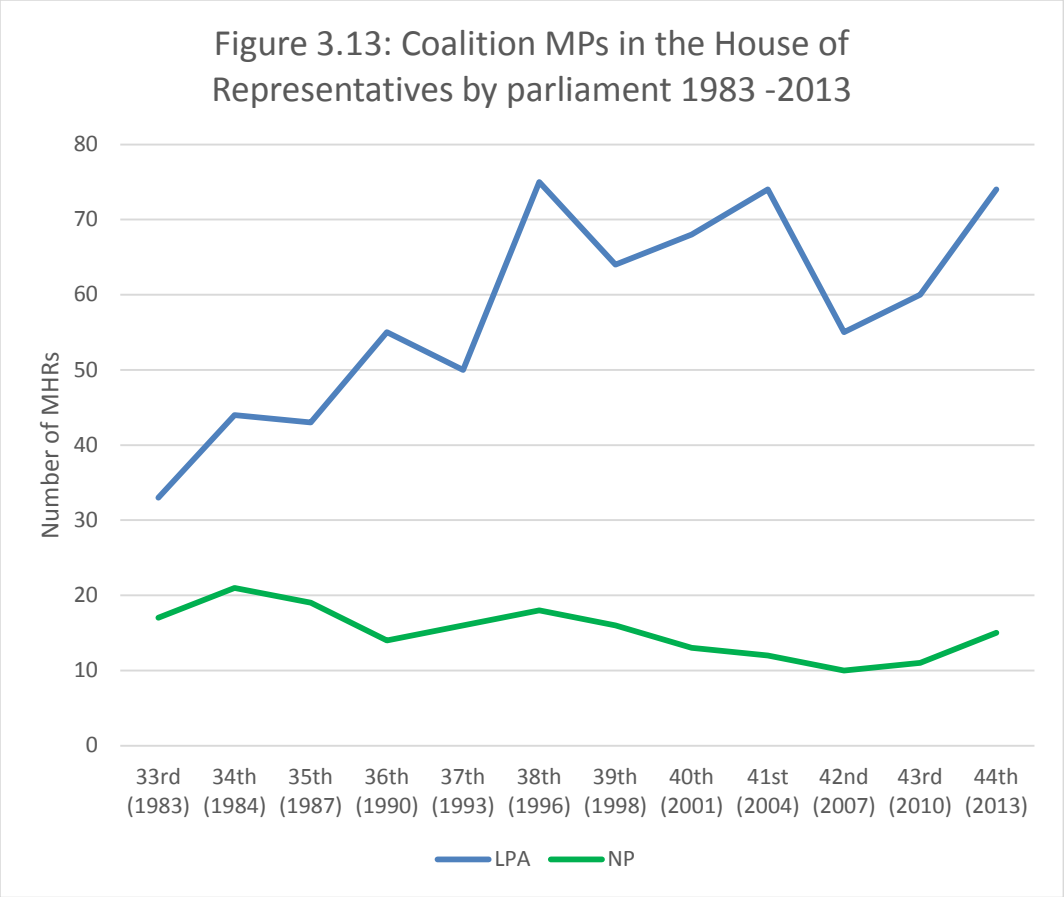
The Coalition relationship between the Nationals and the Liberal party is important, if for no other reason than it would be difficult for the Liberal party to gain a parliamentary majority without the National party's seats. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the relationship between the Nationals and the Liberals in exhaustive detail, this study will explore key continuities and differences in the Coalition relationship in opposition between 1983 and 2013. Important differences between the two eras include the relative decline of National party representation in the parliament. Yet, many more continuities remain. First, the relationship continues to be managed at the interpersonal level, principally by the party leaders. Second, there is the need to constantly manage the tensions that arise from the party's different ideological preferences and constituency needs.

Declining National party representation

Although the National party's fortunes are connected to the Liberal party's, particularly in relation to forming a government, their electoral fortunes are not perfectly linked. National party representation has declined in absolute terms since 1983 (see figure 3.13), the party has lost territory to the Liberals and its electoral performance has diverged on several occasions from the performance of its coalition partner. This is a reflection of both encroachment by the Liberals into provincial and regional Australia and the rise of right-wing fringe parties such as One Nation. The Nationals are also vulnerable to breakaways from the party, such as Bob Katter, Tony Windsor, Rob Oakeshott and Julian McGauran. However, as Clive Bean argues, the Nationals are the twin beneficiaries of Australia's proportional system of voting and its favourable position in the enduring centre-periphery and primary-secondary industries cleavages.[366]

[365] Prasser and Neylan, 'Liberal Leadership, Policy-Making and Party Organisation', 120–21.
[366] Clive Bean, 'Trends in National Party Support', in *The National Party : Prospects for the Great Survivors*, ed. Linda Elizabeth Courtenay Botterill and Geoff Cockfield (Crows Nest, N.S.W: Allen & Unwin, 2009), 68.

During the pre-1996 opposition years, the National party extended its ongoing project to broaden its appeal beyond its traditional country constituency. In both the 1984 and 1987 elections, the Nationals increased their efforts to contest seats across Australia, with mixed results. In 1984 and 1987, the party contested 72 and 82 seats and won 21 and 19 seats respectively. In contrast, in 1983 the Nationals contested 31 and won 17.[367] However, when taking into account the increase in the size of the chamber in 1984, the National party's performance improved in 1984, taking 10.6 per



cent of the vote compared with only 9.2 per cent in 1983. For this reason, the Nationals' electoral result in 1984 was seen as a success, despite the fact that many candidates lost their deposits, sparking a major debate in the Victorian division.[368]

By the late 1980s, the National party's fortunes would decline. In 1987, the party faced the prospect of splitting internally or with its coalition partner under pressure from Queensland Premier Joh

[367] Committee of Review into the Future Direction of the National Party of Australia and Peter James Nixon, *National Party of Australia, the Future : A Report* ([Barton, A.C.T: National Party of Australia], 1988), 11.
[368] NLA: MS5000, Box 1363, Folder title, *Joh Crusade*, Federal Director, contingency brief, 'End of the Coalition: political implications', 29 April 1987, 2; For more on the Nationals' push into metropolitan seats, particularly in Victoria see: 'Nationals going all out to capitalise on Lib's problems, *The Australian*, October 16 1984; David Broadbent, 'NP's city bid becomes brawl', *The* Age, December 8 1984; Tom Nobel, 'Nationals to concentrate on winning country seats', *The Age*, April 22 1985.

Bjelke-Petersen. The 'Joh for PM' campaign saw the Nationals lose two seats despite its percentage of the national vote increasing to 11.5. The fiasco sparked an internal party review, alongside changes to the party's constitution. The Nationals reached their nadir at the 1990 election, when they lost their parliamentary leader, Charles Blunt, and returned a 'disastrous' 14 seats with only 8.4 per cent share of the vote— the party's worst since 1955.[369] While the party recovered somewhat in seat numbers in 1993 and 1996 (16 and 18 respectively), the party's share of the vote continued to decline.[370] However, as Bean argues, the Party's ongoing success lies in maintaining a healthy average vote-to-seat ratio of 1.4 between 1983 and 2007. This ratio is a stronger performance over time than either of the major parties.[371]

Senate representation has remained stable for both parties over the period under study. For the Liberal party, the range is between 27 and 31 Senators.[372] National party Senate representation has remained stable between 1983 and 1996, ranging between four and six Senators.[373]

The National party's review in 1988, identified the party's difficulties in seeking to increase its vote given demographic and work-pattern changes since the party's heyday. The report noted that in 1988, all of the party's seats were designated rural and concluded that the party should focus on increasing its provincial representation rather than launching an assault on metropolitan Australia.[374] This remains an ongoing problem for the Nationals and has only worsened in the post-2007 period as demographic changes along traditional National party coastal seats have undermined its attempts to expand.[375] More disturbing still for the Nationals is the competition it faces from the Liberals and independents. As Cockfield outlined, the LPA holds twice as many seats with rural districts and holds more agricultural seats than the Nationals (reflecting the Nationals' thin party representation in South and Western Australia).[376] With the Coalition's return to government in 2013, the National party appears to be reversing its downward trend. However, it is too soon to tell if this is the product of the retirement of two independents Tony Windsor and Rob Oakeshott or a resurgence in the party's vote. Despite the National party's declining representation, the fact remains that the Liberal

[369] Bean, 'Trends in National Party Support', 69; Committee of Review into the Future Direction of the National Party of Australia and Nixon, *National Party of Australia, the Future*, 11.
[370] Bean, 'Trends in National Party Support', 69.
[371] Ibid., 70.
[372] There are two exceptions. In 1983 there were only 23 Senators, however, the chamber was also smaller before the expansion of the lower house in 1984. Therefore, this result is proportional and in line with the rest of the period. In 2004 the Howard government achieved a Senate majority for the first time since the Fraser Government with 34 senators.
[373] National party representation fell to three during the Howard Government between 1998 and 2004.
[374] Committee of Review into the Future Direction of the National Party of Australia and Nixon, *National Party of Australia, the Future*, 14.
[375] Geoff Cockfield, 'A Rural Party in an Urban Nation', in *The National Party : Prospects for the Great Survivors*, ed. Linda Elizabeth Courtenay Botterill and Geoff Cockfield (Crows Nest, N.S.W: Allen & Unwin, 2009), 64.
[376] Ibid., 62–63.

party cannot, in most circumstances, govern without its junior partner. This then raises the important question of how is this relationship managed in opposition.

The Coalition: stability, continuity and tension

As noted chapter one, the compromise required to maintain the Coalition relationship has costs for both parties, and in the opinion of many party members and academics yields too few rewards. The title of Brian Costar's edited compilation, *For Better or Worse,* accurately captures the pragmatic calculation made by both party's parliamentary elites.[377] Party organisation members and backbenchers may only begrudgingly accept the coalition, and resent it thereafter, but as this section will demonstrate, party leaders and other senior figures view the relationship as vital. They also have the good fortune (or misfortune) to manage their relationship at the interpersonal level, thereby building trust and empathy.

Until 1983, the default assumption of a coalition between the Liberal party (or its earlier antecedents) and the Country party was that it should not be maintained during opposition. Before the 'Joh for PM' fiasco, the coalition had dissolved between 1932 and 1934, for a year in 1939-40 and again with the election of Whitlam from 1972-1974. What was significant about these earlier partings (and the split in 1987) was the nature of the choice made. In the late 1930s, Earle Page refused to work with Robert Menzies. In 1972, Doug Anthony and Billy Snedden opted to dissolve the coalition arrangement but continued to work co-operatively in opposition. Parliamentary party leaders themselves made the decision to dissolve their coalition. The consequences of this choice dawned when the parties faced the 1974 election and scrambled to produce a coherent and unified set of policies for voters.[378] But, by 1983 the attitude to the coalition had shifted, and the default position was to remain in coalition rather than act separately. The reason was best summed up by former leader Doug Anthony at the height of the 'Joh for PM' crisis, who argued that 'bickering and brawling' by the Coalition parties demonstrated to the public that 'we were not credible alternative government'.[379]

The significance of the 1987 Coalition split lies in the reason it came about — namely as the result of the Queensland National Party forcing the federal party leadership to choose between splitting their own party or breaking the Coalition. It was a decision imposed on the National party leader, Ian Sinclair, who had been unable to resist the pressure from the renegade Queensland division. This

[377] Brian Costar, *For Better or for Worse: The Federal Coalition* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1994).
[378] Committee of Review into the Future Direction of the National Party of Australia and Nixon, *National Party of Australia, the Future*, 32.
[379] Doug Anthony, 'The Walter Scott Sydney Rotary lecture for 1987', 17. NLA: MS5000 box 1363 folder 'Joh crusade',

reality is reflected in the 'deep regret' and the commitment to seek 'a sound basis for ongoing cooperation in Opposition with the National party' after the irreparable break on 29 April 1987.[380]

The split in 1987 had the effect of underlining the importance of the Coalition relationship, with the National party's internal review in 1988 arguing strongly in favour of the Coalition for three reasons. First, the report argued that it was 'untenable' and 'arrogant' for the party to presume that it could face an election knowing full well that its policies were subject to change should it be elected. Second, as a separate party, the Nationals would be subjected to fringe status and only gain media coverage when it was seen to be in disagreement with the Liberal party.[381] Finally, the report argued that the National's influence was increased by its presence within the Coalition's structures, because it was able to influence the Liberal's broad political direction, and directly input into policy processes through the shadow ministry.[382] Indeed, the report writers reminded National members that 'whenever the party has a so-called victory [over the Liberals], it cannot go out publicly and proclaim that victory. The public image has to portray a united front with neither party being seen to win or lose'.[383] Had the strange series of events not unfolded in Brisbane in late 1986, the pre-1996 opposition would likely have seen the Coalition relationship carry on with its predictable bumps along the way.[384]

The Queensland LNP merger in the post-2007 period also highlights continuities in the way the parties manage the Coalition relationship at the federal level. Again, the merger of the Queensland Nationals and Liberals was a decision made by state bodies, largely in response to the internal difficulties of the Queensland Liberals and the tarnished brand of the Queensland National party.[385] Significantly, the manoeuvre was not opposed at the time by the federal leader Brendan Nelson, who offered his support to see the merger go ahead with the least disruption.[386] Moreover, for federal parliamentarians little changed when they arrived in Canberra. LNP members choose

[380] 'What the leaders said', *The Age*, April 29, 1987, http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/media/pressrel/HPR09024552/upload_binary/HPR09024552.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%221980s%201987%2004%2029%20howard,%20john,%20(former%20pm)%22.
[381] Committee of Review into the Future Direction of the National Party of Australia and Nixon, *National Party of Australia, the Future*, 33.
[382] Ibid., 34.
[383] Ibid., 33.
[384] Paul Davey, *Ninety Not out: The Nationals 1920-2010* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2010), Chapter 16; Paul Davey, *Joh for PM : The inside Story of an Extraordinary Political Drama* (Sydney, N.S.W: NewSouth Publishing, 2015); Bongiorno, *The Eighties*, 182–85; Howard, *Lazarus Rising*, Chapter 16.
[385] Costar, '"Party Futures"', 168.
[386] Mark Davis, 'Party merger gets the nod', *The Sydney Morning Herald,* July 28 2008, Available at: http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/party-merger-gets-the-nod/2008/07/27/1217097059705.html?sssdmh=dm16.326124 Accessed January 17 2016.

whether or not to sit in the Liberal party room or the National party room and at least for the first few years after the merger have approached politics at the federal level from the traditional Coalition perspectives.[387] Over time, the Queensland LNP may develop its own political culture and be a potential source of tension, but in the post-2007 opposition years, this difference was not readily apparent.

Interpersonal management

The effective working relationship between the Coalition partners is the result of their similar party structures (though different cultures) and their shared opposition to Labor. The parties are subject to the same system wide changes, such as the rise of the monetarist economic policies which saw the Nationals develop their own wets and dries.[388] Conversely they are both subject to party-specific challenges, such the rise of factionalism in the NSW Liberal party or the growing 'restlessness' in the National party's heartland during the mid-1980s.[389]

Yet, there is little formal infrastructure to help manage the Coalition relationship specifically. Given that both the Liberal and National parties remain hierarchical party organisations, it is unsurprising that a majority of the tensions, disagreements and the everyday management of the Coalition relationship occur at the party leader and federal director level. While the party room, shadow ministry and leadership group are important sites for managing party relationships, the Nationals are not accorded any particular or formalised privileges in these bodies apart from representation. Formal coalition agreements that are common in European jurisdictions are absent from the Australian context. Instead relations between the parties are maintained in an *ad hoc* fashion and informally over dinners and drinks with an intimate circle: 'we used to have leadership dinners every fortnight and you get the leadership group and the federal directors' one senior official explained.[390] The meetings were 'useful', because 'you would get an idea of what their thinking was at the high levels.'[391] Over dinner, tensions could be dealt with before they were allowed to fester: 'one issue will be resolved by putting a bit of money in. Another issue would be resolved by stepping back from one or two issues or conditions or terms. Other issues would resolve by giving in or

[387] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on April 15 2013; Personal communication with the author, interviewed on October 11 2012; Personal communication with the author, interviewed on February 25 2013.
[388] Milton Cockburn, 'Charles Blunt: Politician', *The Sydney Morning Herald,* January 24 1986; Peter Hartcher, 'Political interlopers down on the farm', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, June 28 1986, 29.
[389] Sarah Sargent, 'Farm militancy shakes up party allegiances', *The Australian Financial Review*, July 15 1985; Paul Malone, 'Farmers assert independence of Nationals and other parties', *The Canberra Times*, July 12 1985; 'Rural party plan worries Nationals', *The Australian,* August 8 1985.
[390] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 13 2013.
[391] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on December 20 2013.

compromising.'[392] Thus, the ability of leaders to communicate frankly, constructively and in confidence was significant.

Building trust was seen as vital to building successful partnerships between the parties. Tim Fischer, National party leader from 1990 to 1999, reflected that he 'had a very good working relationship with John Howard', but his relationship was Hewson was more strained: 'I got on, at times, okay, with John Hewson,' but that ultimately Hewson 'never trusted me greatly'.[393] This emphasises the importance of high quality interpersonal relationships between party leaders. As one senior Liberal noted, reflecting on the history of the Coalition, 'a bad relationship [with the National leader] could make a Liberal leader's position impossible.'[394] The importance of the relationship remains relevant today. A clear example was Malcolm Turnbull's inability to come to an accommodation with the Nationals over an emissions training scheme (ETS) in 2009. The Nationals' highly co-ordinated and unified campaign against the ETS provided a critical block of support to the climate change denialists in the Liberal party room, upon which the fate of Turnbull's leadership turned in November 2009.

The conflict over the ETS also demonstrates how the Coalition becomes more difficult to manage at the party room level where ideological differences become more problematic as they are dispersed over large numbers of actors. In conflicts between the parties, particularly when the Liberals are split, the Nationals small size is an advantage:

> Because it is small you can get on the phone, talk to people, have a quickly coordinated position, literally within an hour. As opposed to a large organization where the leadership might quickly coordinate a position but you can't take your backbench with you.[395]

Yet, given the party's smaller size, National party actors emphasised the importance of being good at the 'process of politics'. The capacity to 'mount an argument and use all the mechanisms for moving things internally, if that fails, to move things externally so that can change public opinion,' is particularly important to junior party members.[396] Thus, when the National party is united on a given position, and the Liberal party is divided, as in the case of the ETS, the junior party can offer substantial support to the part of the Liberal party that is closest in sympathy. Additionally, the potential to split the Coalition is an important check on the behaviour of both party leaders and

[392] Ibid.
[393] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on September 16 2013.
[394] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on October 11 2012.
[395] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on April 15 2013.
[396] Ibid.

other party actors. As one Liberal explained, a good leader will judge 'how deeply people feel about an issue … and how much damage would be caused if there is a disintegration'.[397]

The actions of the National party to maintain a separate identify form the Liberal party are a constant cause of tension between the two parties. As the Liberals developed their tax policy in the mid-1980s, there was regular and public criticism from the Nationals, including leader Ian Sinclair at times.[398] In the post-2007 period, National party senators were attacked in print by Tony Abbott for crossing the floor on carbon sinks and the $2.4 billion communications fund, stating that 'Nationals senators need to understand that it's impossible to be part of a coalition only when it suits them.'[399] The Nationals' Ron Boswell's returned the compliment, reminding Abbott that the Nationals had a right to represent their own constituencies.[400]

For the National party, a major challenge is to maintain a separate identity from the Liberal party. This reality is, at times, acknowledged by Liberal party actors who understand that the National party's views need to 'be accommodated and understood and respected in those areas that are vital to their constituencies,' because 'It's important to the Liberal party, [that] the National party is able to win and hold its particular seats and sustain its constituency.'[401] Further, there will also be times when the National party will 'have to take an issue to the … Liberal leader and say "this is a line in the sand issue for us and we can't go there. This is a potential threat to our unity".'

Yet despite these difficulties, the Coalition remains a vital relationship for both parties. For the Nationals, 'the Coalition is the vehicle by which we gained access to government, [and] the resources to make a difference.'[402] For the Liberal party that cannot govern without the Nationals' seats, there is an acknowledgement that 'the public are going to mark down the Liberal-National parties if they're at each other's throats. It's impossible to go to an election as separate parties with separate policies.'[403] This recognition of interest convergence and inter-dependence between the two parties is aptly demonstrated by the National party's election team being present in the Liberal party's HQ at past two elections in 2010 and 2013, continuing a practice started in 2004.[404] The relationship is

[397] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on October 9 2012.
[398] Ian Davis, 'Nationals pledge tax changes' *The Age*, November 11 1984 ,' Michael Lawrence, 'Senators' threat to supply over taxes', *The Sydney Morning Herald,* November 11 1984; John Short, 'How tax could sink a marriage', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, June 21 1985; Russell Barton, 'Howard firm with Nats on tax reform', *The Age*, October 2 1985.
[399] Bernard Keane, 'Memo the Liberal Party: just shut up', December 12 2008, http://www.crikey.com.au/2008/12/12/memo-to-the-liberal-party-just-shut-up/ .
[400] Ron Boswell, 'Memo Tony: every vote is vital to Nats', *The Australian,* December 16 2008.
[401] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on May 1 2013.
[402] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on September 16 2013.
[403] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on May 1 2013.
[404] Loughnane, 'The Liberal Campaign', 140.

ultimately akin to a long-term marriage: it requires constant attention and the building of trust between individual party actors.[405]

Managing a political group

Parliamentary practice provides that when the governing party loses an election, and if it remains the largest non-government group in the House, then it becomes the opposition. However, the neatness of this description glosses over the human toll of an electoral defeat and the demands made upon those members who remain. How do people, who were once at the centre of power, adapt themselves instantaneously, from making considered decisions to critiquing them? After so public a rebuke, there will be grief, exhaustion and demoralisation. How did the Coalition, and specifically the Liberal party members, cope with the transition to opposition and what were the continuities and differences in the party's attempts during their two periods of opposition to rebuild and manage the party?

Maintaining morale: combatting grief, anger and rebuilding

There were key differences in the LPA's approach to opposition in 1983 compared with 2007. For most MPs entering opposition in 1983, there was a sense that the party 'deserved' to go into opposition. The result was expected and some Liberals had begun packing up their offices before election day.[406] Others felt 'relief' and believed it would give the party an opportunity to shake off its policy timidity and the chance of a 'fresh start'.[407] It was this feeling on both sides of the party's ideological divide that led to the repudiation of the Fraser legacy, particularly Fraser's strong social agenda. John Howard echoed the sense of inevitability and reflected on the 'humbling' nature of losing office and the exhaustion it brings in its wake.[408] After defeat, Howard wanted 'a six-month sabbatical' but instead, as a leadership contender; he was plunged immediately into the thick of political conflict.[409]

Yet, there was also cause for optimism. In 1983, the Liberal party still governed in Tasmania and the Nationals ruled alone in Queensland. As a former Liberal explained, given the political success of the LPA historically, 'nobody thought that we would be in opposition for long.'[410] The LPA's confidence in the Labor party's inability to lead was also reflected in early opposition strategy documents which argued that Hawke lacked the right mix of skills, had 'no strong sense of policy direction' or

[405] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on September 16 2013.
[406] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on November 26 2013.
[407] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 18 2013.
[408] Howard, *Lazarus Rising*, 139.
[409] Ibid., 140.
[410] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 5 2013.

economic expertise and led a party with 'deep divisions'.[411] The LPA underestimated Hawke and the ALP in its early opposition days. Their assumption was that Hawke was overly reliant on political research and his government would spend in 'Whitlamesque proportions', leading to the 'inevitable' result that 'within a very short time, the government will become the highest taxing government in Australian history.'[412] With 'history on your side', it is not surprising that many in the Coalition underestimated the challenges of opposition and almost welcomed the chance for the party to refresh itself.

The loss in 2007 was strikingly different. The party was out of office federally and in all states and territories. Rather than a feeling that the party had deserved to lose, many were disappointed that the government had been repudiated despite performing well. For former Howard ministers the change in their circumstances was stark:

> … just the sudden onslaught, being cast into slow motion. Nothing happens. … you're not achieving anything, you've got to get into a grind, you've got to make yourself travel, because the only way you can get information is to go and see people and pick up crumbs.[413]

The sense that it would not be long before the Coalition would be back in office was also absent in 2007. Instead, most felt that the Coalition was facing the prospect of at least two terms in opposition. For others it was not just the change of pace and loss of meaningful work, but the prospect that it could be the end of their career:

> We could be in the wilderness for up to a decade. And for me that was a daunting prospect because I'd be older then and I felt I may never have the chance to perhaps use the experience that I have acquired over a lifetime of different activities. So I was very disappointed and it took me some time, I think, to regain more usual enthusiasm.[414]

Demoralisation was a major problem across-the-board for Brendan Nelson as Opposition Leader immediately after the election defeat: 'there were many people who were just absent, missing in action, not engaged. There were some who said, "Yeah, Brendan, whatever you want to do, mate, yeah"'.[415] For many within the opposition, particularly those who had served at the higher levels of government, the first year was dominated by a sense of pointlessness, if not grief:

[411] NAA: M1435, 130, contained within an envelope labelled 'to be addressed to the Liberal Party 1983', memo Tony Eggleton to Andrew Peacock, 'Strategy of Opposition (by David Kemp)', July 1983.
[412] Ibid., 3-4.
[413] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on August 16 2012.
[414] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on August 20 2012.
[415] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 11 2013.

> That first twelve months is just hard slog. You're in opposition, the electorate is not listening to you. They don't care. The government's getting a fair go. You tend to do it by rote. You do your media work but it's not really counting. You try and get the structures right but you'll probably change them again. You tend to fall back on your base and just talk about some basic principles that were safe.[416]

Yet opposition can also be an opportunity, particularly for backbenchers and younger MPs. As one senior Liberal noted, for opposition backbenchers there is 'actually going to be more opportunities for a position so [going into opposition] is not necessarily as devastating as if you're a senior minister.'[417] For some MPs it 'wasn't hard at all, so as long as I was moving up the ladders, from [a] personal development point of view.'[418] Indeed, some MPs saw it as an advantage for the trajectory of their career because 'the parliamentary party is smaller so you've got more chance of getting to the frontbench.'[419] Shortly after the 2007 defeat, Peter Dutton wrote enthusiastically of the 'opportunity for policy development'.[420] For those who had long waited for promotion in government, with the departure of a large number of senior figures, opposition was a relished opportunity to move up into senior roles. As Nelson noted 'There were some who worked quite hard, by the way, from very early on … even though we'd come out of government'.[421] For these MPs, a leadership group with scope to think anew was an opportunity to put forward new ideas and take the party in a new direction.

But where some saw career opportunities, others took the opportunity to open debate about the party's direction and future. After defeat in 1983, calls were made for the party to return to its 'philosophy' and the grassroots. The NSW secretary Stephen Litchfeild, argued that the party 'must get away from the negative campaigning of the '60s style', and that the party needed to 'make liberalism a way of life, not just the opposite of socialism.'[422] Without the required discipline of government, the party had an opportunity to consider its philosophical direction and party reforms. Yet, much of it was in vain as the party would struggle with its philosophical direction for the remainder of the decade.

While the party was more successful in discussing party reform in the early 1980s, producing *Facing the Facts,* the Liberals were significantly poorer at implementing its proposed recommendations. Indeed, upon going into opposition in 2007, Nick Minchin referred his colleagues to *Facing the Facts*,

[416] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on March 5 2013.
[417] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on April 10 2013.
[418] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on July 11 2013.
[419] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on September 18 2012.
[420] Peter Dutton, 'Cheer up Liberals, our future is bright', *The Australian*, November 29 2007.
[421] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 11 2013.
[422] 'Cast off pretences: Liberal', *The Canberra Times,* March 30 1983.

noting the relevance of the report's recommendations to the party in the 2000s and lamenting the fact that only a few were ever implemented.[423]

After defeat in 2007, most Liberals argued for the defence of the Howard government legacy and for only modest changes.[424] Yet, a minority of Liberals called for bolder measures, such as Marise Payne, who decried the Howard's government's perceived lack of compassion. Payne also criticised the party's strong discipline, calling for the party to live up to its 'broad church' rhetoric and encourage 'open discussion and robust debate', declaring that she had 'had enough of any suggestion that a political party is the last place to discuss policy.' [425] There were other Liberals also disturbed by the party's conservative turn after 1996. Judith Troeth argued passionately that the party 'sits too closely with the conservative elements which are representative of vested interests, rather than community attitudes.'[426] She diagnosed a 'weak and subservient organisational wing' lacking in courage to 'stand up' to the parliamentary wing as the cause of many of the Liberals' problems. Echoing Payne, Troeth argued that 'too often the mantra has been 'disunity is death', at the expense of 'vigorous debate'. [427]

Finally, in Troeth's own state, she argued that the Victorian machine had become controlled by a 'factional clique' closely associated with Peter Costello and as a the result the Victorian party machine had shifted its focus away from state politics and from the party's long-term interests to the short-term interest of members of the federal parliamentary party.[428] Such statements made while in government would have served as a major distraction and would likely be interpreted through a prism of leadership politics. Yet in opposition, these same debates were safer because less was at stake, though they remained divisive. During both periods, lengthy discussions and debates were a feature of life in opposition.

Alongside broad principles, the party also had to address the more difficult task of specific areas of policy. The decision for the 1983 cohort was more difficult. With Labor moving to the right and as a decade-long debate about new approaches to government and the economy unfolded, the onus on the Liberal party was to not only decide what to keep, but also how it would adapt to these big shifts in the political and ideological landscape.

[423] Nick Minchin, 'Libs must face facts to regain power'*, The Australian*, December 13 2007.
[424] For post-election examples see Kevin Andrews, 'Uphold beliefs and our policies'*, The Australian*, December 17 2007; Tony Abbott, 'Opposition, too, has promises to keep', *The Australian,* December 5 2007.
[425] Marise Payne, '… and Libs need to be more liberal', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 5 2008.
[426] Judith Treoth, 'Libs must heed the grassroots voices', *The Age*, December 1 2007.
[427] Ibid.
[428] Ibid.

As one Liberal from the post-2007 opposition argued, oppositions have to 'recognise that they are in opposition for a reason' and that as the outgoing government they had 'made mistakes, they lost touch with some issues or some elements of the community, and it's your duty, I think, to reassess the basics of what you do in government.'[429] Yet, for most Liberals the changes were based on a

> Prima facie desire to stick with those policies unless it is established that they are in fact really bad policies or they are in fact unsalable. … Given that it's not an easy process, there's very few who argue to throw it all out and start again.[430]

Thus, aside from the ETS, the choice was focused on what can be kept or 'what do we have to abandon,' rather than an existential debate about the future of Australian liberalism.

Despite many of its opportunities, prolonged time in opposition wears away at politicians resolve and sense of greater purpose:

> My own personal decision was, do I want to go through another election loss? No. Do I want to be a backbencher in opposition? No. Do I want to be a frontbencher in opposition? No. Do I want to be Opposition Leader? No. Do I want to be a backbencher in government? No. Here's the final one, do I want to be a government minister? Not anymore.[431]

This was particularly problematic for those serving in the pre-1996 opposition, where repeated electoral losses, and ongoing leadership and factional tensions sapped the party's sense of collective purpose and placed enormous pressures on political actors:

> The really sad thing about that period, I have no bad memories at all about the policy work, I only had bad memories about the leadership tussles and what eventually destroyed my political life. And that was very hard, very tough actually.[432]

Managing power in opposition and its challenges

Leaders and group leadership

The question of leadership and its relationship to ideology has long interested the media and Liberal party scholars. Ideology was an important, if contested, prism for explaining the Peacock-Howard battle during the 1980s. The Costello-Howard battle was often viewed through an ideological lens, although in both cases the policy differences were not as great as they were made out. In the case of the Turnbull-Abbott leadership contest, ideology was once again highlighted as a critical factor: the

[429] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on August 30 2012.
[430] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on April 24 2013.
[431] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on March 14 2014.
[432] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 18 2013.

contest was 'a battle for the soul of the Liberal party'. Paul Kelly noted that the defining difference between Abbott and Turnbull was Abbott's capacity to unite the Liberals.[433] For Kelly, the reason was primarily driven by ideological questions, namely Abbott's firmer grasp of conservative politics.[434] Indeed, Kelly has claimed that the 'core insight' of the Liberal party is that it is more comfortable with a 'leader whose roots lay in the conservative rather than progressive wing of the party.'[435] While there is a seductive simplicity to this argument, it overlooks complex factors that drive the relationship between the leader and the party. To be clear, I am not arguing that ideology is not an important factor, rather that it is often exaggerated, at the expense of more mundane, everyday factors that make up successful party leadership.

The party leader is not just solely responsible for the party's philosophy and values, they are also responsible for ensuring the smooth running of its institutions and the maintenance of discipline and cohesion. The Liberal party has a number of formal and informal governing structures, which are augmented by the dynamics and looser discipline of opposition. The parliamentary party's formal structures include the party room, shadow ministry, and the leadership group. The party's unformalised structures are its factions or 'personality groupings'. It is beyond the scope of this study to examine the role of the party organisation, important as it is.

Although there is broad agreement on the functions and roles of each of these internal party structures, different actors will interpret and understand them differently according to their position and experience within the party. It is the differences in perception at each level of the party's hierarchy that help us to uncover their dynamics in opposition and over time.

First, how do *leaders* understand their role in opposition? This study was able to interview six out of the nine leaders of the Coalition parties between 1983 and 1996 and 2007-2013. The job of opposition leader is often described as 'the worst job in Australia' – a sentiment reflected by several former Liberals interviewed in this study. For John Howard the difficulty was 'the challenge of managing ambitious men and women, when you've got very little to offer them except the hope that one day you might have something real to offer them.'[436]

Part of the challenge is the multi-faceted nature of the job that must be undertaken without the grease of resources and prestige that government provides. As Ian Sinclair put it, the job of leader was a complex set of tasks:

[433] Kelly, *Triumph and Demise*, 22.
[434] Ibid., 24, 28, 246.
[435] Ibid., 28.
[436] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 13 2013.

> as a party leader, you have to try and balance those individual demands with those of all your other members within your party, with the aspirations of the party itself, with any alliance [the Coalition] you might be in, and … try and recognise and speak to each other's desires and aspirations, philosophies, and you also have to accommodate the fundamentals of good government.[437]

Howard emphasised the management of human relationships:

> You have to listen to people ... running a political party is quite different from leading a company or leading a battalion or leading a cricket tournament. It's a mix of personnel management, individual leadership strengths, knowing when to say 'yes' and when to say 'no', knowing always to be a good listener.[438]

Brendan Nelson also emphasised the importance of the 'pastoral' role of leadership alongside its responsibilities, 'as the leader, certainly of the Liberal party, you're there to exercise judgment on behalf of your people, what do you think is the appropriate way to go.'[439] Alexander Downer felt a similar level of responsibility noting 'it's exciting to be elected the Leader of the Opposition … but that's one thing. There's a feeling that runs through you of coldness … the feeling being of cold and alone.'[440] Hewson understood his responsibilities more broadly. His responsibly was to unite the party, rebuild its policy credibility, and ultimately, to 'just win'.[441]

Yet, there are also obligations beyond the party. As Nelson noted, the leader of the opposition exercised a higher degree of responsibility because he not only led the institution 'Her Majesty's loyal opposition', in which you are 'doing the best you can for Australia … to hold the government to account and get good government outcomes', but also

> You are actually part of the government, actually part of the process, and the government making decisions would often speak to me. You'd often be included in their thinking about various issues, certainly in the intelligence and security space.[442]

The challenge for the leader then is to effectively blend the pastoral, strategic and parliamentary aspects. Howard put it best:

> It is in the interest of the Liberal party that its leader be a responsible opposition leader. And an opposition leader who happens to be a Liberal must always remain cognisant of what his party thinks.[443]

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[437] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 4 2013.
[438] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 13 2013.
[439] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 11 2013.
[440] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on May 24 2013.
[441] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 6 2013.
[442] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 11 2013.

The leader is at the apex of the rigid hierarchical power structure, and for those at the bottom of the pile, the overwhelming requirement of the party leader was 'to win' the election:

> You have to be in front, you have to continue in momentum, and so you always have to be looking like you are going forward and you are likely to win. Because the moment the party room doesn't think you can win, you've got a problem.[444]

As the above statement suggests, LPA actors understood that much of the leader's authority was tied to how well the party was performing and its chances of electoral success. This important but minimalist criteria implies that party members are prepared to hand over decision-making capacities and with it, ultimate responsibility for those decisions. LPA actors agreed that the party structure put 'enormous authority' in the hands of leaders, even those in opposition:

> In terms of their right to pick their own shadow cabinet or frontbench and appoint committees and set direction and run the shadow cabinet and all the rest of it. I think we are one of the more … because of the absence of factions, or trade unions or anything else, we are one of the more leader oriented organisations, I think, in politics in the world today.[445]

Further, expectations of leaders and their capacities are high:

> You expect strength, conviction, tolerance, strong work ethic, a respect for diversity of opinion within the party, a performance both in the parliament and in the media and all that. Resoluteness, even tempered, I mean the expectations are always ... the high jump bar is set very high.[446]

Yet, despite this, LPA actors insist that there are important limits on a leader's powers. Indeed, many LPA actors believe that if anything, the backbench and the party room sometimes have 'a greater capacity to push the executive around to an extent,' during opposition.[447] Actors maintained that leaders had an obligation to consult the party and that 'that the bigger the issue, the less prerogative [there] is in some ways.'[448] As one former Senator reflected, 'the party does grant some discretion and leeway to leaders, but leaders have got to be very careful not to abuse that privilege.'[449] Party leaders that are not seen to be performing well will see forces develop that are 'more resistant to the so called leader's prerogative'. Given the party's lack of formal structures to manage internal difficulties, it is ultimately for leaders to judge where the limits lie. For those that miscalculate 'the

[443] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 13 2013.
[444] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on November 28 2012.
[445] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on May 1 2013.
[446] Ibid.
[447] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on October 30 2012.
[448] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on September 10 2012.
[449] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on April 24 2013.

only resort is to change the leader,' a situation which is a major weakness of the party's internal governance.[450]

Although the headline criteria relate to excellence in the tactical and strategic domains of politics, the limitations and expectations of parliamentarians beyond winning indicate the importance of personnel management. The obvious, if understated, importance of these skills becomes self-evident if we look at the reasons why many Liberal leaders failed to hold onto the leadership. Often it was a failure to listen and alienation of their colleagues. [451] Leaders must manage a complex set of tasks and are ultimately responsible for the party's cohesion and victory. As John Howard concluded, it is 'a very hard, much harder job running a political party than anybody ever thinks. I didn't realize how hard it was until I suddenly got it.' [452]

Centralisation and the art of internal party management

Party room

The balance between the leader and the other institutions of the party requires constant management by a successful leader. The party room remains the primary structure through which party-wide debate can occur. Liberals who served during the 1980s highlighted the robust nature of debates in the party room at that time, whereas today, Liberals have mixed feelings. One senior figure emphasised the enduring importance of the party room:

> Every person has a fair belief that the power rests somewhere else. When I was … just a mere backbencher in the joint party room, I always believed that the power was with the senior executive of the party. Now that I'm in the senior executive of the party, people are terrified of the joint party room.[453]

Many Coalition members interviewed highlighted that Abbott's astute and considerate management of the party room built upon his authority and helped maintain discipline within the party. Yet, a minority complained that the party room was not a space for real debate and that all discussions would be leaked to the media — a complaint that continued into government. Indeed, it is common practice for journalists to have a few MPs who will text through details of party room proceedings as they occur.

[450] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on May 1 2013.
[451] Consider the example of John Howard from 1985-89, Dr John Hewson between 1993 and 1994, Malcolm Turnbull in 2009 and finally, the last year of Abbott's prime ministership.
[452] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 13 2013.
[453] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on April 15 2013.

The party room is also an expression of the way discipline functions in the Liberal party. Backbenchers are not subject to the same level of discipline as members of the shadow ministry. The ability to express individual opinions and to exercise a conscience vote against the party line is a key tenant of Liberal party myth-making. It is for this reason that Liberal party actors regularly deny the existence of factions within the party. It is true that power structures within the Liberal party are more fluid and its factions do not operate in the same manner as the ALP. However, the critical distinction is that the LPA's factions are not formalised. Had the LPA and its antecedents not defined itself in contrast to the Labor party, it is likely that more Liberal parliamentarians would be more willing to adopt formalised factions, at least as an organising principle.

Yet, the lack of formal infrastructure does have important implications for the operation of factions and how they translate from state bodies to the federal sphere. Factional groupings that exist at the state level do not readily translate in Canberra, thus Liberal party actors are in a position where they must settle their own allegiances rather than arriving and slotting into ready-made structures. Thus, it is unsurprising that many parliamentarians reported that many of their closest colleagues were from the same state, but that was not always the case. Given the emphasis on personal relationships compared to formalised structures, this also lends weight to the importance of cohort groups and how a critical mass of numbers can significantly influence the party's internal politics, including conflict.

Unlike Labor, whose factions are organised by state and ideological prescription, the 'groupings' that have names in the Liberal party tend to coalesce around ideas and party meeting groups such as the Modest Members or the Lyons Forum. Without the discipline of formalised factions many Liberal party actors argued that their allegiances are overlapping, fluid and are often issue contingent. For example, one parliamentarian might be stridently opposed to government subsidies for the car industry and against gay marriage. This Liberal parliamentarian's position on these two different policy areas would see them share very different bedfellows.

Without formal structures to deal with potential ideological differences, the party room can become an important battleground for policy debates. The 'dry' ginger group used the party room to push its economic reform agenda during the late Fraser government and it was a party room revolt which sparked the resignation of several shadow ministers from the Turnbull frontbench which precipitated his fall from the leadership. The emphasis that Liberal party actors place upon the leader's ability to effectively manage the party's internal politics presents a particular challenge to party leaders because the party lacks effective political infrastructure. It also highlights the importance of inter-personal and intra-party management skills of leaders. These skills are largely

undervalued in assessments of a Liberal leader's capacity, yet they underpin successful tenures. Leaders have a waxing and waning basis of support. A leader who proves adroit will be given more leeway when their electoral fortunes are low.

Ironically, given the reasons for his downfall as Prime Minister, Abbott showed himself to be an able manager of internal party matters as opposition leader. Several unnatural allies of Abbott noted his capacity to listen and to make non-traditional allies feel included and respected. Indeed, Abbott himself identified the importance of internal party management as a key challenge shortly after going into opposition. At that time, he readily understood the problem for the party where former government ministers would be portrayed as a 'has-been or a potential spoiler' and the reality that the easiest way to generate headlines is for the party 'to engage in self-criticism'.[454] Yet, his removal as Prime Minister after less than two years, because of poor governmental management in combination with poor polling, demonstrates the importance of internal party management skills to leaders of the Liberal party.

It also highlights the problem of placing too much emphasis on ideological difficulties to explain leadership success or failure. Kelly has claimed that once Abbott replaced Turnbull, that the party had completed a 'leadership and policy revolution.'[455] In fact, as future events have made clear, the Liberal party had simply put the inevitable policy debate over climate change on ice and delayed the eventual reckoning of the breakdown of the pairing of neo-liberal economics with social conservatism.[456] These debates and their consequences will continue to unfold for some time to come. Anger at Turnbull 'stealing the party' is just one point on a continuum of adjustments of the living arrangements between the uncomfortable bedfellows of liberalism and conservatism that the fusion in 1909 brought about.

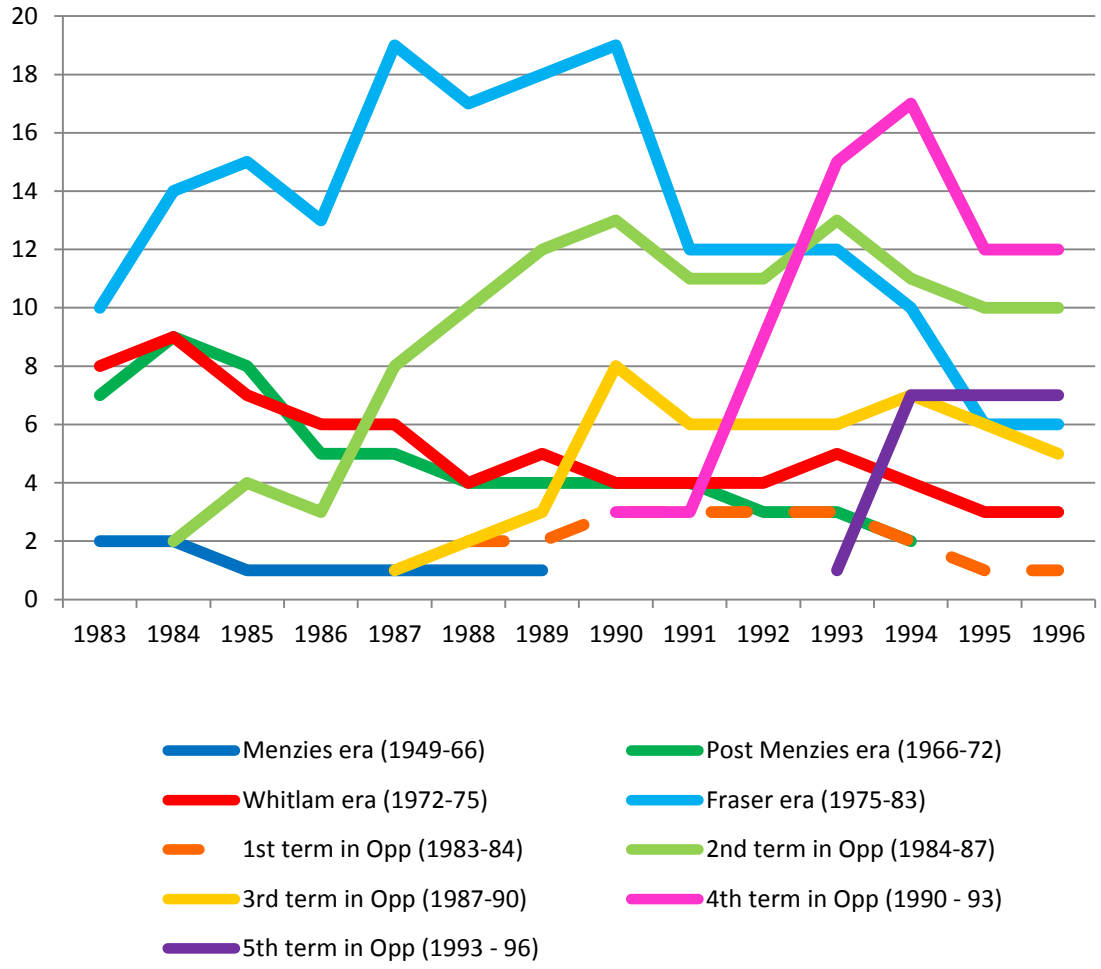
Shadow Cabinet

In the Coalition, the selection of the shadow ministry is a prerogative of leadership, and one of the few gifts of patronage available to an opposition leader. Selection of the shadow cabinet is also one of the ways leaders shape the ideological direction of the party. As Kemp argued, 'the effective leadership of an opposition party requires authority, and leadership in the restatement of the basic guiding principles of policy is potentially an important source of authority.'[457] Yet, as Liberals interviewed were at pains to emphasise, cabinet selection is also a responsibility. Not only are the

[454] Abbott, 'Opposition, too, has promises to keep'.
[455] Kelly, *Triumph and Demise*, 27.
[456] For more on the state of Australian Conservatism see Aly, *What's Right?*; Eric Porter, 'Legitimacy, Democracy and Rights: The Conservatism of Janet Albrechtsen', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 57, no. 2 (June 2011): 245–61.
[457] Kemp, 'A Leader and a Philosophy'.

careers of parliamentarians' dependent on their leader, but leaders must also weigh gender balance, state representation and personal authority and loyalties. Thus, appointments to the shadow ministry are not always merit based. Maintaining the ideological balance within the party was a key lesson that Howard learnt from his first period as leader.[458]

Figure 3.14: Coalition shadow cabinet members by cohort, 1983-1996



Examining the composition of the shadow ministry by year of entry cohort can help us reveal how power is shared within the Coalition and can give some insight into the ideological make-up of the shadow ministry over time, though it cannot give us the whole picture.

Figure 3.14 illustrates the dominance of the Fraser government cohort until the 1990 election. This corresponds with the career lifespan of this group from Figure 3.1, but also reflects the party's decision to draw a line under the Howard-Peacock rivalry, symbolised by John Hewson's election to

[458] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 13 2013.

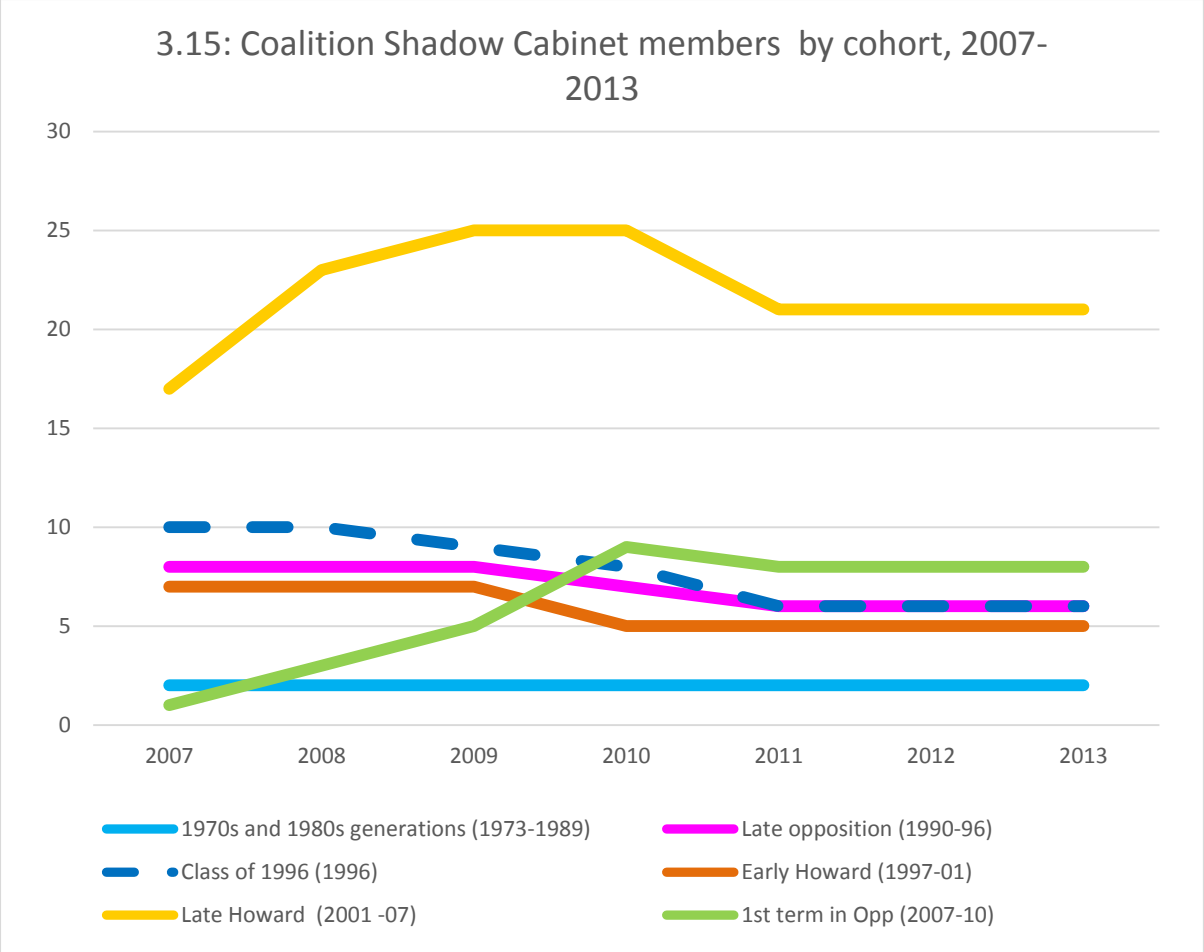
the leadership in 1990. Ongoing leadership turmoil and ill-discipline saw regular changes in the composition of the shadow ministry, particularly under John Howard who was plagued by leaks and instituted the much hated 'rotisserie' system:

> I have a lot of respect for Howard, but one of the most stupid things he developed was a rotisserie, and basically said he'd only keep shadow ministers [for] a certain time and then turn them over. You could never think of anything that would tend to be more destabilising than that. So I got rotisseried in.[459]

For Liberals who had had extensive ministerial experience, the rotisserie was demeaning to their dignity and for those that lost out as a result of the regular changes, it only caused further resentment and motivation to seek change at the top of the party. The reduction of both the Whitlam and Fraser cohorts in 1988 and the rise of the 1984 cohort in the same year was the point where the shadow cabinet was most closely aligned with Howard's ideological preferences. It was at this point that Howard transformed from party leader to a leader of a faction.[460] The sheer length of time in opposition also affected the way power was shared in the 1980s and 1990s. Election defeat discredited the LPA's approach and with the arrival of young and ambitious parliamentarians the pressure for renewal and a different approach grew with each passing year. Some state divisions, such as Victoria prior to the 1990 election, aggressively pursued renewal, seeking new candidates and forcing out sitting members who were perceived to be promoting a form of liberalism uncomfortable with economic neo-liberalism or who had failed to make a significant enough contribution during their career. As noted, it is no accident that the ideological in-fighting that characterised the 1980s within the Liberal party faded after 1990. The majority of leading figures in that contest were from the Whitlam or Fraser cohorts. With their retirement from parliament, particularly those on the losing 'wet' side, to be replaced by MPs with more socially conservative and 'economically rational' views, the Liberal party was free to settle into the post-1996 Howard interpretation of liberalism.

By contrast, the experience in the post-2007 period was different (see figure 3.15). While there were some significant similarities, such as the dominance of the cohort from the immediate past-government, the shadow cabinet of the 2007-2013 period had less experience of opposition and of diverse leadership styles than its 1983-1996 counterpart. There were also fewer MPs seeking to

[459] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 5 2013.
[460] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on May 24 2013.

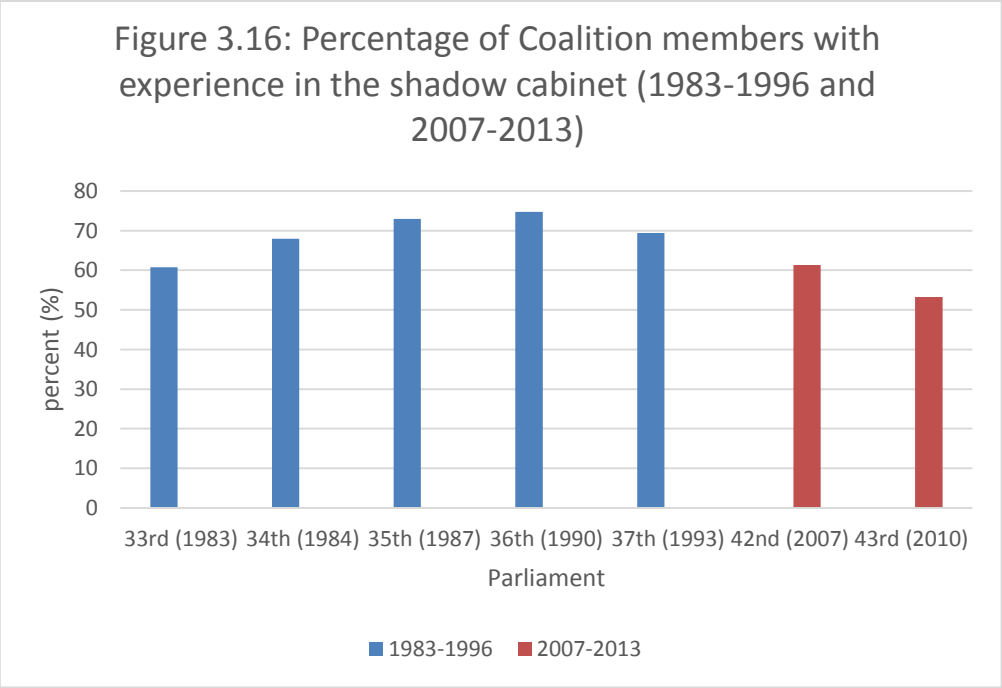


return to office after losing or retiring compared with 1983.[461] Significantly, during the forty-third parliament (2010-2013) the late Howard government cohort (2001-2007) was as significant as the 'class of 96' in the shadow ministry. Both cohorts outnumbered those who entered parliament in the early Howard government years (1997-2001). Last, the cohort entering during the forty-second parliament (2007-2010) has also grown in importance. Many came into opposition with previous experience in government or politics as either political staff or from the party machine. This politically experienced group grew as long-serving members in blue ribbon seats retired and were replaced by former staffers such as Jamie Briggs in Mayo, Paul Fletcher in Bradfield and Kelly O'Dwyer in Higgins.

After the leadership turmoil of the forty-second parliament (2007-2010), Abbott's shadow ministry was notable for its stability with only one minor reshuffle in 2011. Abbott adopted a deliberate strategy to limit the amount of shadow cabinet renewal as a trade-off for more stability.

[461] Tresea Gambaro and Ross Vasta returned to Parliament in 2010 after losing office in 2007. Warren Entsch elected to return after retiring at the 2007 election.

The relative difference in the management of the shadow ministry between the two opposition periods is illustrated in figure 3.16. It illustrates the higher levels of turnover in the pre-1996 period compared with the post-2007 opposition period. The high-water mark in 1990 of 75 per cent of Coalition parliamentarians with some experience in the shadow ministry was not only the product of leadership instability, but also, in the particular case of the 1990 cohort, the leadership style of John Hewson that was unashamedly focused on giving 'everyone a job' in order to keep the backbench too busy to engage in leadership speculation.[462] The relatively low 53 per cent of shadow ministers with experience in the forty-third parliament underscores the lack of turnover in the Abbott opposition frontbench.



Centralisation in the leader's office

It is not just turnover or ideological patterns of the shadow cabinet that is different between the pre-1996 and the post-2007 oppositions. The relative importance of the shadow cabinet has waned as the influence and importance of the leader's office has waxed. Liberal actors from the 1980s interviewed for this study all insisted on the importance of shadow cabinet as a key location for policy debate in addition to its traditional reactive work of responding to the government's agenda. This is in stark contrast to those who served in the shadow cabinet during the Nelson-Turnbull-Abbott years, who instead emphasised the shadow cabinet's reactive role. Given the way policy was managed under Abbott (see chapter six), it appears that only the most controversial items were discussed in depth at the shadow cabinet level, which were often followed up with a party room debate (often within 24 hours). Routinely, electoral policies were kept tightly controlled by individual

[462] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 6 2013.

shadow ministers working in conjunction with the Robb policy review committee. The reason for maintaining this level of control of the policy process was simple — it 'stops leaks'.[463] Maximising confidentiality also allows the leader's office the greatest capacity to release information at tactically opportune times.

Consequently, the diminution of the shadow cabinet has also seen the elevation of the leadership group. Participants in the leadership group during the 1980s described its functions as largely tactical and political. As one former member noted 'it doesn't do the hard policy work, but may have a serious discussion about policy direction.'[464] By contrast, the leadership group under Abbott exercised the final say over policies and determined whether or not policies needed to go back for discussion by the shadow cabinet.[465] The leadership group's role in determining daily political tactics, especially during sitting weeks, also means it acted as an important sounding board for the leader. Alongside its increased significance in the policy processes, it illustrates how power and decision making became increasingly centralised between 1983 and 2013.

The final factor contributing to centralisation was the increased influence of the leader's office. This change coincided with the Hewson leadership as the combined result of Hewson's overwhelming policy vision, new technologies which allowed for the mass distribution of information, and the party's exhaustion after seven years of the Peacock-Howard leadership struggle. Together, these factors granted Hewson a unique opportunity to centralise authority with little complaint from the party room.[466][467] However, it would be wrong to characterise centralisation as the product of one man. Rather, it was part of a concurrent powerful trend towards centralisation of the prime minister's office since 1972, which also influenced the way opposition leaders sought to practice being 'prime minister'.[468]

In opposition, the capacity of the leader to control policy staff allocations and appointments further entrenched the power of the leader to control the party's policy direction. Shadow ministers may have had one or two additional staff, whereas the leader of the opposition during the 1980s had approximately a dozen staff and Abbott had up to thirty. Second, the federal secretariat's capacity to act as counter balance to the leader's office has diminished. While the secretariat has always worked closely with the leader, working to and in support of the leader's office, since 1996 the secretariat

[463] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on August 16 2012.
[464] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 18 2013.
[465] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on August 20 2012.
[466] R. A. W. Rhodes and Anne Tiernan, *Lessons in Governing: A Profile of Prime Ministers' Chiefs of Staff* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2014), 49–50, 65, 88.
[467] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on July 10 2013.
[468] Rhodes and Tiernan, *Lessons in Governing*, 49–50, 65, 88.

has lost the capacity to deliver services it had previously in opposition, such as some policy support and the administration of the shadow ministry.[469] This arrangement was preferred by Liberal party actors in the pre-1996 period, because there existed an 'internal political dynamic where people didn't trust the leader's office and so they preferred the Liberal Secretariat, which was seen as a little bit more neutral.'[470]

By 2007, the secretariat was no long able to provide this type of administrative support and consequently this function was taken up by the leader's office. Furthermore, the marriage between Abbott's Chief of Staff, Peta Credlin, and the Liberal party's federal director, Brian Loughnane, was a cause of internal tensions and strife.[471] The weakness of this model was also evident in recent revelations about the poor management of the leader's office and lack of focus on policy planning in particular.[472]

The consequences of the loss of capacity of the federal secretariat, the control of key resources, the rise of telecommunications that allow for mass distribution of information and a long-term trend towards centralisation in the prime minister's office, have all contributed to the centralisation of power in the leader's office. These changes have also occurred in the context of broader changes observed across the western world towards the personalisation of politics.[473] The leadership of Tony Abbott represented the high watermark of centralised control by the leader's office, which was due to the unusual circumstances of the hung parliament. Many Liberals noted that the hung parliament and the fact that the party was so close to winning power changed the dynamic internally:

> That made us realize, the party realise, that we couldn't continue to change leaders, which we had to stick with one leader. It was perceived that the way Tony had gone about [it], … had been almost successful. And if we were going to do it [win the election] next time, we had to fall in line and this guy was the best option we had.[474]

Since 1990, and the leadership of John Hewson, the relative importance of shadow ministers has diminished. It is telling that the concept of 'Abbott's team' was a deliberate electoral marketing strategy designed to combat concerns about Abbott's leadership capacity. The campaign acknowledged implicitly the great power that Abbott had as leader to shape the direction of any future government he would lead. The purpose of the advertisements was to reassure voters that there were more level-headed Liberals that could help to curtail Abbott's ideological fancies. As

[469] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on September 19 2013.
[470] Ibid.
[471] Errington and Van Onselen, *Battleground*, 65.
[472] Savva, *The Road to Ruin*, 47–48.
[473] For an introduction see Karvonen, *The Personalisation of Politics*.
[474] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on February 25 2013.

previous election campaigns in the last two decades have demonstrated, had the consensus been that Abbott's own views were in line with the community, the need to emphasise the team would have been less important.

In the thirty years between 1983 and 2013, Liberal party leaders in opposition (and government) have become more dominant. Yet, as party leaders have accumulated powers and the ability to control the daily communication strategies which underpin the party's ideological direction (see chapters seven and eight), the leader has also become more vulnerable to replacement. Greater centralisation and control has also seen more responsibility laid on the shoulders of individual leaders. Perhaps this can explain the ruthlessness within the Liberal party, which since 2007 has replaced failing leaders both in opposition and government.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how changes in personnel have influenced broader party-wide phenomena such as leadership conflicts and the party's overall ideological direction. The presence of cohort groups goes some way to explaining why certain conflicts or ideological issues remain important while others diminish, beyond the traditional reliance on conflict between key personalities. However, further research is required to better understand the nature of factionalism within the LPA. The chapter argued that while party members and Coalition parliamentarians may resent the compromises required to maintain the Coalition, party leaders see the relationship as vital. The chapter has also demonstrated how the health of this relationship largely rests on the capacity for parliamentary leaders to work co-operatively and build trust at the inter-personal level. In addition, this chapter explored how opposition places a heavy burden on more senior members of the opposition, while granting opportunities for those on the backbench.

The chapter also argued that party leaders saw interpersonal management as an important aspect of running a party successfully in opposition. The give-and-take implied in this conclusion reflected party actors' understandings of the limits on the prerogative of the leader. Finally, this chapter also explored how the influence of leaders has increased over time while the prominence and importance of shadow minsters has declined. This was due to the leader's ability to control resources, utilise communications technologies and the impact of broader trends in the organisation of governmental power that have favoured centralisation. The next chapter will examine how changes in the media landscape have affected the Liberals in opposition in the pre-1996 and post-2007 periods.

Chapter 4
Opposition and the media landscape: shaping images, getting messages out

Introduction

As noted in chapter one, the role of the media and the opposition's growing emphasis on publicity and media management is seen as more important to oppositions because the political contest has moved beyond parliament and into the media.[475] This is part of a larger trend of the mediatisation of politics more generally. But how do these processes come about and has there been significant change over time?

This chapter examines the evolution of the media landscape in both periods of opposition and identifies the structural constraints on the opposition's capacity to engage with the media. It then explores how the LPA has attempted to engage with the media between 1983 and 1996 and 2007 and 2013 by examining the party's attempts to first produce material suitable for the media and its attempts to manage the media. It examines how leaders attempted to manage their relationship with the press galley, how opposition actors sought to leverage favourable coverage from journalists. Through empirical analysis of the LPA's use of media it discusses how the Coalition's approach to newspapers, television and social media evolved over time, arguing that political actors were given far more latitude to manage their media engagement in the past. Liberal parliamentarians were slow to adapt to the rapid changes in media production underway by the 1980s and by contrast, in the post-2007 period they were given significantly more support by the party but were less free to act as Burkean representatives. Finally, it argues that the media landscape has become far more favourable for oppositions today than was the case in the early 1980s.

A harsh media landscape: structural features that affect oppositions

Three structural features affect the opposition's ability to engage with and use the media. First, Australia's 'winner-takes-all' approach to government limits the opposition's capacity to affect outcomes and in turn limits the opposition's news making opportunities. Without the

[475] Errington, 'Establishing Prime Ministerial Leadership Style in Opposition', 65; Uhr, 'Parliamentary Oppositional Leadership', 67.

advantages of executive government, coupled with typically having less agenda setting capacity, the opposition are not pre-eminent 'news-makers'. Their role as chief government critic can often render their contribution to public debate predictable, repetitious and complaining. Despite the considerable powers of oppositions and minor parties in the Senate, the focus of media attention remains disproportionally focused on key actors in the lower house. The media's gaze only diverts when the Senate challenges the authority and leadership of the House of Representatives. These institutional realities have implications for the opposition's ability to attract and sustain favourable media attention.

Second, in the age of 'hardcopy' media products, where space and time were finite, the government enjoyed a significant advantage over the opposition.[476] Before the rise of the 24-hour news cycle, a major challenge for the opposition was breaking into the finite space of the traditional media. The reality for oppositions until the advent of the internet, digital media and the 24-hour news cycle was that while new policy agendas *could* garner prominent and favourable coverage, more often than not, oppositions found themselves on the front pages for all the wrong reasons — namely when the human drama of their own internal troubles became too difficult to conceal.

Tactically, oppositions have to weigh the risk of engaging with the media with the need to build momentum for a change of government. Does the opposition engage in low risk but relatively easy and predictable strategy of negative carping? Or does it engage in the higher risk strategy of proposing policy, thereby building an alternative vision for the nation, but also exposing the party to criticism, loss of prestige and credibility. For example, Paul Kelly declared Peacock's election bid dead on arrival after the LPA's disastrous health policy announcement in 1990.[477] Moreover, looser party discipline, low morale and attempts at reform and renewal during opposition increase the likelihood of damaging media coverage over the party's internal disputes.

Third, journalists are socialised into the profession by their peers and use news frames and recent Australian political history to interpret current affairs.[478] Thus, after elections, journalists typically reflect on what went wrong for the losing side and frame their analysis of the opposition as a party

[476] Rodney Tiffen, 'Australia: Gladiatorial Parties and a Volatile Media in a Stable Polity', in *The Handbook of Election News Coverage around the World*, ed. Jesper Strömbäck and Lynda Lee Kaid, ICA Handbook Series (New York: Routledge, 2008), 118.
[477] Kelly, *The End of Certainty*, 519–20, 554–56.
[478] Barbara-Ann Butler, 'Information Subsidies, Journalism Routines and the Australian Media: Market Liberalization versus Marketplace of Ideas', *Prometheus* 16, no. 1 (1998): 32; Ward, *Politics of the Media*, 101–8; Margaret Simons, *The Content Makers: Understanding the Media in Australia* (Camberwell, Vic: Penguin Books, 2007), 255–64.

in need of soul searching. Moreover, journalists tend to think about oppositions through the lens of a business-as-usual approach to politics; consider for example the resistance in the media's coverage to the idea of greater power sharing during the hung parliament of 2010-2013. Journalists also use their own past experience to interpret current political events, effectively type-casting oppositions into opposition specific news narratives — few of which appear favourable to oppositions. Although news coverage has increasingly become opinion driven, the opposition benefits from its own 'cheer squad' journalists.[479]

Managing party-wide political communication

When approaching the media, the interests of political parties and individual MPs are not the same. Geography, electorate size and mass media technologies have all necessitated and facilitated the use of mass media to communicate with voters. Moreover, before emails and text messaging, the media was used not only as medium in which to communicate with voters, but also with party members and parliamentary colleagues. In this context, the needs of individual MPs and those of parties can come into conflict. Media skills are highly visible and easy to assess and are increasingly becoming an important demonstration of broader political competence. For opposition parliamentarians who are not responsible for implementing (and often developing) policy, effective media skills are erroneously correlated with ministerial competence. Thus, ambitious MPs seek to build their media profile while parties require team members to sing from the same song sheet. Howard's dominance of the Coalition's economic agenda in the mid-1980s regularly brought him into conflict with his leader Andrew Peacock. Howard was 'always willing to do media' and as the former Treasurer, he became the 'automatic gatekeeper' over the Coalition's economic policy and this, along with Peacock's lack of interest in economic policy, hampered Peacock's capacity to carve out his own credentials as an economic manager.[480]

Additionally, shadow ministerial rank comes with obligations and responsibilities to one's own party when communicating in the media. For example, an ambitious backbencher may court the national media, in the hopes of gaining the attention of both the press and leading members of their party. John Carrick had advised a young John Howard to pick a policy area and make it his own as a way to improve his recognition within the party. Howard later passed this advice on to

[479] For studies on media bias see Marian Simms and Daniel Bolger, 'The Australian Print Media and Partisan Bias in the Campaign', in *Howard's Agenda: The 1998 Australian Election*, ed. John Warhurst and Marian Simms (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 2000); Marian Simms, 'The Print Media: Lap Dog or Watch Dog?', in *Mortgage Nation: The 2004 Australian Election*, ed. Marian Simms and John Warhurst (Perth, W.A: Australia Research Institute, Curtin University of Technology, 2005); Rodney Tiffen, 'Australia: Gladiatorial Parties and Volatile Media in a Stable Polity', in *The Handbook of Election News Coverage around the World*, ed. Jesper Strömbäck and Lynda Lee Kaid (New York: Routledge, 2008), 117.

[480] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 13 2013.

a young Joe Hockey.[481] While backbenchers have the luxury of expressing their personal opinions, shadow ministers and shadow parliamentary secretaries — bound by shadow cabinet solitary — do not. As officers of the party, they must reflect shadow cabinet's position whether or not they personally agree.

The party leader speaks with what Tony Abbott described as the 'corporate voice' of the Liberal party.[482] Yet, the LPA leader also enjoys the privilege of asserting his policy and ideological preferences, though as demonstrated in chapter three, this privilege must be weighed carefully. Balancing the need to construct a favourable image and define oneself as a person the public can get to know, while also being the titular voice of a political institution is a major challenge for party leaders that constantly requires calibration. Leaders are by their very nature 'attention-seeking', but for the party more broadly, resisting collapsing the leader's voice into the party's voice is a constant point of tension.

Finally, there is the additional voice of the organisational wing of the party which is occasionally heard. Given the political culture of the LPA and the relationship between the organisational and party wings of the party, public criticism from this corner is often destabilising and discouraged.[483] However, the LPA's opposition years have witnessed outbreaks of internal criticism and dissent. John Valder, party President from 1985-87, publicly supported Howard's careful formulation of a statement of loyalty to then Leader Andrew Peacock that rattled Peacock and his office.[484] Further criticism by John Elliott in 1988, which was linked to speculation that he would challenge Howard for the leadership, is another example of unhelpful forays by the party organisation into the public political fray.[485] In 2011, Abbott's duplicity in his support of Alan Stockdale over Peter Reith for party president provoked the latter into a more forceful and public critique of the federal party.[486] Indeed, given the organisational wing's relative silence, outbreaks from that quarter are interpreted by the press as signs of division or of a lack of order in the party.

Thus, in this way we can see that political communication by political parties is the orchestrated and layered effort of multiple actors with differing levels of responsibility. This is not simply a matter of 'staying on message', but also nudging some issues onto the agenda, opening up

[481] King, *Hockey*, 94.
[482] Tony Abbott, *Kitchen Cabinet*, Australian Broad Casting Corporation, September 4 2013.
[483] Liberal Party of Australia. Committee of Review and Valder, *Facing the Facts*, 69, 101.
[484] Errington and Van Onselen, *John Winston Howard*, 119.
[485] Kelly, *The End of Certainty*, Chapter 21.
[486] Peter Reith, 'Peter Reith Calls on Abbott to Tackle Workplace Reform', *Radio National* (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 28 June 2011), http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/breakfast/peter-reith-calls-on-abbott-to-tackle-workplace/2919828.

dialogues, and supressing politically dangerous topics. The overall success of the party's media strategy is dependent on the each individual party member deploying the message carefully and in unison. Changes in technology have tightened the centralisation and control of political messaging.[487] Yet, this trend, initially facilitated and accelerated by the rise of the fax machine, email and sophisticated computing systems, is now under challenge by social media and permanent connectivity which characterises our world today. Given these constraints, how did the Coalition navigate the media landscape between 1983 and 1996?

A challenging media landscape 1983-1996

The media landscape in the 1980s was different from the one we recognise today. Some features remain similar: television is still a dominant news medium, though less important than in 1983.[488] Tabloid and broadsheet newspapers remain the leading agenda setters from which other media sources take their cue.[489] By the late 1980s, there was a recognition of the importance of media performance skills and management techniques.[490] Yet, in 1983, Australia had more newspapers, including afternoon newspapers, ownership was less concentrated than today and news production in the major media companies was less centralised and syndicated.[491] The Canberra press gallery enjoyed a higher status in the 1980s, as the interlocutors or conduits between politicians and the public.

Since the 1975 dismissal the LPA's relationship with the media has been strained. By the 1980s, a generation of younger gallery journalists had been 'infatuated' with Gough Whitlam and their relationship with the Fraser government was never 'cosy'.[492] Complaints about left-wing media bias have become a totemic feature of Liberal party and their supporter's rhetoric.[493] Even before losing office in 1983, communication was a major concern for the party. Communication, or rather its poor prosecution during the Fraser years, was highlighted as a major flaw in the

[487] Onselen and Onselen, 'On Message or out of Touch?', 56.
[488] Ian McAllister and Sarah Cameron, 'Trends in Australian Political Opinion: Results from the Australian Election Study, 1987-2013' (Canberra: School of Politics and International Relations ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences, 2014), 7, http://politicsir.cass.anu.edu.au/research/projects/electoral-surveys/australian-election-study/publications/aes-trends.
[489] David Denemark, Ian Ward, and Clive Bean, 'Election Campaigns and Television News Coverage: The Case of the 2001 Australian Election', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 1 (2007): 90.
[490] Tiffen, *News and Power*, 80–85; Windschuttle, *The Media*, 312, 325–26.
[491] Rodney Tiffen and Ross Gittins, *How Australia Compares* (Port Melbourne, Vic: Cambridge University Press, 2009), Chapter 13.
[492] Fraser and Simons, *Malcolm Fraser*, 266; Rob Chalmers, *Inside the Canberra Press Gallery : Life in the Wedding Cake of Old Parliament House*, ed. Sam Vincent and John Wanna (Acton, ACT: ANU E Press, 2011), 199.
[493] See Derek Parker, *The Courtesans : The Press Gallery in the Hawke Era / Derek Parker* (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991); Henderson, *A Howard Government?*, Chapter 7; Keith Windschuttle, 'The Poverty of Media Theory', *Quadrant*, March 1998; David Flint, 'The Bias of Australian Journalists.', *Quadrant*, September 2001.

1983 Report, *Facing the Facts,* and the party organisation called for improvement.[494] Fraser's media strategy was a now-familiar formula: leader-centric in focus (known in the literature as personalised) but with the gruff patrician style of the man himself.[495] The strategy presented the prime minister as an outdoor type, an 'everyman' and a sports fan.[496]

Fraser's press office also innovated. It developed the 'doorstop' interview: a brief and succinct message on the steps of parliament, from which a transcript was produced and circulated to the press gallery.[497] Fraser's press team, under David Barnett, developed a strategy of limiting Fraser's exposure to a critical press gallery. Instead, Fraser focused on (live) radio and television interviews, where the interviewers were often deferential, the questions were often provided beforehand and transcripts would be provided to newspaper journalists to ensure the message was distributed as widely as possible.[498] Moreover, live television and radio was broadcast immediately, without editing.

Losing government in 1983 added additional burdens. The first was the much-hated creation of the National Media Liaison Service (NMLS) by the Hawke government, nicknamed 'aNiMaLS' by the press gallery. Employing 21 staff the NMLS allowed the Hawke government to monitor media nationally, including the statements of the opposition, at public expense.[499] Inconsistencies, disagreements and gaffes on the part of the opposition were damaging enough. For example, Peter Baume recorded in his diary how a particular gaffe by Michael Baume, where he contradicted the party leader's timetable for tax cuts during the 1987 election campaign, had caused 'a tremendous furore' and confirmed the 'inevitability of defeat on Saturday — the final nail.'[500] The resources of NMLS would ensure that an interview in Hobart, by a mid-ranking shadow minister would be alerted to the national media and gave the government a significant advantage compared with the modest resources of the federal secretariat at Menzies House.

Second, the party's use of media was dissipated and not effectively co-ordinated for much of the 1980s. Former shadow ministers were largely left to their own devices in relation to the media appearances they chose to make. The party still emphasised the importance of promoting the shadow cabinet but within that objective, it relied on having the more successful performers

[494] Liberal Party of Australia. Committee of Review and Valder, *Facing the Facts*, 108, 113–14.
[495] For the personalisation of politics see Karvonen, *The Personalisation of Politics*; Webb and Poguntke, *The Presidentialization of Politics*.
[496] Julian Fitzgerald, *On Message: Political Communications of Australian Prime Ministers 1901 - 2014* (Mawson ACT: Clareville Press, 2014), 337.
[497] Ibid., 339.
[498] Ibid., 341–42.
[499] Ibid., 353.
[500] Diaries of Peter Baume, July 7 1987. In possession of the author.

make themselves available and to do media that played to their strengths.[501] However, a lack of co-ordination increased the risk of messages going awry or members simply freelancing. Before the NMLS this was less of an issue, as candidates who spoke locally rarely had their words transmitted beyond their electorates. As Baume reflected in his diary, the lack of co-ordination in the party's messaging was 'one more example of the incompetence and accident-proneness of the frontbench.'[502] It is for these reasons that leaders embraced technologies in the late 1980-90s such as the fax machine, and later email and secure online websites, which allowed the party to increasingly centralise its message.

Leader approaches to the media

Liberal leaders are the principal mouth-piece of the party. Their style, preferences and availability all serve to condition the relationship between the party and the media — a trend that has only increased as the party's political communication was centralised in the leader's office. Throughout the Fraser government's tenure and over the next thirteen years in opposition the LPA's relationship with the media remained uneasy, largely because many in the LPA nursed grievances that the gallery was hostile. This presented a dilemma about whether to court or avoid the gallery. The LPA did not trust the press gallery to interpret their words generously or perhaps even fairly. However, they could not escape the fact that they still needed to court the gallery's key thinkers and agenda setters.

Andrew Peacock's great asset was his moderate and charismatic image, which he was careful to protect. Peacock's approach to the media was cautious and he was often selective about exposing himself to criticism from journalists. Internal correspondence between Peacock and his advisors' reveals that the office was conscious of Peacock's difficulty in building an image as a man of policy substance. Dubbed the 'show pony' within months of becoming opposition leader by John Hewson, the contrast was particularly damaging in comparison to John Howard, then deputy leader.[503] Howard made himself available to the media constantly, particularly after the 1984 election in an effort to promote his leadership credentials after Peacock's surprise success in the election.[504] Yet, Peacock's office was aware of both his strengths and weaknesses. His office and the secretariat argued that his very moderation was an asset compared to Howard. As one staff member outlined, 'it will be necessary for your office to develop a 'harder-edge' and tightly controlled personal program that dovetails precisely with our key policy and political thrust. Your personal program is

[501] Errington and Van Onselen, *John Winston Howard*, 120–21.
[502] Diaries of Peter Baume, July 7 1987. In possession of the author.
[503] John Hewson, 'Howard's Tortoise May Beat Peacock's Show Pony', *Business Review Weekly,* December 26 1983, 34.
[504] Errington and Van Onselen, *John Winston Howard*, 120.

central to every objective in opposition.'[505]As with many of his colleagues, Peacock struggled to convince the gallery that he had the economic policy-credentials during a decade of major reform.

As opposition leader from 1985-89, Howard sought to contrast himself with Peacock in both style and media strategy. Howard was hardworking and made a virtue of his ordinariness, and was tireless in his media work. Howard presented himself for a weekly media briefing, which given the troubled internal situation of the Liberal party, exposed Howard to a constant leadership questions that fed the perception of internal strife.[506]

Compounding Howard's woes were a constant stream of internal leaks and constant coverage of internal ideological disputes between the 'wet' and 'dry' factions. Government ministers had been able to acquire a number of policy documents and internal memos in the first half of 1986.[507] By late May, the government leaked the Coalition's aviation and primary industries policies in quick succession and claimed it had an additional five policy documents. The Coalition responded by releasing all five at once and forfeited their capacity to release the policies at a politically opportune time.[508] The government compounded the opposition's embarrassment by later claiming it never acquired any more policy documents apart from those already leaked.[509]

Howard reflected that the leaks 'affected us quite badly' because it meant that he had 'spent a disproportionate and unwelcome amount of time dealing with leadership' rather than talking about the Coalition's alternative platform.[510] This sentiment was echoed by Peter Baume in his diary when he reported Peacock's infamous telephone conversation with Jeff Kennett which was recorded and leaked to the media. As Baume notes, 'the Liberal Party found itself on the defensive as the more lurid details of the conversation were discussed by the media. By the time I came to Parliament House on 23rd March for Shadow Cabinet there was no other topic of conversation.'[511]

Moreover, given the increasing factionalisation of the party under Howard's leadership, Liberal 'wets' became more vocal in their opposition. Ian Macphee eventually provoked Howard into

[505] NAA: M1601/4, 20, 'Planning 85-86', 1.
[506] Errington and Van Onselen, *John Winston Howard*, 133.
[507] Paul Malone, 'Liberals' list add to their troubles', *The Canberra* Times, March 21 1986; Rob Frail, 'Opposition releases leaked airline policy', *The Sydney Morning Herald,* May 21 1986; Anna Grutzner, 'Coalition leak one of expected series', *The Canberra Times,* May 22 1986; Milton Cockburn, 'The Shadow Minister for Leaks strikes again', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 22 1986; Peter Hartcher, 'Farm policy leak came 'from Shadow Cabinet',' *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 22 1986; Anna Grutzner, 'Minister tables 'leaked' Schools policy', *The Canberra Times*, May 28 1986.
[508] Milton Cockburn, 'Opposition probably conned in leak war', *The Sydney Morning Herald,* May 23 1986.
[509] Mike Taylor, 'Libs release seven policies to head off further leaks,' May 23 1986.
[510] Personal communication June 13 2013; Personal communication June 18 2013.
[511] Diaries of Peter Baume, March 1987: My resignation from Shadow Cabinet, in possession of the author.

sacking him over differences in communications policy and Peter Baume would be forced into a position where he resigned over sex-discrimination legislation. Both events cemented the narrative of Howard as a 'factional' rather than party leader and that the party was in increasing disarray. After his resignation, Peter Baume describes backgrounding journalists where he wafs able to 'set out my views of the hybrid nature of the Party, and my belief that the Party had been hi-jacked in a policy sense.'[512] Backgrounding is an unremarkable aspect of the politician-media relationship, but the factionally charged nature of the above example, coupled with the leaks and public criticisms, demonstrate how the media can amplify a sense of crisis and disorder within a party.

Howard worked the media assiduously, yet his relationship with it remained tumultuous during the 1980s. Before his first leadership tenure, Howard was the Coalition's policy guru. But as leader, his good relationships within the parliamentary press gallery eroded and Howard was often seen as a strident ideologue, sometimes an old 'fogie' espousing a vision of the Australian family more reminiscent of the 1950s or pilloried for his comments on Asian immigration in 1988.[513] During his second stint as opposition leader in 1995, Howard adopted many of the strategies pioneered by Fraser, namely to by-pass the press gallery through unfiltered mediums complementing Howard's formidable talent for live talk-back radio.

As leader, John Hewson's attempted to recast his engagement with the media. As shadow treasurer, Hewson had made familiar arguments that the media was overly enamoured with Keating and overlooked the Coalition's economic policies.[514] Hewson's style was feisty and argumentative and as party leader, he instituted a regular and informal briefing session with the press in the hope that this would give him the opportunity to explain his economic framework to the media.[515] Hewson saw the media as an intellectual challenge and was motivated to present a positive image as opposition leader.[516] His aggressive, as opposed to defensive, media style initially proved successful, largely out of novelty. But, the aggressive and assertive style soon proved burdensome because of the opposition's limited agenda setting capacity, and he quickly joined the ranks of past complaining opposition leaders.[517]

Moreover, Hewson was not willing to meet the media's needs. He refused to allow television

[512] Diaries of Peter Baume, July 7 1987. In possession of the author.
[513] Bongiorno, *The Eighties*, 254–56.
[514] Norman Abjorensen, *John Hewson: A Biography* (Port Melbourne, Vic.: Lothian Books, 1993), 119.
[515] Ibid., 152.
[516] Ibid.
[517] Ibid., 153.

cameras at his weekly briefings, which provoked a boycott by several gallery journalists.[518] Moreover, in the early phase of his leadership, when *Fightback!* was in development, the party struggled to provide newsworthy content for the media. Like Howard, the weekly briefings exposed Hewson to unwanted questioning about internal matters. In response, Hewson was often defensive and adopted a complaining tone and as some gallery journalist became increasingly derisive and openly contemptuous, one briefing broke-down into a 'slanging match'.[519] Like leaders before him, Hewson returned to the strategy of by-passing the gallery and going straight to the people.[520]

Managing the media in the 1990s

The above section recounted how leaders attempted to manage relationships with the media. However, what about those parliamentarians who were less well resourced? The relationship between then shadow treasurer Alexander Downer and his press secretary Cheryl Cartwright is one of the few detailed accounts that demonstrates the opportunities and challenges facing opposition MPs in the early 1990s as they attempted to leverage the media to promote both the party and themselves.[521]

As a former press gallery journalist and Fraser government staffer, Cartwright was relatively unusual as an LPA-aligned press officer in the early 1990s. Cartwright encouraged Downer to reject Howard and Hewson's media strategy of circumnavigating the press gallery. She argued that journalists outside the gallery take their 'cue' from press gallery journalists and that their aim should be to secure positive press coverage from the gallery's 'opinion leaders'.[522]

Cartwright leveraged both her personal contacts and her knowledge of the culture and rhythms of the press gallery to build Downer's media profile and support his leadership ambitions. As Downer already possessed strong media skills — he excelled at 'the grab' and 'you just had to hone his phrases' — Downer and Cartwright instead focused on media management and developing his own personal image.[523] They developed a long-term media strategy designed to help overcome a perception within the press gallery that he was 'an idiot' and convince his party that he had the judgement and gravitas to lead the LPA.[524] Thus, the emphasis was on Downer's credibility and statesmanlike qualities and Cartwright's function was to help develop, or reverse

[518] Ibid., 152.
[519] Ibid.
[520] Ibid.
[521] Cheryl Cartwright, Cheryl Cartwright, interview by Barry York, September 2 2009, http://oralhistories.moadoph.gov.au/cheryl-cartwright.
[522] Ibid., Part 6.
[523] Ibid.
[524] Ibid.

engineer from Downer's preferences, rather than formulate his media strategy.[525] This meant foregoing media opportunities, which might have generated coverage in the immediate term, but undermined his long-term goal.[526]

A major challenge for any opposition shadow is generating news worthy content or 'annouceables'. As shadow treasurer, Downer enjoyed the advantage of the salience and regularity of economic data announcements and could regularly attempt to insert himself into reporting.[527] Downer's biggest challenge was to avoid appearing too critical when the economic figures were illustrating the beginning of Australia's post-recession recovery. In this situation, Downer's media strategy focused on identifying the economic downside or forewarning future problems.[528] This had the effect of boosting Downer's leadership credentials both internally and externally.[529]

Cartwright invested heavily in building a personal rapport in the gallery as a management tool and as a means of leveraging greater and more sympathetic coverage for Downer. Her regular visits to the gallery meant she was often told if a journalist was doing a 'tough story' and that 'they'll also soften it a little bit, they don't realise they are, but they are softening it if they know you'.[530] Cartwright also organised opportunities for Downer to court the media with her former colleagues in order to demonstrate that he was 'a fun guy' with 'good brains'.[531] The intimacy of Cartwright's personal relationships with the gallery led to the revelation that many of her former colleagues had difficulty obtaining opposition comment for the midday news on such important topics as the release of Australian Bureau of Statistics figures that would come out at 11.30am. Cartwright negotiated a deal with a number of radio journalists where Downer would make himself available for 'a fairly bland grab', but that they would not ask any difficult questions because he would not have had 'time to absorb all the detail'.[532] By agreement, Downer would sneak into the gallery for the radio only to give 'a fairly bland grab' thereby increasing the news value of reporters' stories and in exchange he would be 'running on radio all afternoon' without the risk of courting negative media coverage.[533]

Cartwright also used her knowledge of gallery journalist practices and needs to secure prominent news coverage for Downer on the Sunday evening news and in the Monday papers. Exploiting the

[525] Ibid.
[526] Ibid.
[527] Ibid.
[528] Ibid.
[529] Howard, *Lazarus Rising*, 197.
[530] Cartwright, Cheryl Cartwright, Part 6.
[531] Ibid.
[532] Ibid.
[533] Ibid.

half hour difference between Adelaide and Canberra, they would generate 'reaction' comment about the Sunday political television programs. Every week, Cartwright would watch *Business Sunday* in Canberra and then brief Downer in Adelaide. Downer 'would come up with the line, then we'd polish it'.[534] A doorstop would be organised and 'one of his kids would go down with a tape recorder, and tape it, and we'd talk all the way there [on the telephone], so he'd have the lines right.' On the way back in the car, Downer would play back the tape over the phone and Cartwright would make a transcript, leaving out a 'couple of phrases I didn't like' and then take it around the gallery to journalists struggling to find copy to fill the Sunday news bulletin and the Monday papers.[535]

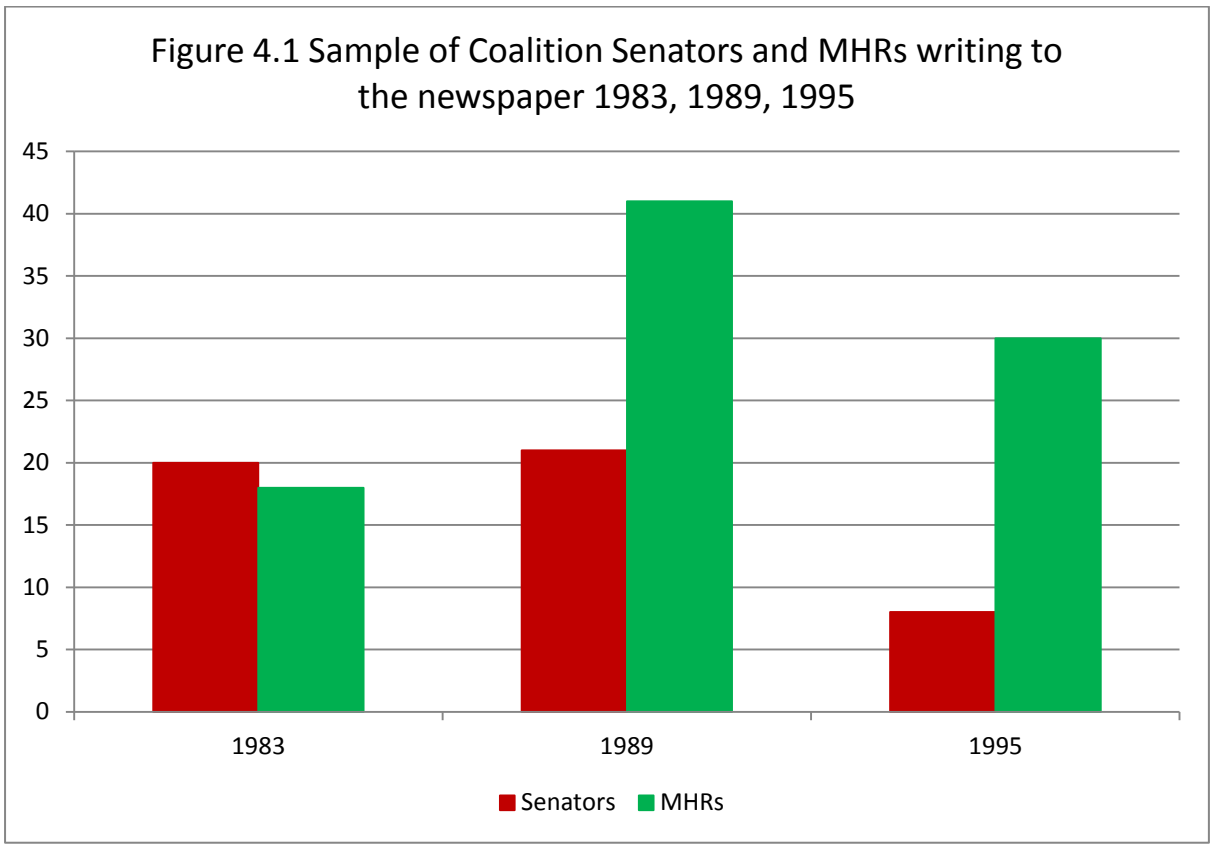
Downer's standing among journalists and colleagues improved greatly as a result of his media strategy, and he was elected party leader in 1994. Downer and Cartwright's strategies demonstrate why the Liberal party's political communication became increasingly mediatised. Investing in media relationships and producing material that media producers find valuable rewarded Downer with favourable coverage and elevated his career. The Downer-Cartwright relationship also demonstrated the limits of centralised media messaging in the mid-1990s. Downer was still largely left to his own devices in much of his media work and was able to organise special arrangements with the press that might have not been possible had all media messages been centralised in the leader's office. In effect, Downer and Cartwright worked as a team of lone operators, but their spoonfeeding efforts also highlighted that among the Coalition actors, their strategy and tactics were still relatively novel.

Newspaper opinion pieces 1983-1996

Writing opinion pieces offers politicians an opportunity to engage in sustained argument, advocacy and self-definition. Opinion piece writing is also a useful tool of opposition. It is another way to act as government scrutineer and public educator. It is also an opportunity to demonstrate the opposition's alternative policies and showcase a politician's potential competence as a minister. Given the looser discipline of opposition, discussing ideas can also prove dangerous for political parties. Opinion piece writing can be a demonstration of ideological allegiance, and political actors arguing against the position of their party court retaliation from their colleagues and publically call attention to internal differences. Indeed, opinion piece writing can be an act of sabotage. By publically declaring a position, a parliamentarian can force a public response from their party. Rarely is vigorous internal debate interpreted as other than division and turmoil.

[534] Ibid.
[535] Ibid.

Between 1983 and 1996 the Liberal opposition's use of newspapers as a tool to communicate with voters changed markedly. Data collected from *The Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* in the years 1983,[536] 1989 and 1995 is used here as an indicative measure of media engagement — some of which would have been picked up in other Australian states.[537] The data reveals that Coalition parliamentarians were avid letter writers (see figure 4.1), particularly when compared to post-2007 data (see figure 4.5) where the number of newspapers sampled is far greater. In the 1980s, shadow ministry members were far more likely to write to the newspaper



than their backbench counterparts (see figure 4.2). Yet the situation had changed by 1995. In 1995, it was backbenchers who were far more likely to contribute, foreshadowing similar trends observable in the post-2007 period (see figure 4.6). The behaviour of party leaders was also different in the 1980s. No letters or opinion pieces by the Liberal leader were found in either the

[536] Data was collected from March 1983 as the party was in government previous to this time. As a result, the figures for 1983 are likely supressed somewhat.

[537] Data was collected for the years 1983, 1989 and 1995 as a way of collecting an indicative sample from the Coalition's early, middle and late opposition years. *The Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* were selected as an example of a national and a local paper, but which are both based in Sydney. As the pre-1996 sample and the post-2007 samples are not the same (the pre-1996 data is sourced from two newspapers and samples only three years. The post-2007 sample includes all newspapers except *The West Australian* and has attempted to capture every opinion piece or letter written) data has been presented separately. The reason for the difference is a question of resources. The post-2007 data is all available digitally, while an overwhelmingly majority of the pre-1996 data had to be collected manually.

1983 or 1989 sample. Howard's major contributions to the opinion pages of *The Australian* only occurred after he lost the leadership in 1989, when he was given a weekly column. But, by 1995, Howard as leader wrote four opinion pieces, two in each paper.

Figure 4.2 Proporiton of Coalition shadow ministry members and backbenchers writing to the newspaper 1983, 1989, 1995

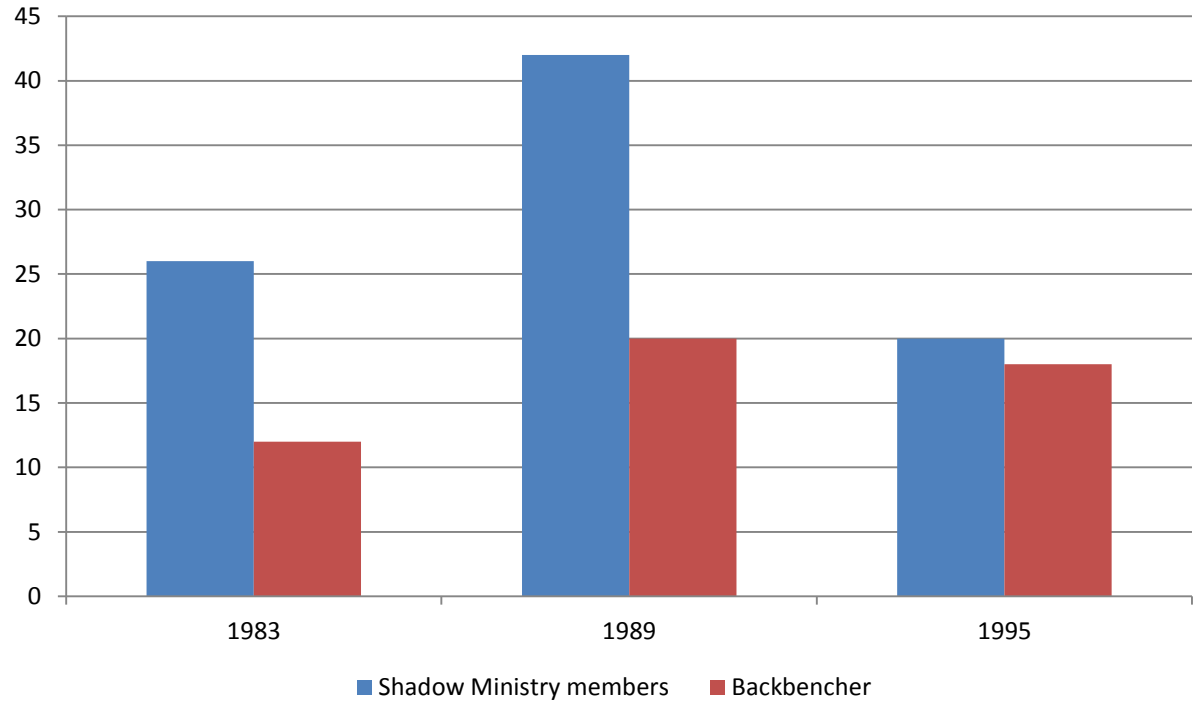
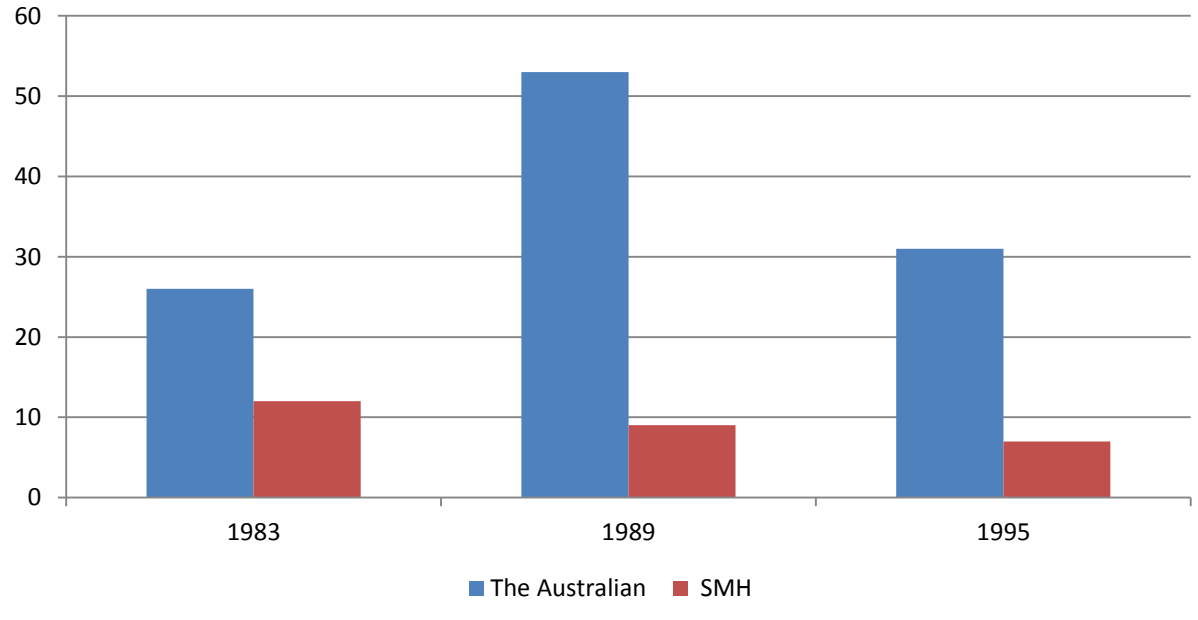
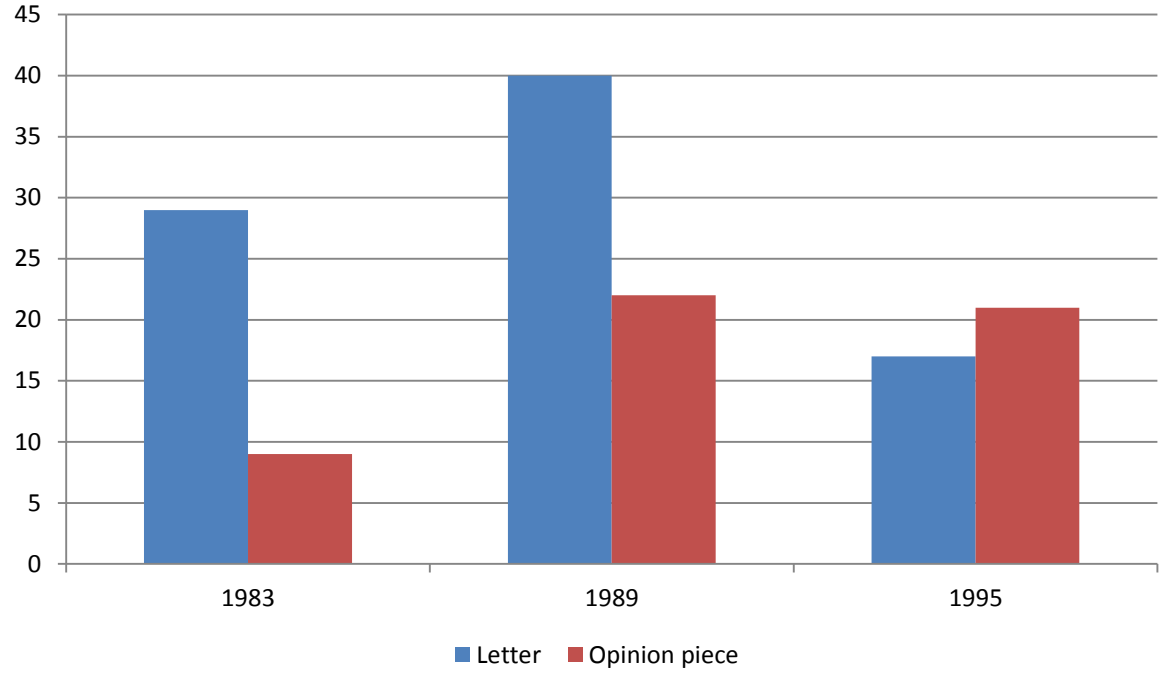


Figure 4.3 Coalition parliamentarians writing to the newspaper by newspaper publication 1983, 1989, 1995



As figure 4.3 illustrates, even in the early 1980s, *The Australian* was the paper of choice for the Coalition parliamentarians seeking to influence public opinion (for the comparison see figure 4.8 and figure 4.9). Until the late 1990s, the majority of these contributions to the paper were in the form of letters to the editor (see figure 4.4) signalling the beginnings of a change in behaviour by both media and political actors. Indeed, by the post-2007 years the overwhelmingly majority of contributions were in the form of opinion pieces. Moreover, Coalition parliamentarians appeared to have a different relationship with the two papers. Coalition parliamentarians were far more likely to write into *The Australian* to criticise government policy rather than rebut claims of inaccurate reporting. In 1989 in particular, with the exception of only one opinion piece for *The Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH), all letters written by Coalition MPs were objecting to the paper's reporting. Opinion piece writing was very rare prior to the mid-1990s. The exceptions were a special series on the future of the Liberal party run by *The Australian* in 1983, and Howard's personal column in 1989. During the 1980s, apart from Howard, only Fred Chaney was invited to contribute semi-regular long-form contributions to the newspaper.

Figure 4.4 Coalition parliamentarians writing to the newspapers by type 1983, 1989, 1995



Indeed, in the late 1980s, it was rare for politicians from either side of the political aisle to be given the opportunity to write an opinion piece in either paper. At the time, both papers maintained firm journalistic control over the opinion pages. However, by the mid-1990s, the situation had altered significantly in *The Australian*, where the vast majority of opinion pieces appear (only six appear in

the SMH, two from Howard and four from new MHR and backbencher, Tony Abbott). Both papers, and particularly *The Australian*, were becoming far more likely to prosecute a particular case or policy issue and therefore call on partisan advocates, signifying the early stages of the 'campaigning newspaper'. A likely reason for the rise of the opinion piece by political actors is the demise of parliament as an important forum of policy debate, a factor often attributed to its televisation.[538] Moreover, the divisive nature of Paul Keating's cultural agenda was a constant source of debate within both papers during 1995. This is an environment that lends itself to growing amounts of partisan comment based on first-principle concepts of debating.

The LPA's engagement with the media at the interpersonal level and its interaction with newspapers demonstrates a major change in behaviour between 1983 and 1996. In the early 1980s, the media was an institution that the LPA largely sought to exert influence over rather than actively participate in. In 1983, politicians and the substance of parliamentary debate were treated with far more deference and were diligently reported. For a party long accustomed to government and much of the near-automatic news coverage that holding government power entails, adapting to a resource poor environment, where only the most senior figures would have media staff, was difficult. Moreover, the nature of political communication was changing, with the capacity to monitor comments across Australia through the NMLS, discipline was becoming more important as differences of opinion which would have been overlooked were increasingly coming to national prominence. Over the course of the 1980s as party membership declined and the media itself was increasingly becoming the primary way that people found out about politics. This increased the need for the party to actively manage its political communication with the public. Yet, at the same time, savvy individual actors could still utilise the lack of central co-ordination to actively manage their own media image with a high degree of independence.

Using the media: 2007-2013

Since 1996, the media landscape underwent major change and the pace only increased between 2007 and 2013. The rise of the '24-hour' news cycle was already emerging by 2007 and social media would only accelerate the pace of change.[539] Patterns of news consumption changed. Elite audiences increasingly obtained news from the ABC (with its increased online presence) and the broadsheets, while popular news audiences obtain their news from tabloid papers, commercial

[538] Taflaga, 'A More Aggressive Parliament? An Examination of Australian Parliamentary Behaviour 1996 to 2012', 22.
[539] Peter Chen, *Australian Politics in a Digital Age* (Canberra: ANU E-Press, 2013).

television and radio.[540] Moreover, audiences for traditional media were generally older as younger news audiences increasingly obtained their news from online sources.[541] The LPA's relationship with the media remained strained in the post-2007 opposition period and was coloured by the Howard government's relationship with the press and the party's long-running complaints of bias. In the lead-up to the 2007 election, many within the Coalition felt that the media had given the Rudd opposition an easy ride and had failed to scrutinise the alternative Prime Minister because they had wanted to see a change of government.

However, as studies by Denemark *et al.* and Goot demonstrate, the media was not necessarily biased against the Coalition or partial to the favoured incumbents.[542] Television in particular had a tendency to presidentialize election campaigns, and commercial television (with larger audiences) focused disproportionately on the incumbent.[543] In late 2007, online news was primarily focused on the two major parties and offered 6.3 per cent more coverage of the prime minister than the opposition leader.[544] The difference was less pronounced on television and radio, suggesting that it was online news that was entrenching the power of incumbents and the major parties. Though, despite all the changes in the media landscape, the Coalition in opposition still faced many of the same problems it had in 1983: a lack of resources and interest in its message. Given these constraints, how did the Coalition navigate the media landscape between 2007 and 2013?

Door stops, press conferences, television and radio interviews

Transcripts generated from media appearances remained an important tool of media engagement and management for the opposition. The arrival of cable news services have increased the reach of political information delivered by doorstop, press conference or television interviews. Today, the use of real-time captioned services for the deaf, available on free to air television (in effect ABC News-24) has also liberated journalists from relying on their own notes or waiting for political offices to send and produce their own transcripts. In conjunction with other forms of online news and radio, media appearances by political actors are therefore quickly reported and disseminated and provide more opportunities for oppositions to participate in the media than previously.

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[540] Sally Young, *How Australia Decides: Election Reporting and the Media* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 45, 51, 83.
[541] Ibid., 62.
[542] Denemark, Ward, and Bean, 'Election Campaigns and Television News Coverage', 97; Murray Goot, 'Is the News on the Internet Different? Leaders, Frontbenchers and Other Candidates in the 2007 Australian Election', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 43, no. 1 (1 March 2008): 108.
[543] Ian McAllister, *Political Behaviour: Citizens, Parties and Elites in Australia*, Australian Sociology (Melbourne, Vic.) (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1992), 187; Denemark, Ward, and Bean, 'Election Campaigns and Television News Coverage', 97–98.
[544] Goot, 'Is the News on the Internet Different?', 105.

Table 4.1. Appearances by Tony Abbott and Bill Shorten by media network.**

Interviewed by	Tony Abbott, 2011	Bill Shorten, 2014
ABC	40	45
Canberra press gallery	47	54
2GB AM Sydney	23	0*
2UE AM Sydney	20	0*
3AW AM Melbourne	8	6
4BC AM Brisbane	12	4
5AA AM Adelaide	4	2
6PR AM Perth	8	2
FM radio	18	4

*Shorten's office says he has appeared on these stations but no transcript was sent out

** note: figures derived from transcripts sent to the Canberra Press Gallery by the opposition leaders' offices.

(source: Massola 2015, figures derived from transcripts sent to the Canberra Press Gallery by the opposition leaders' offices)

Table 4.2. Appearances by Abbott an Shorten by specific program

Specific programs	Tony Abbott, 2011	Bill Shorten, 2014
7:30	1	4
Insiders	1	2
Lateline	0	1
Radio National Breakfast	1	8
ABC radio AM	13	12
Andrew Bolt (TV/radio)	7	0
Ray Hadley 2GB	8	0
Alan Jones 2GB	8	0
Neil Mitchell 3AW	4	1
Today Show (Nine network	31	2
Sunrise (Seven) network)	8	5
Sky News Canberra	0	4
Peter Van Onselen	2	2

(source: Massola 2015, figures derived from transcripts sent to the Canberra Press Gallery by the opposition leaders' offices)

James Massola's comparative study of media appearances by Tony Abbott and Bill Shorten in their first full year as opposition leader without an election (2011 and 2014 respectively) reveals how much media work underpins leaders' political communications strategies and which media outlets are favoured.[545] In 2011, Abbott undertook 457 interviews, though Abbott's office claims that he

[545] James Massola, 'Bill Shorten Has Made Himself a Small Target as Opposition Leader', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 March 2015, http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/bill-shorten-has-made-himself-a-small-target-as-opposition-leader-20150322-1m4sy8.html.

performed 675. By contrast, Bill Shorten performed only 265 in 2014. Abbott's high number of interviews highlights the centrality of media work as part of his strategy in 2011. However, without additional data, it could also be a reflection of the heightened political tension during the hung parliament.

A closer examination of Massola's data (Table 4.1 and Table 4.2) reveals that Abbott undertook over 95 interviews in the ideological safe ground of the talk-back hosts Alan Jones, Ray Hadley and Neil Mitchell on AM radio. [546] Although Abbott and Shorten appeared on the ABC a similar number of times, Abbott avoided the ABC's hard news programs, avoiding *Lateline* entirely and appearing on *7.30* and *Insiders* only once in 2011. In addition, Abbott also favoured softer media targets such as breakfast television and FM radio.

Table 4.3. Media Appearances by Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott June – November 2012.

Media Appearances Jun – Nov 2012							
	Press Gallery	Media Conference	ABC radio interviews	AM radio interviews	FM radio interviews	ABC TV interviews	Other TV interviews
Gillard	226	848	23	8	3	5	10
Abbott	142	909	3	12	4	1	16

(Source: Keane 2013)

By late 2012, Abbott's media strategy was heavily criticised by the press gallery. Gallery journalists accused the opposition leader of deliberately by-passing the press gallery to avoid scrutiny. Gallery journalists argued that Abbott preferred press packs away from Canberra, which were less expert and more likely to ask easy questions.[547] In retaliation, journalists reported the Abbott office's attempts to control the media appearances of shadow ministers and backbenchers.[548] In July 2013, the ABC's flagship news programs announced that the opposition leader had not appeared on *Breakfast* with Fran Kelly for 362 days, *Lateline* for 583 days, *Q & A* for 1054 days, *Insiders* for 362 days and *7.30* for 72 days respectively.[549] Bernard Keane had previously tested the media's claims

[546] These figures were obtained from journalist James Massola of *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Figures presented here do not represent the total number of interviews conducted by each leader in the year 2011 and 2014 respectively. Instead, the figures are indicative and reflect Massola's interest in comparing Abbott and Shorten's preference for notable media, defined by Massola as media which would likely be heard by a large number of voters.

[547] Tony Jones, 'Spin, Selling & Slogans', *Q and A* (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 1 July 2013), http://www.abc.net.au/tv/qanda/txt/s3780235.htm.

[548] Michelle Grattan, 'Libs Move to Keep Abbott on Track', Newspaper, *The Age*, (6 July 2011), http://www.theage.com.au/national/libs-move-to-keep-abbott-on-track-20110705-1h0xo.html.

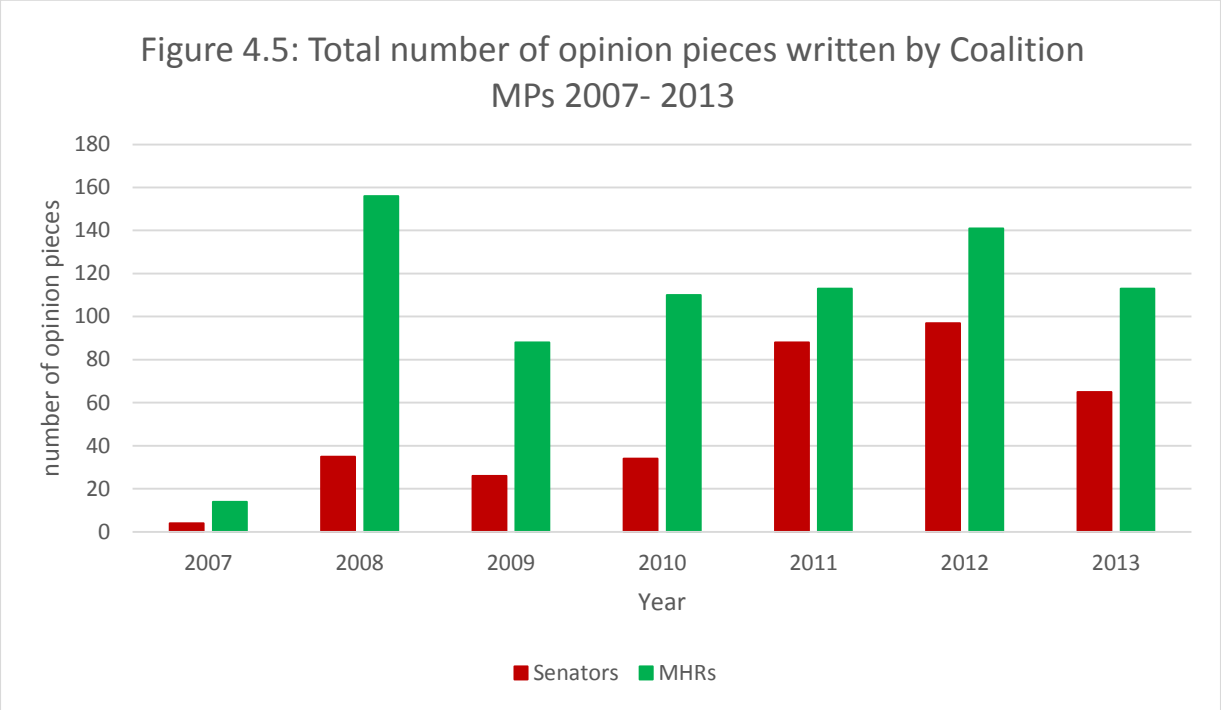
[549] Jones, 'Spin, Selling & Slogans'; Matthew Knott, 'Media Briefs: Abbott v ABC … Palmer's Paper … Gillard Bullies … –', *Crikey*, July 5 2013, http://www.crikey.com.au/2013/07/05/media-briefs-abbott-v-abc-palmers-paper-gillard-bullies/?wpmp_switcher=mobile; Emma Alberici, 'Opposition Would Restore Howard's Asylum Seeker Policy', *Lateline* (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, July 4 2013), http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/content/2013/s3796347.htm.

and undertook of a study of Abbott and Gillard's press appearances from 1 June to 30 November 2012 (see table 4.3).[550]

Keane found that Abbott and Gillard answered almost the same number of media questions (Abbott answered 1051 questions and Gillard 1074), but that Abbott did more press conferences away from Parliament House and favoured talkback radio and commercial television over the ABC. This suggests that the media's criticism of Abbott's media strategy had some justification.[551]

Newspaper opinion pieces 2007 - 2013

Over six and a half years, the Coalition produced over 1100 opinion pieces published in Australian Newspapers, excluding *The West Australian*.[552] Figure 4.5 shows the number of

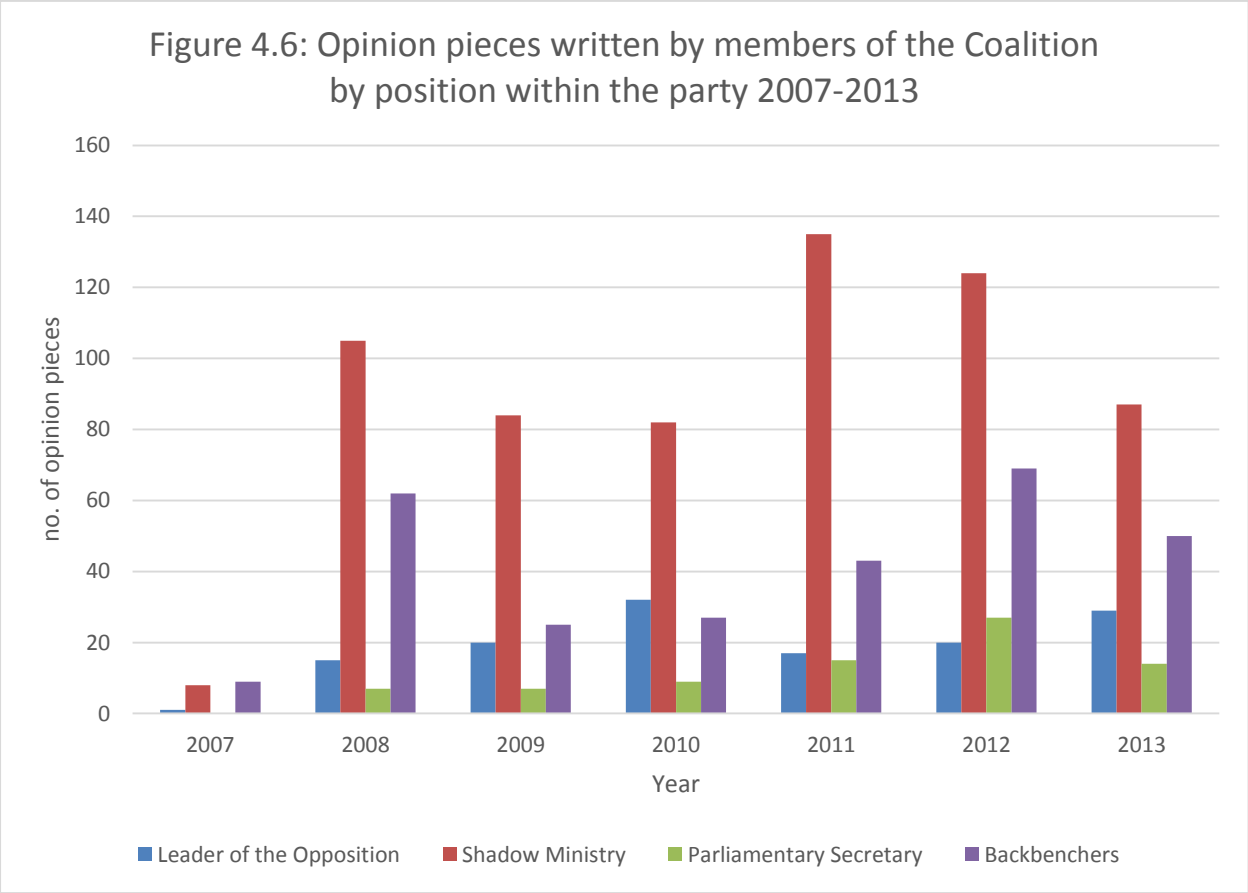


articles produced each year by the opposition divided according to whether they were Senators or MHRs. In 2008 and 2009, the opposition's years of dissent and leadership turnover, MHRs regularly wrote significantly more opinion pieces than their upper house colleagues. However, Senators gradually made more strenuous efforts even though they were less inclined to

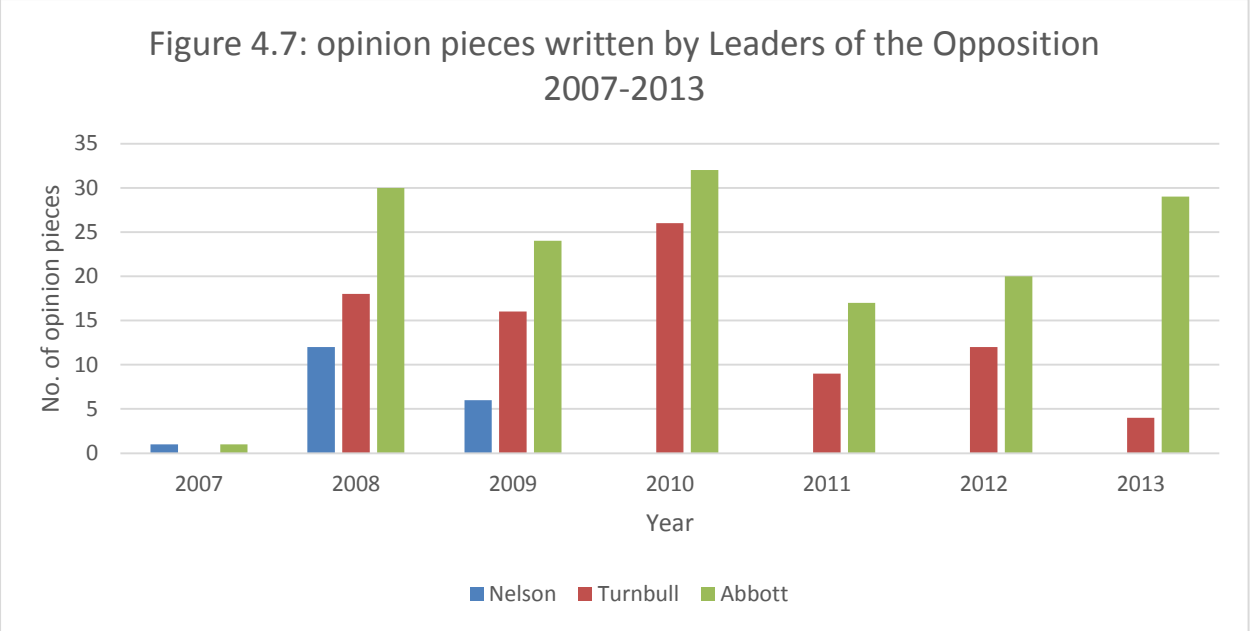
[550] Bernard Keane, 'Mythbusting on Abbott and the Media, but Who Asked the Questions?', *Crikey*, 13 February 2013, http://www.crikey.com.au/2013/02/13/mythbusting-on-abbott-and-the-media-but-who-asked-the-questions/.
[551] Ibid.
[552] Total n in the data set = 1102. The data was collected from November 24 2007 through to September 7 2013. The data was compiled using Fairfax Digital collections using a By-line search for each member of the Coalition. Fairfax Digital Collections has the advantage of including many smaller regional papers, but it does not include *The West Australian*. Therefore, the figures for West Australian members, and notably front benchers such as Julie Bishop are likely depressed. Opinion pieces are sometimes syndicated and these articles are collected in each paper in which they appear, slightly inflating some MPs figures.

comment publically about the direction and future of the Coalition and the Liberal party. Their lower numbers in 2009 could reflect the priorities of Turnbull's leadership or might reflect their overwhelming opposition to the Rudd government's CPRS. After the leadership change in December 2009, and facing an election in 2010, the Coalition was more disciplined. The advent of the hung parliament further underscored the need for discipline within the Coalition.

It is also important to consider which actors are writing opinion pieces and where they are located within the party's organisational hierarchy. Figure 4.6 shows opinion pieces written by



Coalition actors broken down by the author's status (Leader of the Opposition, Shadow Minister, Parliamentary Secretary and Backbencher). While shadow ministers are the largest contributors, backbenchers are significantly more active than we might expect. Unlike shadow ministers, backbenchers are not bound by the discipline of shadow cabinet and have more time. Backbenchers are more likely to write for their local papers where competition is less strenuous or where their contributions are letters or rebuttals to other writers. The opposition leader's contributions represent a significant proportion, reflecting their status and their newsworthiness.



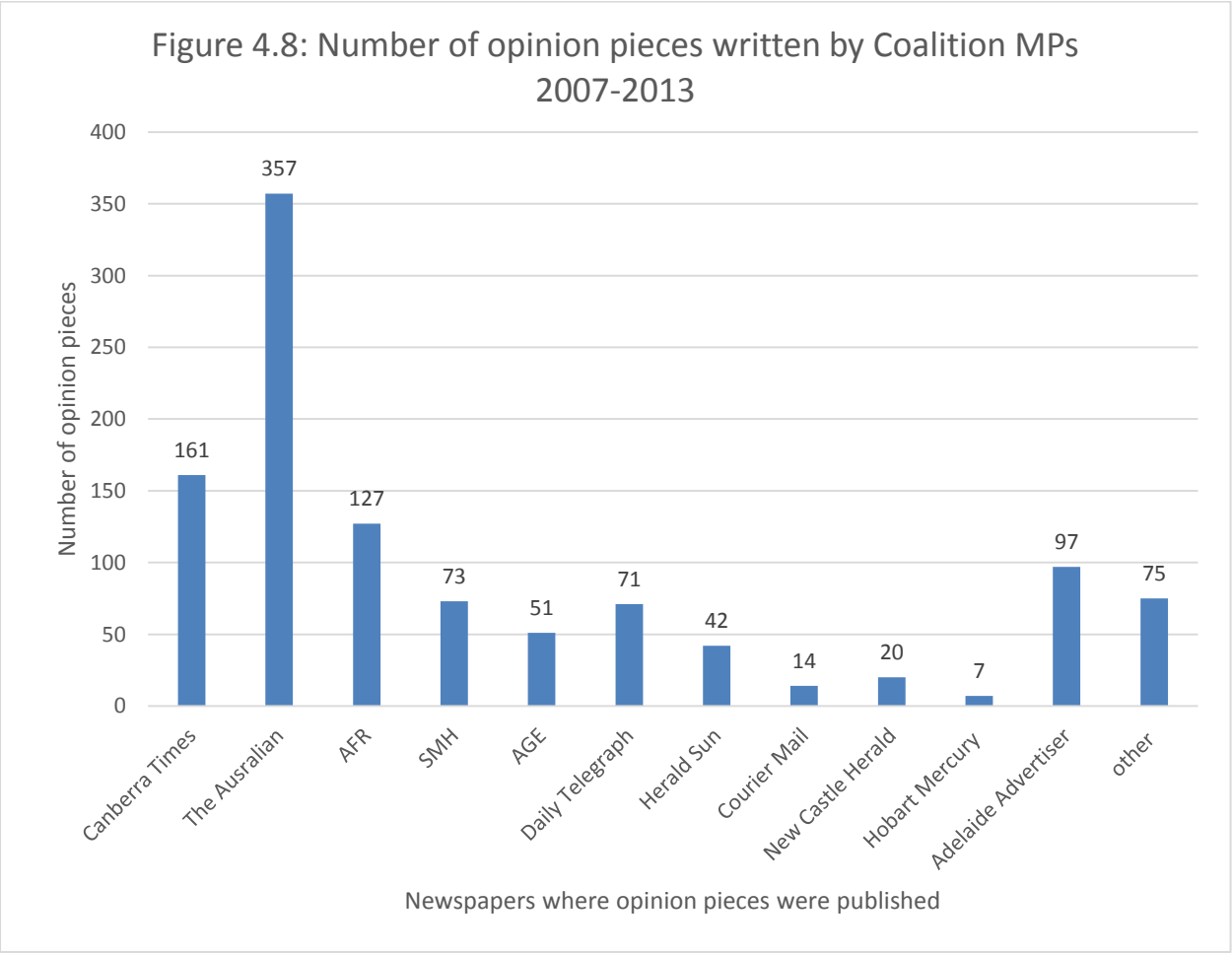


Figure 4.7 shows the contributions of the LPA's three leaders, Brendan Nelson, Malcolm Turnbull and Tony Abbott. Both Turnbull and Abbott are comfortable opinion piece writers, reflecting their journalistic backgrounds (indeed, Abbott has long been an avid opinion piece writer as

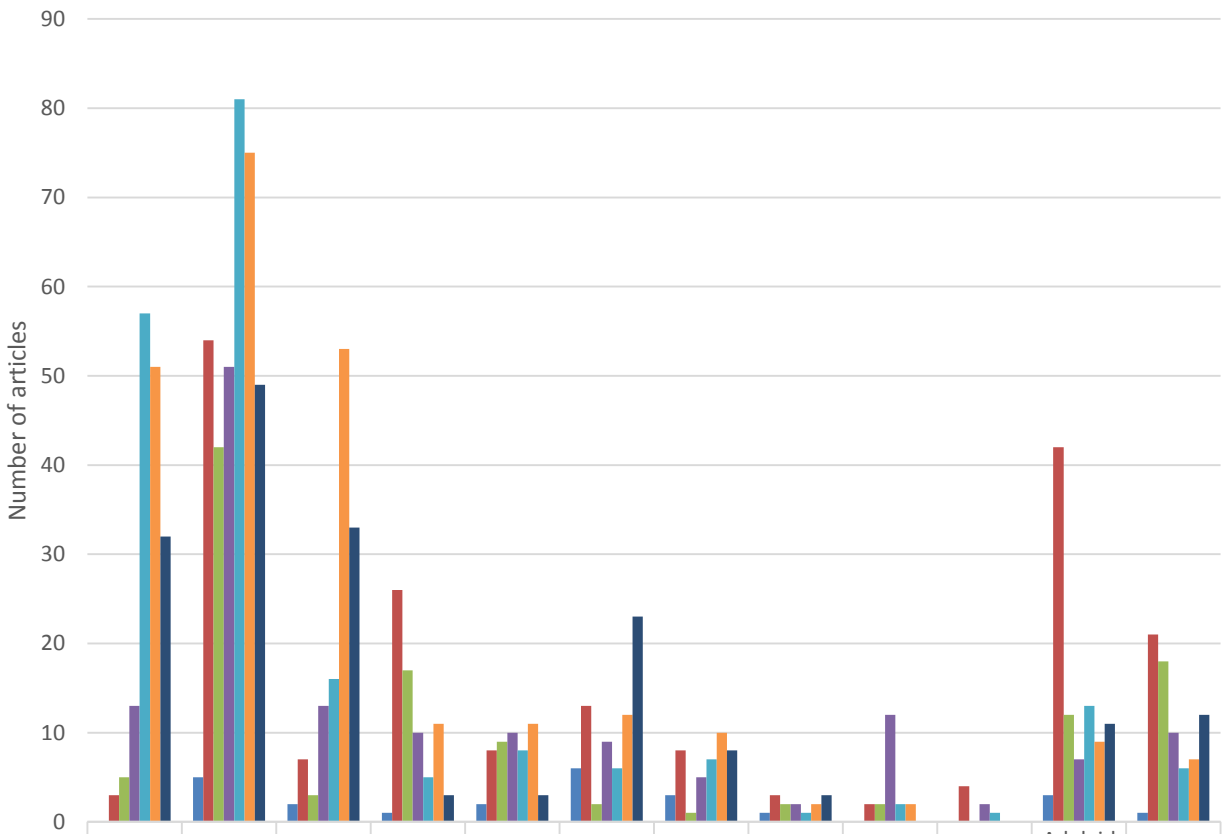
noted above). After assuming the leadership on 1 December 2009, Abbott wrote three opinion pieces and had an extract from his book *Battlelines* published by the end of the year. Interestingly, Turnbull was most prolific as a backbencher in 2010 and his opinion writing was dramatically curtailed when he re-joined shadow cabinet, subjecting himself to its discipline and the media management of the leader's office.

In addition to *who* is publishing articles, *where* articles are published also matters (see figures 4.8 and 4.9). *The Australian* was the primary target for Coalition MPs, followed by *The Australian Financial Review (AFR)*. Although *The Canberra Times*' contribution appears significant, this is the product of Barnaby Joyce's regular column which accounts for 141 out of 161 opinion pieces published in this period. Given *The Australian*'s vigorous campaign for a change of government for the duration of the hung parliament and the complimentary ideological framework of *The Australian* and *AFR* with the Liberal party, this is unsurprising.

However, what is significant is how many articles are placed in *The Australian* and to a lesser extent *AFR,* given their relatively low circulation. This suggest that the Coalition either does not think discussing policy in depth is a priority for a mass audience, or that it seeks to discuss policy with the general mass audience in a different way.

Figure 4.9 also shows that 2008, 2011 and 2012 were the years were most opinion pieces were written. High numbers in 2008 are likely the result of lower levels of discipline and a reflection of the internal debate underway about the party's direction, and this is reflected in the content of pieces. By contrast, in 2011 and 2012, opinion pieces were focused on attacking the Gillard government and should be understood as part of the opposition's co-ordinated and disciplined campaign to destroy the credibility and policy platform of the Gillard government. Finally, lower numbers in 2013, spread across a wider variety of outlets, suggests an election strategy predicated on tighter central control of the party's message (which will be further discussed in chapter eight), and an appeal to a wider audience in an election year.

Figure 4.9 Opposition opinion pieces by paper and year for the period 2007 - 2013



	Canberra Times	The Aus	AFR	SMH	AGE	Daily Telegraph	Herald Sun	Courier Mail	New Castle	Hobart Mercury	Adelaide Advertiser	Other
2007	0	5	2	1	2	6	3	1	0	0	3	1
2008	3	54	7	26	8	13	8	3	2	4	42	21
2009	5	42	3	17	9	2	1	2	2	0	12	18
2010	13	51	13	10	10	9	5	2	12	2	7	10
2011	57	81	16	5	8	6	7	1	2	1	13	6
2012	51	75	53	11	11	12	10	2	2	0	9	7
2013	32	49	33	3	3	23	8	3	0	0	11	12

Yet, the majority of Coalition parliamentarians only wrote a few opinion pieces each year. In the House, fifteen MHRs and six senators produced more than five opinion pieces in each year (see table 4.4 and 4.5). Arguably, this cohort of opinion piece writers constitute the policy thinking elite within the Coalition.

Table 4. 4. Opposition Senators (more than five opinion pieces in a single year), 2007-2013

Senator	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total no. of articles	% in the Aus	% in the AFR	Total % in the Aus and AFR
Nick Minchin	1	5	11	1	1	-	-	19	36.8%	0%	36.8%
Barnaby Joyce (NP)	0	2	1	14	57	52	30	156	4.5%	0.64%	5.1%
George Brandis	0	3	2	1	9	5	4	24	79.2%	8.3%	87.5%
Simon Birmingham	0	3	0	4	3	5	5	20	0%	5%	5%
Scott Ryan	0	0	0	0	1	7	5	13	7.7%	92.3%	100%
Ron Boswell (NP)	0	1	1	0	2	4	6	14	78.6%	0%	78.6%

Among those high contributing Senators, only Brandis, Ryan and Boswell wrote overwhelmingly in *The Australian* and the *Australian Financial Review.* By contrast Minchin, Pyne and Birmingham (all South Australians) focused on local papers, and with a higher frequency on softer topics (such as ANZAC Day). For the Senate policy elite, *The Australian* is the newspaper of choice, with the exception of Scott Ryan who is a regular contributor to the *AFR*'s regular dry economics 'Modest Member' column. Barnaby Joyce's regular column in *The Canberra Times* is an outlier — as a Queensland Senator he has no local connection with the paper, but as one of Australia's five broadsheet newspapers it is undoubtedly a useful and regular platform where Joyce can air his views and spruik the Coalition's policy concerns.

Similar patterns can been seen in the behaviour of MHRs. *The Australian* and to a lesser extent the *AFR*, were also important papers for MHRs. However, among MHRs there was greater variation in the media outlets chosen by policy elite in the Lower House. O'Dwyer, Fletcher, Robb, and Briggs wrote for *the Australian* and the *AFR* eighty per cent or more of the time which suggests they favoured communicating with the political and policy elite over a broader mass audience. By contrast, the three leaders of the opposition, Nelson, Turnbull and Abbott spread their opinion pieces around to more outlets.

Table 4.5 Opposition MHRs (more than five opinion pieces in a single year), 2007-2013

MHR	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total no. of articles	% in the Aus	% in the AFR	Total % in Aus and AFR
Tony Abbott	1	23	24	24	17	27	29	145	51%	4.8%	55.8%
Alexander Downer	5	28	5	-	-	-	-	39	2.6%	0	2.6%
Brendan Nelson	1	12	6	-	-	-	-	19	26.3%	5.3%	31.6%
Malcolm Turnbull	0	16	16	26	9	12	4	83	21.6%	4.87%	26.4%
Greg Hunt	4	9	3	5	7	10	7	45	40%	15.5%	55.5%
Christopher Pyne	1	21	17	15	10	10	4	71	9.9%	2.8%	12.7%
Andrew Robb	0	6	2	8	10	10	11	47	66%	17%	83%
Joe Hockey	0	0	3	9	6	9	6	33	42.4%	24.2%	66.6%
Josh Frydenberg	-	-	-	2	15	19	16	52	59.6%	9.6%	69.2%
Paul Fletcher	-	-	0	9	6	10	9	34	55.9%	35.3%	91.2%
Scott Morrison	0	2	2	7	9	4	7	31	48.4%	0%	48.4%
Julie Bishop[553]	0	1	1	2	4	6	2	16	56.3%	6.3%	62.5%
Tony Smith	0	3	0	0	2	6	0	11	27.3%	9.1%	36.4%
Jamie Briggs	-	0	0	2	4	10	0	16	12.5%	68.8%	81.3%
Kelly O'Dwyer	-	-	0	0	0	8	5	13	0%	92.3%	92.3%

[553] Julie Bishop's figures are likely to be lower because data was not available from *The West Australian* at the time of collection. This is likely to be the case for all West Australian MPs and Senators.

Opinion piece writing along with other forms of media participation such as doorstops or television or radio interviews is an important demonstration of the layered nature of political communication by political parties. Communication of this kind seeks to reinforce at the very least the key values of the LPA and at the very best (from the party's point of view) the specific messages that the party wants to promote on any given day. In the Coalition's early years of the post-2007 period, opinion piece writing was often a deliberate and considered act, which put parliamentarians' personal views on the record. Yet, during the hung parliament, opinion piece writing was most commonly reflecting the party's broader attacks on the Gillard government.

However, some MPs strove to resist on occasion reflecting that 'you can only be controlled to the extent that you allow yourself to be controlled.'[554] Opinion pieces which called on the Liberal party to broaden its ideological appeal or pieces calling for industrial relations reform at the same time the party leadership is assiduously avoiding the issue reflect the tensions at the heart of parties that have disciplined political communication. It is a collective act, even if some voices are significantly more important and influential than others.

Finally, the post-2007 period shows the continuation of a trend that began in the very late 1980s of political actors increasingly using main stream media as a platform to discuss policy. Unfiltered media platforms have only become more popular for political actors, and for good reason. However, Coalition MPs remain largely focused on elite media or news outlets that are sympathetic to their cause. It appears to be the case that the party still relies on more traditional reporting to broadcast its broad messages to the electorate as a whole.

Social media

By 2007, the Coalition had established considerable electronic communications infrastructure though its engagement with social media was cautious, even suspicious, and emphasised centralised control of political communication. Use of social media followed a well-established trend within the LPA. As the Van Onselens noted, the Coalition had a well-developed intranet system, through which it co-ordinated messages from the centre to the periphery of the party, further driving the centralisation of the party's political communication.[555] By the mid-2000s, the LPA had developed a campaign website, which was largely static and top-down and by 2007, the party had added traditional 'address to the nation' style YouTube videos.[556] These videos were formal and delivered in a style that contrasted awkwardly with Kevin Rudd's more natural and digitally savvy 'Kevin07'

[554] Personnel communication with the author, interviewed on November 28 2012.
[555] Onselen and Onselen, 'On Message or out of Touch?', 45,49-52.
[556] Peter John Chen, 'Australian Political Parties' Use of Youtube 2007', *Communication, Politics & Culture* 41, no. 1 (2008): 119.

campaign. The Coalition entered opposition at a distinct disadvantage to the ALP on internet campaigning and the use of social media.

For most of its time in opposition, the Coalition's initial engagement with social media was cautious. MPs and candidates were cautioned about their use of social media. Some backbenchers and candidates were asked to close their Facebook and Twitter accounts in anticipation of the 2013 election. Others were 'strongly advised' against using Twitter and the party did not encourage candidates to Tweet on behalf of the LPA.[557] During the Coalition's opposition years, the take-up of social media was driven by personal initiative and interest. Malcolm Turnbull courted notoriety and used social media and his blog to reinforce his 'man of the future' image.[558]

MPs also used Facebook to pursue both external and internal party communication. For example, Dennis Jensen used Facebook to publically criticise Malcolm Turnbull's leadership in the lead up to the spill in November 2009, declaring 'we have been getting unprecedented emails on the ETS, unprecedented in both volume and anger. Let your members and Senators know what you think, and get your friends and acquaintances to do likewise'.[559] Joe Hockey also used Twitter during the 2009 leadership crisis —to his detriment— to attempt to communicate internally: 'hey team re The ETS. Give me your views please on the policy and political debate. I really want your feedback.'[560] Given the immediacy, rapidity and personal engagement required of web 2.0 forums such as Twitter and Facebook, these technologies represented a challenge to the party organisation, which since the late 1970s had used technology to centralise party messaging.

Social media was seen by the LPA as another tool to facilitate continuous campaigning rather than increased dialogue between citizens and their representatives. The LPA focused on direct email and Google AdWords to target voters. [561] The LPA used YouTube and the political videos such as the Kevin O' Lemon' series to engage their base during non-election years.[562] As Chen reports, the

[557] Jessica Wright, 'Liberals Slap Social Media Gag on MPs', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, December 9 2012, http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/liberals-slap-social-media-gag-on-mps-20121208-2b2eo.html.
[558] Malcolm Turnbull, *Blog*, http://www.malcolmturnbull.com.au/media/category/blog. Since becoming Prime Minister, the Blog has been incorporated into the Prime Minister's webpage.
[559] Phillip Coorey, 'The Facebook Plot That Left a Leader Needing Friends', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, November 27 2009, http://www.smh.com.au/national/the-facebook-plot-that-left-a-leader-needing-friends-20091126-juq5.html.
[560] Joe Hockey, 'Hey Team Re The ETS. Give Me Your Views Please on the Policy and Political Debate. I Really Want Your Feedback.', microblog, *Twitter*, (November 26 2009), https://twitter.com/joehockey/status/6094764220.
[561] Peter Chen, 'The New Media and the Campaign', in *Julia 2010: The Caretaker Election*, ed. Marian Simms and John Wanna (ANU E-Press, 2012), 69–70.
[562] Loughnane, 'The 2010 Federal Election: The Liberal Party', 151.

Liberals posted 22 videos within 50 days of the election in 2010, three fewer than they had posted in 2007.[563] However, in 2010 these videos generated a total of 290 444 views in 2010 compared with 150 719 in 2007. They also doubled the average number of views per video from 6029 in 2007 to 13 202 per video in 2010.

By the 2013 campaign, digital campaigning had become core business. The party's social media analytics were projected onto a display wall at Campaign HQ.[564] While the LPA continued to use direct emails, their emphasis shifted to Facebook, where they invested in targeted advertising.[565] Although Rudd remained more popular on Twitter (2.5 million Australian users), Abbott ended the campaign more popular on Facebook with 258 830 'likes' compared with Rudd's 127 476.[566] The party argued that this 550 per cent increase during the campaign was due to the party's emphasis on targeted advertising on Facebook. However, the campaign was also dogged by controversy when Abbott's Twitter followers mysteriously spiked in a suspected case of mischief making.[567] The Liberals used YouTube effectively to engage their base and stoke voter anger with its election videos, such as 'Labor Chaos' which produced over 91 000 views in two weeks.[568] In the 2013 campaign, Chen concludes that the LPA had won the 'visibility war', driving 980 000 unique visitors to the Party's website, compared with 556 000 to the ALP's, and generated three times the number of referrals, largely via Facebook.[569]

Through its social engagement strategy, the LPA further centralised communication within the leader's office and the federal secretariat. For example, there were fewer personal campaign websites in 2010 than there had been in 2007.[570] However, the LPA also attempted to use more interactive (web 2.0) media strategies. In 2010, the LPA's election website provided a social networking platform, where voters could comment on ideas put up by the party. It generated 854 comments on 55 ideas, an average of 15.5 comments per idea.[571]

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[563] Chen, 'The New Media and the Campaign', 79.
[564] Chris Kenny, 'Diligence v Spin at the Nerve Centres', *The Australian*, 16 August 2013.
[565] Peter Chen, 'New Media in the Electoral Context: The New Normal', in *Abbott's Gambit: The 2013 Australian Federal Election*, ed. Carol Johnson and John Wanna (ANU E-Press, 2014), 83, http://press.anu.edu.au/titles/abbotts-gambit/.
[566] Ibid., 84; Loughnane, 'The Liberal Campaign in the 2013 Federal Election', 200.
[567] Georgia Waters, 'From Gaffes to Guilty Admissions, Game's up When Media Gets Social', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 September 2013.
[568] Edmund Tadros, 'Differing Ways to Push Message', *Australian Financial Review*, 16 July 2013.
[569] Chen, 'New Media in the Electoral Context: The New Normal', 84.
[570] Chen, 'The New Media and the Campaign', 74.
[571] Ibid., 73.

Between 2010 and 2013 social media went from a novelty to a mainstream fixture of the party's communications toolbox.[572] However, directives encouraging candidates not to Tweet and complaints during the campaign of further gagging and control of candidates in NSW reflect the top-down model of political communication that dominates the way that the LPA in Opposition has used social media.[573] The party demonstrated that it could successfully leverage social media, even if its parliamentarians were not 'digital natives'. Nor did the party use the technology in the spirit in which it was intended or designed. Communication was largely unidirectional. For every Malcolm Turnbull or Julie Bishop, there is a Tony Abbott who considered Twitter 'digital graffiti' or the countless MPs whose pages are largely run by their staff and are simply used as billboards to exhibit their work in the community rather than as a site for genuine engagement.[574]

A more favourable media environment for oppositions?

The transformation of the media landscape from 1983 to 2013 had made it more favourable for oppositions.[575] Alongside technological changes, the move from Old Parliament House also watered down the intimacy that had previously characterised the relationship between politicians and journalists. During the Howard years, the Coalition's media' strategy was predicated on the distribution of transcripts by ministerial offices that were designed to direct (and re-direct) journalists to the key messages of the day. Fast distribution also meant that politicians no longer needed to wait for information to filter back in order to respond to their opponents.[576] Thus, the combination of quick distribution and a higher demand for news content encouraged the emergence of multiple daily news cycles.

The last five years, and most intensely during the hung parliament, saw further changes in the media landscape which have escalated this 'war of transcripts'.[577] The emergence of ABC News 24 as a second 24 hour news channel, the rise of online reporters aiming to file for the large lunchtime surge of readers, increased copy sharing between the papers, the emergence of

[572] Loughnane, 'The 2010 Federal Election: The Liberal Party', 148–50; Loughnane, 'The Liberal Campaign in the 2013 Federal Election', 196.
[573] Gabrielle Chan, 'Liberal Candidates Appear to Have Been Gagged after Jaymes Diaz Interview', *The Guardian*, August 19 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/19/australian-election-2013-australian-politics.
[574] Mark Di Stefano, 'Julie Bishop Describes Serious Diplomatic Relationships With Emoji', *BuzzFeed*, February 16 2015, http://www.buzzfeed.com/markdistefano/emoji-plomacy#.acrM00Xg6; Lucy Battersby, 'Tony Abbott Dismisses Social Media as "Electronic Graffiti", Again', *The Age*, January 26 2015, http://www.theage.com.au/it-pro/government-it/tony-abbott-dismisses-social-media-as-electronic-graffiti-again-20150126-12yg26.html.
[575] Marija Taflaga, 'We Need to Talk about Tony…: Media Coverage of the Abbott Opposition 2009-2013', 2013, 15–17.
[576] Julian Fitzgerald, *Inside the Parliamentary Press Gallery: Seeing beyond the Spin* (Mawson, ACT: Clareville Press, 2008), 99, 105.
[577] Personal communication with Dennis Shanahan, July 23 2013.

newspapers branching out into the broadcasting space, and the rise of Twitter and other social media platforms means that it is now easier than ever before to distribute information, commentary and debate. The explosion in bandwidth available for political news has made media organisations desperate for political talent. This, combined with large job losses and loss of specialisation has only increased the need for the kind of content that opposition spokespeople can provide because it is cheap, easy to interpret, and is often colourful.

New technologies have also changed journalism practices.[578] First, the model for 24-hour news is rolling news coverage, refreshing developing stories with new emerging news angles throughout the day and frequently repeating news footage. In short, 24-hour news is a form of media constantly searching for content to fill the void. Political 'talking heads' programs with colourful and controversial media hosts are an effective strategy for filling in this time. For example, SKY News has three 'Agenda' programs a day and one on Saturday and Sunday where political talent is interviewed followed by journalists interviewing journalists. SKY News also has several programs with colourful or interesting hosts such as Grahame Richardson or Peter Van Onselen. ABC News 24 is less inclined to engage this kind of programing because it can draw on content produced by its existing news divisions and regional network, which it can feed into its rolling news coverage. But it still offers plenty of opportunity for political interviews, the content of which becomes a transcript which is then distributed to the media.

Although the internet has had a dramatic impact on readership, newspapers in Australia were slow to respond to the new opportunities to interact with followers. Until the 2010 election, most newspaper websites used the internet as a means to republish content in the paper in digital form. However, this pattern of production changed during the hung parliament as newspapers increasingly use their digital space to produce interactive infographics, live blog political events and increasingly expect their staff to have active Twitter and Facebook presences.[579]

As traditional media outlets increasingly morph into digital media platforms, so too have the incentives for reporters changed.[580] Consequently, political actors have also adapted their behaviour to the new media environment. Today, news organisations increasingly mimic the

[578] The following is based on interviews with press gallery journalists and my own experiences working in the press gallery for Fairfax Media from 2008 to July 2016.
[579] For example see Fairfax's Pulse Live or the Guardian's politics with Katherine Murphy.
[580] For early 2010s perspective see Greg Jericho, *The Rise of the Fifth Estate : Social Media and Blogging in Australian Politics* (Brunswick, Vic: Scribe Publications, 2012); Judith Ireland and Greg Jericho, 'Judith Ireland and Greg Jericho "The Impact of Social Media on Political Journalism"', text, *Papers on Parliament*, (October 2014), http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/~/~/link.aspx?_id=AF4D0999B1BA40C99E71B5439E603A13&_z=z.

news production style of cable news: that is, rolling news coverage, refreshing existing stories with new angles and the need to continuously find new news items over the course of the day. This manifestation is demonstrated aptly by the rise of traditional newspapers and online-only media platforms increasingly producing their own video content featuring politicians as the stars of their offerings. For example, Fairfax Media has a daily digital broadcast *Breaking Politics, The Conversation* with Michelle Grattan has regular video interviews with politicians and News Limited regularly features footage from Sky News on its newspaper mastheads.

This is a boon for the opposition for four reasons. First, 24-hour news channels grant daily opportunities for the opposition to participate in, and drive forward, the news cycle. Second, participation in these programs is relatively low risk given that the format of programs like *The Drum* or *Sky Agenda* are effectively political exposition and comment rather than the more interrogative style of programs like *7.30*, *Lateline* or the now defunct *Meet the Press*. Others such as *The Project* or breakfast television tend to be lighter programs, based on humour and quick repartee, presenting politicians with an opportunity to humanise themselves. For the government, 24 hour news represents a higher level of risk and an opportunity to be caught out making a mistake, but for the opposition, it is significantly less risky because expectations are lower for the opposition. Moreover, the exposition style of continuing news coverage is well suited to the opposition's role as critic-in-chief and is welcomed by the media that is constantly searching for reaction to drive the day's news stories forward. Third, 24 hour news also gives ambitious backbenchers an opportunity to build their media profile, which has become an important (and erroneous) proxy for political and ministerial competence. Importantly for leaders, having regular media appearances keeps their colleagues on message and busy.

Finally, online reporting and 24 hour news has given the opposition more opportunities to influence the daily news cycle. Where previously the opposition had to work hard to make it into the top story of the day— often as the last paragraph of the story— today the availability of the media means that the opposition has greater flexibility in its media strategy. The fact that there are now two 24 hour News channels means that an opposition doorstop event is more likely than ever to receive coverage because if either ABC News 24 or Sky News decide to cover the event, then the other channel will feel compelled to match the coverage of their competition. In this environment, the opposition can launch a debate in the middle of the day and because of the media's need for continuous copy, the opposition will often see their political lines posted in online stories and repeated multiple times on 24 hour news channels. As several journalists interviewed for this study noted, the availability of 24 hour news and the impact of copy sharing between major newspapers such as the News Limited

tabloids or *The Sydney Morning Herald, The Age* and *The Canberra Times* has meant that the opposition has not needed to work individual journalists in every outlet as diligently as they had in the past.

Conclusion

In the 1980s and early 1990s, the LPA did not have a sophisticated or coordinated approach to using the media. Rather, media engagement was personally driven and reflected the individual style of leaders and shadows. Leaders in the 1980s did not feel the need or were unable to micro-manage what shadow ministers said, because the technology and the resources of the opposition were insufficient to the task. Until the fax machine arrived, campaigns were still heavily dependent on state divisions. Coalition parliamentarians regularly wrote to their papers, but the nature of the engagement was often to challenge the nature of reporting rather than to offer an account of the opposition's alternative policy proposals — a situation that changed by the mid-1990s.

In the post-2007 period, the approach to the media became more centralised and controlled due to the enabling capacity of modern telecommunications. Political actors increasingly place more emphasis on media activities. Leaders learnt which audiences to target and which media environments were safer. They also spent more time and invested more resources into media, either through media appearances, writing opinion pieces or both. Tony Abbott as opposition leader played to his strengths and benefited from the dramatic changes taking place within the media. Indeed, between 2010 and 2013, the media landscape favoured shallow content and actors seeking to offer negative messages over those attempting to argue for positive changes.

Paul Kelly has argued that the media cycle has brought about the 'death of reform', yet, there are already signs that the model favouring the opposition is breaking down.[581] Media organisations are increasingly seeking to value-add by emphasising quality and using more data-driven approaches to tell political stories. The 2014 budget response is indicative of this change in reporting emphasis. The (brief) rise of 'fact checking' and more bespoke news services were early experiments in this model. Moreover, the centralisation of political communication in the leader's office has likely reached its high-water mark during the failed Abbott prime ministership. The arrival of social media, in conjunction with the need for MPs to respond timely to events and the desire for authenticity, will continue to place pressure on a rigid and overly centralised model.

[581] Kelly, *Triumph and Demise*, 78–84.

In the last three chapters, this study has examined the structures, environment and limits on opposition behaviour and how the LPA with the National party have sought to manage these factors over two time periods. The next four chapters explore how the LPA has institutionalised both its policy-making and management processes, and how it attempts to translate its specific policy ideas into political communication narratives. The specific themes raised in this chapter, about changing media cycle and behaviour of actors will be taken up again in chapters seven and eight

Part Two

Approaches to policy-making and political communication by the LPA in Opposition

Chapter 5
Learning to craft and manage policy 1983- 1996

Introduction

This chapter explores the policy making process and the Liberal party's underlying motivations to pursue policy between 1983 and 1996. It first explores the reaction of the extra-parliamentary party, which was an enthusiastic support of a renewed policy focus. Second, it explores the party's policy-making machinery under leaders Andrew Peacock and John Howard. How was the work of policy-making undertaken, how could the extra-parliamentary party support the opposition and how did Liberals understand the role of policy in the party's overall political strategy? Third, the chapter analyses John Hewson's period as opposition leader and the major changes to policy-making processes, including the centralisation of policy-making within his own office. It then briefly outlines the approaches of Alexander Downer and Howard before concluding that the Liberal party's approach to opposition until the 1993 election was predicated on the assumption that the opposition had to behave as an alternative government. That is, it had to articulate a positive model of opposition.

LPA policy in opposition: Historically weak policy making structures

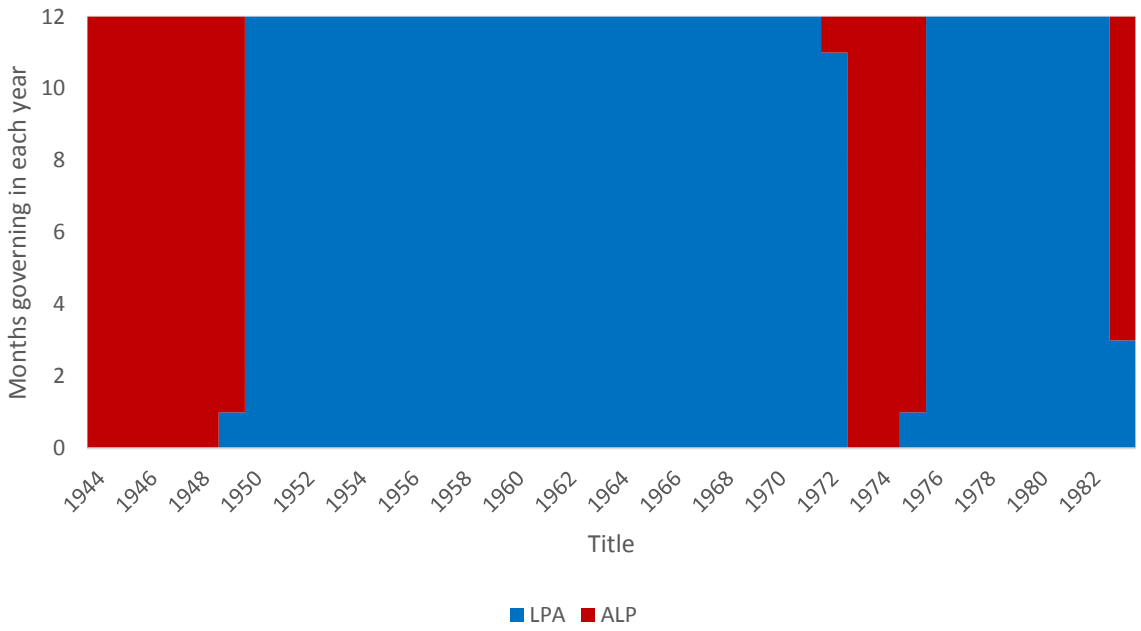
The policy making capacities of the federal LPA had never been strongly developed at either the party machine level or at the parliamentary party level. This was as much a product of Robert Menzies' initial design for his then-new LPA in 1944, as it was about the party's opposition to Labor's pledge. The former was the outcome of Menzies' insistence at the formation of the LPA that the fundraising wing of the party remain separate from its parliamentarians in order to protect them from the perception of conflicts of interest which had been a cause of great controversy within the LPA's predecessor, the United Australia Party.[582] The latter — the commitment to Burekean representation and consequently opposition to Labor's pledge — further compounded the underdevelopment of the organisational wing's policy capacities.[583] As noted previously, by the early 1950s, Menzies in government had all but ceased to listen to the organisational wing on policy matters, instead leaving it to fundraise and organise campaigns.[584] The LPA prided itself (and still

[582] Hancock, *The Liberals*, Chapter 2.
[583] For example see Liberal Party of Australia. Committee of Review and Valder, *Facing the Facts*, 98.
[584] Hancock, *National and Permanent?*, 120.

does today) on its commitment to freedom of conscience, though in practice the party exhibits high levels of party discipline.

The LPA's electoral success, governing from 1949 to 1983 (see figure 5.1) with only a brief two and a half year interruption during the Whitlam years (1972-1975), had cemented the division of labour between the parliamentary party, responsible for settling the party's policy direction, and the organisational wing, responsible for fundraising, pre-selections and running election campaigns.

Figure 5.1 Years in government since the LPA's founding: 1944-1983



Indeed, the Whitlam years had barely been long enough for the party to undertake the prospect of assisting the parliamentary party with policy design before the LPA had returned triumphantly back to government.[585] The state branches of the party had policy committees, which deliberated throughout the Coalition's long years in government, but as Hancock has demonstrated, the ordinary member's ability to influence policy was for decades a regular source of frustration and complaint at the state level.[586] Federally, the party organisation was frozen out as early as the mid-1950s. As Marsh noted, after 23 years in government the parliamentary party had become 'so independent' of the party organisation that it was too difficult to produce an effective 'creative association' quickly.[587] The organisation committed the majority of its resources to a review of the party's platform. The result was that the party did not focus on policy development systematically

[585] Aitchison, *Looking at the Liberals*, 57–58.
[586] Hancock, *The Liberals*.
[587] Marsh, 'Policy Making in the Liberal Party', 7.

until the 1974 election.[588] At this time, the policy formation process was one of debates at party councils, tempered by the experience of the parliamentary members.[589] By 1974, the LPA was able to establish policy working parties and eventually a policy co-ordination committee designed to act as a watch dog and assistant to Opposition Leader Malcolm Fraser.[590] Upon returning to office, the party's role in policy making was confined to helping Fraser maintain his authority over the party platform.

Into the wilderness

Shortly after losing federally in 1983, the party ordered a wide-ranging review of the party organisation, its relationships with its members and MPs and the party's electoral prospects. Written by a large committee comprising both party organisational figures and parliamentarians, *Facing the Facts* (also known as the Valder Report) raised three concerns in relation to policy development and its capacity to support the federal parliamentary party in opposition.[591] First, the report's authors linked the development of a professional party organisation to the Liberal party's very survival.[592] A professional party would be better equipped to support the party in appropriate policy development.

While concluding that the federal secretariat structure was 'sound', only needing a boost to staffing levels to support the party in opposition, the report expressed concern about many of the state divisions, which they judged had not reached the same levels of professionalism as the federal secretariat.[593] The committee also called for a re-think of expectations in some state divisions that organisational staff should not have political ambitions. The report writers argued that this party norm limited the potential supply of quality staff and discouraged party members from seeking experience in a political office before pursuing a political career.[594] Last, *Facing the Facts* noted that the party's fundraising efforts tended to produce peaks and troughs in funding, which could lead to over spending in election years and leave the party struggling to run basic operations during non-election years.[595] Without matching Labor's efforts to professionalise their state branches, the

[588] Ibid., 8.
[589] Graeme Starr, 'The Party Machine', in *Looking at the Liberals*, ed. Ray Aitchison (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1974), 57–58.
[590] Marsh, 'Policy Making in the Liberal Party', 10–15.
[591] Liberal Party of Australia. Committee of Review and Valder, *Facing the Facts*, 4.
[592] Ibid., 81.
[593] Ibid., 81–82.
[594] Ibid., 84.
[595] Ibid., 84–85.

Liberal party would be ill equipped to compete with a resurgent and incumbent Labor party federally.[596]

The report's authors also expressed concern at the lack of communication between the parliamentary party, the organisation and its branches. The committee reminded parliamentarians that it was their primary responsibility to put 'the party's philosophy into practice through policies.'[597] The committee reaffirmed its commitment to Burkean representation, explicitly outlining that elected representatives' primary responsibility was to their electorates, not the party organisation.[598] Indeed, it acknowledged the parliamentary party's pre-eminence in both making final policy decisions and coming to compromise with the national party.[599] However, it was expected 'that policy judgments of the parliamentary party will be reached in accordance with Liberal principles' and that the parliamentary party was expected to fully explain the basis and rationale to the party organisation.[600] The committee added that many of the LPA's problems originated with poor communication between different levels of the party, lack of interest in the policy development processes of the state divisions, or simply ignoring ordinary party members.[601] The same complaints would be repeated after electoral defeats in 2007 and 2010.

Finally, the authors of *Facing the Facts* urged the Liberal party to take up the intellectual fight and win 'the battle of ideas' underway in Australia.[602] To do this, they called for the party to make greater use of think tanks in order to exploit high quality policy thinking and enrich that party's policy offerings.[603] Yet, adding to its troubles, the Liberal party was unclear about its philosophical direction and how to address directly the challenges of a world in which both the post-war and the original federation settlement was fraying under the strain of global competition. The report's authors glossed over this conundrum and the reality that the LPA was divided about how it should approach its future.

Thus, the loss of the 1983 election, presented a significant challenge to the LPA. At a time when policy ideas had become more important than ever to the political contest, the party found itself in opposition. While satisfied with the structure of the federal secretariat, the reality was that the secretariat was out of practice in terms of supporting the party in opposition. Yet, what the party lacked for in internal research capacity (it did not possess anything like the famous British

[596] Ibid., 81.
[597] Ibid., 97.
[598] Ibid., 98.
[599] Ibid., 98, 100.
[600] Ibid., 98.
[601] Ibid., 100–101.
[602] Ibid., 55.
[603] Ibid., 56.

Conservative Research Department, for example) it made up for with a corps of MPs invigorated by the neo-liberal turn that emerged in the late 1970s and the rise of a number of right leaning think tanks established by fellow travellers or former MPs.[604] The challenge then remained to build up internal capacity both within the parliamentary party and the federal secretariat and to manage both the development of policy ideas and to manage effectively their timing and sale to the Australian electorate. How did the LPA go about establishing its policy making infrastructure and how important was it considered by the party?

Peacock and Howard: attempts to institutionalise and professionalise policy making

After dominating government in the post-war era, the ignominy of opposition came as quite a shock for many former ministers. As reported in chapter three, many Liberals did not expect to be in opposition for long. Despite the set-back of losing office, an internal memo in October 1983 characterised the LPA's transition into opposition as an 'opportunity' which 'impose[d] the duty to examine all policy areas free of the constraints of office or of past positions.'[605] This was a chance to overturn old economic orthodoxies, which some party members felt had prevented the Fraser government from exploiting its Senate majorities in the late 1970s. Moreover, policy development during the Fraser years had been 'Spartan', because the Fraser government 'was really about restoring what would have been sound principles of government that they knew and understood from the 23 years of largely uninterrupted government.'[606] For an important minority of Liberal party members, an idealism about the neo-liberal turn fired their ambitions and provided a further impetus to win government, in addition to the drive to keep the 'irresponsible' Labor party out.

In the 1980s, the party would be dominated by two politicians. Andrew Peacock was not known for his interest in policy beyond his well-regarded expertise in foreign affairs, but had a strong popular appeal. To his supporters, such as Peter Shack, Peacock represented a 'chairman of the board' style of leadership, where he could be supported by his ministers in the party's neo-liberal policy direction, and through his public image, soften the harsh edges of the neo-liberal agenda to make it palatable to voters.[607] By contrast, John Howard cultivated an image as a policy wonk and an 'ordinary family man'. Howard was never truly of the 'new right' faction in the party (which was in fact, split between the Howard and Peacock forces), but was seen by supporters as more sympathetic and more inclined to deliver the agenda. After Howard assumed the leadership in 1985, his policy position became increasingly strident and uncompromising, alienating the moderate or

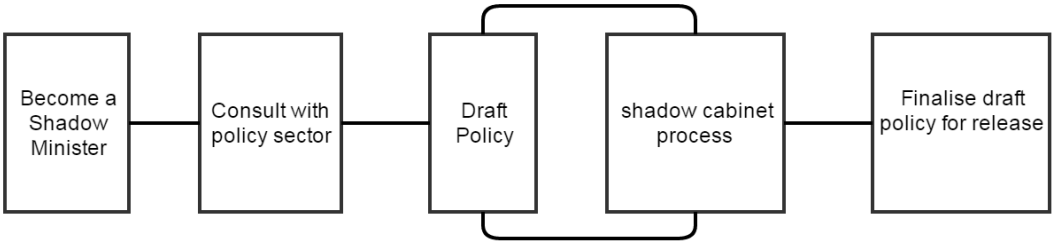
[604] Hyde, *Dry*, Chapter 4.
[605] NAA: M2239/3, 5, 'Framework for Policy Development by Shadow Ministers', October 21 1983', 1.
[606] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on February 25 2014.
[607] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on March 14 2014.

'wet' elements of the party. It is also telling that when Peacock challenged for the leadership, prominent 'dries' such as Jim Carlton, did not join Howard on the backbench.

Developing and institutionalising policy making structures and the work of shadow ministers

The party's efforts in policy making were modest and reflected a structure that mirrored the government's cabinet process, namely a shadow cabinet structure (see figure 5.2). An explicit policy review committee (PRC, later rebadged by Peacock as the Policy Implementation Committee), chaired by John Howard, was established to help the opposition co-ordinate its policies more effectively. Policy making structures were quickly established and drew upon both the parliamentary and the organisational wings.

Figure 5.2 Policy making process



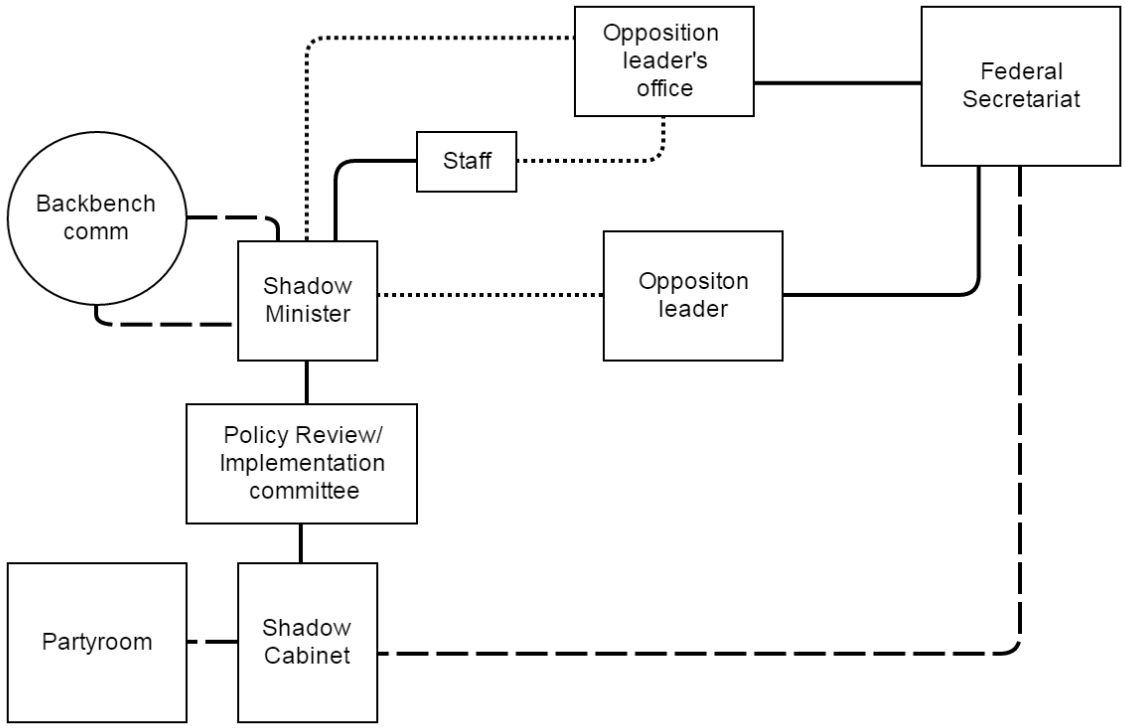
Shadow ministers were the key actors in this structure (see figure 5.3) and enjoyed considerably more autonomy than their modern counterparts. Shadow ministers were responsible for developing policy options in their portfolio area — they were expected to consult with their relevant parliamentary committee and to produce a draft policy for consideration by the PRC before it would go on for final approval by the shadow cabinet.

Policy-making for shadow ministers was an ad-hoc activity conducted by non-experts. The ad-hoc nature of policy development was compounded by the decentralised structure of the party. As a senior former shadow minister explained, the process that developed 'Liberal party policy like everything else [in the] Liberal party was very informal, so we didn't have those formalized internal debate that the Labor party has.'[608] Learning on the job was essential to policy making in opposition because 'politics demands that you be an instant expert about everything — yesterday. Clearly, you cannot.' [609] For members of the opposition, it was an iterative process, 'like being permanently at

[608] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 5 2013.
[609] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on March 10 2013.

university'.[610] For many shadow ministers their staff were vital: 'I always credit my success, such that it was, by appointing … the best people to work with me.'[611]

Figure 5.3 Individual shadow minister's policy processes and relationships



For opposition policy makers, the task was largely one of making judgments, but with inferior resources. As one senior shadow cabinet minister explained, 'on one hand I didn't really have people who knew what they were talking about except for some of the axe-grinders who were committed to one camp or another.'[612] And while some opposition members did develop expertise, the more typical experience was one of learning to manage the information available:

> I would never claim to have an original idea in my life. I would claim that I've been smart enough to recognise the good ideas and what are the bad ideas, to be, at least, a good listener, and to be able to synthesise ideas, bridge gaps.[613]

Internal consultations were also important for some shadow ministers. Although they were often ignored in internal memos, backbench committees were an important sounding board for policies.[614]

[610] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 18 2013.
[611] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on March 10 2013.
[612] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on December 20 2013.
[613] Ibid.
[614] For an example see NAA: M2239/3, 5, memo, 'Joint Standing Committee on Federal Policy: Chairman's brief for meeting on October 21 1983'.

The committee would be given near-final drafts to make comments and suggestions. Other shadow ministers shared drafts with their ideological fellow-travellers. Given policies were not so tightly held centrally, the party room also was a more important site for policy making than it is today. Policies that could not make it out of the shadow cabinet would not be 'going to the party room' for final approval. In essence the job of a shadow minister was to be 'responsible for taking the lead, but because it is always a consultative, collaborative process that needs final consensus, you're always trying to bring people with you.'[615]

Thus, policy-making was an activity made to fit in around the rest of a busy day, dominated by responding to the government's agenda. But, it 'was always in the background, [a] program that you're working on knowing that you wanted to get it done by such and such deadline.'[616] For some opposition shadows, it was an intense experience, as one shadow put it, 'I found it very lonely.'[617]

After his elevation to the leadership in September 1985, Howard continued and built upon Peacock's policy infrastructure. Within weeks of becoming leader, Howard announced new policy review arrangements. The Opposition Policy and Implementation Committee (PIC) again became the Policy Review Committee or PRC. Howard emphasised that the party's policy-making processes would remain the same: 'individual shadow ministers will of course remain responsible for the preparation of policy statements in consultation with opposition members committees and relevant sections of the party organisation.'[618] Policy statements would continue to be subject to 'approval by shadow cabinet and the joint party room before adoption as Coalition policy.'[619] The purpose of the PRC was not to undertake a major overhaul of policy but rather to develop policies further, facilitate internal dialogue between the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary wings and co-ordinate policies more thematically into portfolio areas. Over the course of his tenure as opposition leader, Howard experimented with specific ministerial sub committees such as committees to manage tax policy, and others to deal with privatisation and government waste.[620]

Howard differentiated himself from Peacock by emphasising the importance of policy to the Liberal party's overall strategy and the seriousness of the party's intent to be a responsible and credible alternative government. Howard repeatedly and earnestly claimed that the opposition would win office on the strength of their policy platform: 'when I became the Leader of the Opposition eight

[615] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on March 10 2013.
[616] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on March 10 2013.
[617] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on December 20 2013.
[618] John Howard, 'Policy Review Arrangements', Press Release, October 1 1985.
[619] Ibid.
[620] John Howard, 'Shadow Ministry', Press Release, May 1 1987; Howard, 'Policy Review Arrangements', Press Release, October 1 1985.

months ago, I promised that the opposition would not simply feed off the government's mistakes but would present itself as an alternative government.'[621]

Early in his leadership, Howard outlined that policies would be released well before the election, 'in time for the opposition to develop momentum and develop a program around those alternative policies.'[622] In mid-1986, Howard laid the markers of his philosophical framework for the Coalition's policy ideals. These focused on: 'enhancing individual freedom'; providing 'national security and promote family security'; 'encouraging enterprise and self-reliance'; 'pursuing success and excellence' and; 'showing compassion' to those 'in genuine need of help'.[623]

At the start of May 1987, Howard reduced the number of shadow ministry positions from 27 to 22. The press release announcing this claim boasted of the LPA's 'strongly held views in favour of smaller government'.[624] In reality, it was far more likely the result of attempting to deal with the mass exodus of National party members from shadow cabinet in the wake of the split in the Coalition — especially given that the shadow cabinet increased in size dramatically after the 1987 election and the restoration of the Coalition.[625]

In contrast to contemporary policy-making practices, which are explored in chapter six, policy review committees were larger and given the nature of their size and personnel, less secret. Peacock characterised his review committee as the 'real workhorse' in the party's policy making structure and even boasted that it had developed a 'healthy record of rejecting draft documents'.[626] It was a style that shadow ministers were familiar with from their time in government, but also it complemented Peacock's self-described approach to 'encourage the maximum initiative from shadow ministers in their areas.'[627] Peacock was comfortable allowing shadows to bring policy ideas to cabinet, his main concern was achieving an eventual consensus. In contrast, Howard, whose policy emphasis was stronger, did not appear to outline his expectations in writing as he would later do in government. A shadow minister at the time noted that 'I don't remember him giving me a briefing, note, but just sort of know' what would be approved by shadow cabinet.[628]

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[621] John Howard, 'Foundations for government: Address by the Hon John Howard MP Leader of the Opposition', National Press Club, Canberra, May 8 1986, 1.
[622] John Howard, 'Transcript of the Press Conference by the Hon. J.W. Howard, M.P., Leader of the Opposition', October 1, 1985, 2.
[623] Ibid., 2.
[624] Howard, 'Shadow Ministry', Press Release, May 1 1987.
[625] John Howard, 'Shadow Ministry', Press Release, August 14, 1987.
[626] Ibid.
[627] NAA: M2239/3, 20, letter, Andrew Peacock to Paul Everingham, January 24 1985.
[628] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on March 10 2013.

Howard's first policy review committee, announced in 1985, was chaired by Wal Fife, who was not a member of the shadow cabinet, let alone the leadership group. The committee had ten members, some of whom were known factional antagonists, such as Chris Puplick. After enduring the spate of leaks discussed in chapter four, Howard's policy review committee after the 1987 election was significantly smaller with only five members. It was still led by a non-shadow cabinet minister, Senator Peter Durack, reflecting that the role was likely still envisaged in a similar fashion to the one envisaged for Wal Fife — both of these politicians were able to bring 'their wide experience in government' and 'good political judgment' to the task of policy co-ordination.[629]

A policy role for the extra-parliamentary party?

In the LPA's early opposition years, Peacock attempted to consult more deeply and widely with the party organisation. Peacock's office also sought to engage with committee processes underpinning *Facing the Facts*, with the federal secretariat and his own parliamentary colleagues about how policy should be developed and how it should be used to help the LPA win government. At the end of 1983, the party's first year in opposition, Peacock acknowledged in a letter to the state division presidents and state directors that the resources that could be deployed towards policy making were 'dauntingly limited'.[630]

To further facilitate the LPA's policy making capacity, Peacock with the assistance of the federal director, Tony Eggleton, set about organising a revitalisation and strengthening the organisational wing's joint divisional policy advisory capacity. The hope was that the organisational and parliamentary party streams would flow seamlessly together, feeding the LPA's policy making machinery. The Joint Standing Committee on Federal Policy (JSCFP) drew on the party's state divisions, usually through the attendance of the LPA's state directors, to act as an advisory body for the federal party leader. At the organisational level, the policy committees of each state division would filter ideas up through to the JSCFP.[631] Now that the party was out of office, the parliamentary wing might pay more attention to the party organisation's ideas. In its first post-defeat meeting, Peacock as chair argued that it was time for the JSCFP to take on 'even greater significance' now that the party was in opposition — a statement seemingly at odds with Peacock's acknowledgement that in the past the Joint Standing Committee's role had been allowed to erode and flounder.[632] Peacock acknowledged that the state divisions had not always had an incentive to give serious input to the JSCFP and, equally, the parliamentary party had not always had an incentive to contribute seriously

[629] Howard, 'Policy Review Arrangements', Press Release, October 1 1985.
[630] NAA: M2239/2, 3, letter, Andrew Peacock to Division Presidents and State Directors, November 2, 1983, 2.
[631] NAA: , M2239/3, 5, memo, 'Joint Standing Committee on Federal Policy: Chairman's brief for meeting on October 21, 1983', 8.
[632] Ibid., 3.

to the committee either.[633] Moreover, without continuity of staff support from meeting to meeting the utility of the Joint Standing Committee was undermined.

Yet, despite Peacock and Eggleton's efforts at inclusion, Peacock's opening remarks clearly outlined the limitations of such a body and the realities and difficulties of seeking co-operation and co-ordination in a confederated party. Seeking to direct the discussion to follow, Peacock began by outlining what the JSCFP could not do. Due to its large size and the infrequency of its meetings, it could not be a drafting committee, nor could it conduct detailed analysis and research. Moreover, the JSCFP should not serve as merely a sounding board for interest groups or as simply a post box for the state divisions' views.[634] Instead, Peacock offered that the JSCFP could provide 'leadership and policy development for all sections of the Party' by identifying key issues and promoting dialogue between the state divisions and the federal party.[635] The JSCFP agreed to these measures, also acknowledging the importance of shadow ministers, and insisted on adequate consultation between the federal party and the JSCFP.[636] Nonetheless, given the limitations outlined by Peacock and acknowledged by the committee, it is hard to see how the JSCFP could act as anything other than an advisory body — at best, a better consulted post box for the latest thinking in the divisions.

As 1984 unfolded, there were increasing signs that the Hawke government would go to an early election, forcing the Coalition to scramble to finalise policies without giving shadow cabinet much time for deliberation. The task was all the more difficult because the opposition clearly lacked the resources to come up with definitive costings for their policies, instead having to settle for a 'reasonable' level of detail and couching promises for tax reform as 'when budgetary circumstances permit'.[637]

In the mid-1980s, the federal secretariat gained additional resources to support the federal parliamentary party. The party hired the deputy director of the National Farmers' Federation, David Trebeck, to head up a modest policy unit. The federal secretariat also became more alert to the political communication dimensions of policy development. A submission to Peacock's office, drawn up by the federal secretariat, advised that existing policies should act as a benchmark for further development by shadows ministers and that they [shadow ministers] should look out for initiatives that would demonstrate that the party was 'lively and active'.[638] Just as it had counselled in the

[633] Ibid.
[634] Ibid., 4.
[635] Ibid.
[636] NAA: M2239/3, 5, memo, 'Liberal Party of Australia Standing Committee on Federal Policy, Federal Secretariat, Canberra, Friday 21 October 1983', 2.
[637] NAA: M1198/3, 11, memo, Brian Jeffriess, 'Costing Our Policies', October 18 1984.
[638] NAA: M2239/3, 5, memo, Tony Eggleton, 'Policy Development', December 11 1984, 1.

weeks after the 1983 election that not every government statement requires a response, the federal secretariat argued that that there was 'considerable merit' in not issuing policies quickly, instead leaving shadow ministers free to announce initiatives either closer to the election or at times which would be politically advantageous to the party.[639] This concept will be further explored in chapter seven.

Senators' and MPs' responses to policy institutionalisation

Parliamentary members also had ideas about how policy should be developed from the early days of the LPA's transition into opposition. Their concerns and suggestions largely related to the efficacy of the policy making process. David Hamer, a backbencher, wrote to his leader worried that a lack of consistency across policy areas would undermine the Coalition's credibility and suggested nine questions against which policies should be tested.[640] Examples of the questions suggested included: will it reduce government spending; could this function be performed by the private sector or the states; and, will the policy encourage a stable communities and families? John Spender, then in the outer shadow ministry and writing in the wake of the 1984 election, called for the LPA to stake out positions on policy as soon as possible in order to establish a clear message for the electorate and to make more use of outside advisors.[641] Spender also argued for more rigour internally, suggesting an early to mid-term policy review process which would put shadows on notice to perform and implied that weaker performers should be replaced.[642]

Meanwhile, Ian Macphee, a former cabinet minister and shadow cabinet member, argued that the LPA needed the capacity to develop policy across both state and federal levels as many of the issues the LPA sought to address were deeply intertwined with state policies and law. In Macphee's own portfolio area, industrial relations, he argued:

> it is absurd for the Federal Government to be offering job subsidies and depreciation allowances for the installation of new technology when state government policies are discouraging employment and inducing the replacement of people by technology. Our Small Business Policy will make no impact unless we can demonstrate a capacity to work with state governments to reduce these aspects of unit labour costs.[643]

Peacock responded to Macphee's ideas with interest, indicating that he envisaged a federal-state committee which would give the LPA a 'consistent national stance' on payroll tax, workers'

[639] NAA: M2239/2, 21, letter, Graham Wynn to Tony Eggleton, Copied to Nick Minchin and Andrew Peacock, April 15, 1983; NAA: M2239/3, 5, memo, Tony Eggleton, 'Policy Development', December 11 1984, 1.
[640] NAA: M2239/2, 5, letter, David Hamer to Liberal Party Colleagues, April 4 1984.
[641] NAA: M2239/3, 18, letter, John Spender to Andrew Peacock, attention of Brian Jeffriess, December 5 1984.
[642] NAA: M2239/3, 18, letter, John Spender to Andrew Peacock 'The next three years', December 11 1984.
[643] NAA: M1198/3, 7, letter, Ian Macphee to Andrew Peacock, June 7 1984.

compensation, industrial relations, trading hours, apprenticeships and childcare.[644] However, the problem continued. The party simply lacked the internal party infrastructure or the will to organise this level of inter-party policy organisation.

Internal discussions about the role of policy were part of a larger strategic discussion about how to sell the party to the electorate. Questions of timing were seen as just as important, and sometimes more so, than questions of content, especially in discussions about the broader strategic approach of the opposition. Yet, policy, or the appearance of sound policy, was still seen as an important step in establishing the opposition's credibility as an alternative government. In March 1985, Peacock launched the Policy and Implementation Committee (PIC), which built on the agenda of the PRC and the policy platform laid out at the 1984 election. The PIC not only considered policy but would also devise 'implementation strategies' and design and prepare 'an agenda of priority action for a Coalition government'.[645] In his press release, Peacock declared that 'a clear sighted vision for Australia is not enough', arguing that 'a divorce between policy and implementation can compromise the realisation of the Coalition's goals just as seriously as a gap between philosophy and policy.'[646] Failure to plan adequately for government would mean 'timetables slip and objectives become too difficult to achieve', the result being that 'the public servant becomes the master'.[647] However, it is difficult to trace and assess the work of the PIC as Peacock lost the leadership of the LPA in September 1985.

The Hewson experiment

When Dr John Hewson took over the leadership in the shadow of the LPA's defeat in the 1990 election, he told the party room that 'we ha[d] zero policy credibility' because of double counting errors in the LPA's tax policy in the 1987 election and the Coalition's decision not to announce an health policy in 1990.[648] Hewson's solution was to overhaul the party's policy making processes and to offer a comprehensive policy manifesto for the next decade.[649]

Unlike previous leaders, who had given their shadows more autonomy to set the policy agenda within their portfolios (depending on the shadow and the area involved this might be entirely at their own discretion or with a clear idea of what outcome the leader might want), Hewson demanded a higher level of engagement from not only his shadow cabinet, but also his backbench. Hewson achieved this in multiple ways. First, he used previously successful strategies such as

[644] NAA: M2239/2, 10, letter, Andrew Peacock to Ian Macphee, August 24 1984.
[645] NAA: M2239/3, 5, press release, 'Policy and Implementation Committee', March 16, 1985, 1.
[646] Ibid., 2.
[647] Ibid.
[648] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 6 2013.
[649] Kelly, *The End of Certainty*, 347, 519; Abjorensen, *John Hewson*, 156–57.

organising a weekend-away seminar — for example to Thredbo in 1984. 'The Way Ahead' seminar series was geared towards thinking about how the party could manage its policy-making processes, resource management, internal discipline and its parliamentary performance and tactics rather than what the party stood for.[650] The process was like a primary school class setting their own class rules at the beginning of term.

The policy development and strategic objectives working group came up with 31 recommendations to improve the party's policy making processes, many suggestions were motherhood statements about the need for backbenchers to be more involved in policy work and for shadow ministers to make a greater effort to liaise with their backbench committees.[651] The working group also considered the role of co-ordination, and better pooling together the research capacities of the opposition.[652] In a provocative suggestion, the working group also called for chairs and members of committees to be appointed on the basis of merit, rather than having reserved positions for each party in the Coalition.[653]

Second, Hewson established a Policy Development and Co-ordination Committee (PDCC) under the chairmanship of Jim Carlton. It operated differently from its predecessors, as Hewson considered the previous arrangement 'a bit of a shambles' and not a 'serious' process, where only 'some of them [shadow ministers] used experts, some of them wrote what they thought. [And] not a lot of data' was used.[654] Liberals from that period do not dispute that Hewson's expectations of his shadow cabinet were higher than those of previous leaders. As one long-serving Liberal argued, it was 'the only time in which I consider that there had been a thorough and a professional approach to policy development.'[655]

Hewson's processes were significantly more demanding on shadow ministers, giving them more structure and requiring them to think more analytically. Early in his term, Hewson asked shadow cabinet to write to him, via the PDCC, outlining their goals for their shadow portfolios. This was the first of many requests to shadow ministers which forced them to think in a more structured and analytical fashion than they had been used to. Responses differed according to the skills, styles and priorities of each individual shadow minister. For example Peter Reith as shadow treasurer and deputy leader conceived of his role as providing leadership to the party, and to assist Hewson to develop a narrative about the Hawke government. One of his suggestions included preparing and

[650] NAA: M3417, 861, report, 'The policy development and strategic objectives', May 1 1990.
[651] Ibid., 1.
[652] Ibid., 2-3.
[653] Ibid., 1.
[654] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 6 2013.
[655] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on February 25 2014.

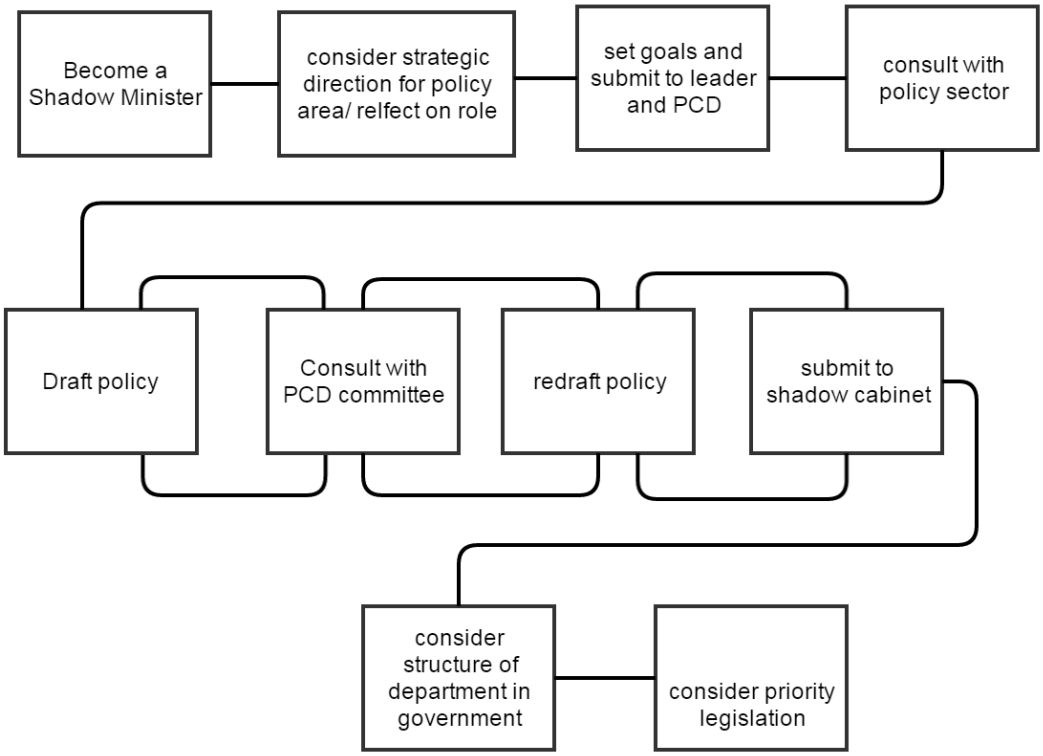
releasing a series of papers which would highlight the government's 'negatives' every six to eight weeks. Reith argued that it would be 'good resource material for all members of the Coalition', and 'enable us [the Coalition] to better sell our message to the public'.[656]

Some shadow ministers, due to the nature of their portfolios, were more focused on establishing clear lines of responsibility and policy territory, where policy areas overlapped. Jim Short, the shadow finance minister, focused his capacity on providing support to both Hewson and Reith and to quickly establishing the ground rules for how the Economic Review Committee would operate under a Hewson leadership.[657] Fred Chaney, the shadow environment minister, offered a broad analysis of environmental politics and how it related to the Coalition. He argued that the Coalition's position between pro-development groups and environmental groups had led to a situation where the Coalition had lost its credibility despite a serious effort at developing a comprehensive policy for the 1990 election.[658] Reflecting his skills as an effective harvester and communicator of ideas, Chaney's strategy was fourfold: first, to withdraw from damaging daily conflicts with interested parties as it only reinforced the false impression that the Coalition was anti-environment; to place the emphasis on selling an environmental policy on questions of fact rather than jurisdictional issues; to broker a deal between the LPA and the National party; and, to personal build links with the third parties involved and the wider community.[659]

As noted, Hewson's new shadow ministry structure and process (see figure 5.4) represented a significant departure from past practices with an emphasis on rigour and multiple stages of internal (parliamentary party) consultation and drafting.[660] For Hewson, 'the whole idea was to make them accountable for the development of serious policy.'[661] Moreover, Hewson's expectation was that they be able to 'really start with a blank piece of paper: in some cases, we are going to have to just amend the existing system, but in other cases … we are starting from scratch [the surface] what should it look like?'[662]

[656] NAA: M3729/1, Box 39, Folder 9, memo, Peter Reith to Dr John Hewson, May 1 1990, 3.
[657] NAA: M3729/1, Box 39, Folder 9, memo, Jim Short to Dr John Hewson, May 1 1990, 2.
[658] NAA: Series M3729/1, Box 39, Folder 9, memo, Fred Chaney to Dr John Hewson, circa May 1990, 1-2.
[659] Ibid., 2-3.
[660] However, as this study has had limited access to archival materials from this period, the findings in this section should be treated as tentative, requiring further conformation through an examination of Hewson's papers. This study has had access to Jim Carlton's papers and Fred Chaney's papers from this era. It has also had the benefit of interviews with participants at the time.
[661] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on July 11 2013.
[662] Ibid.

Figure 5.4 Hewson policy process and structures



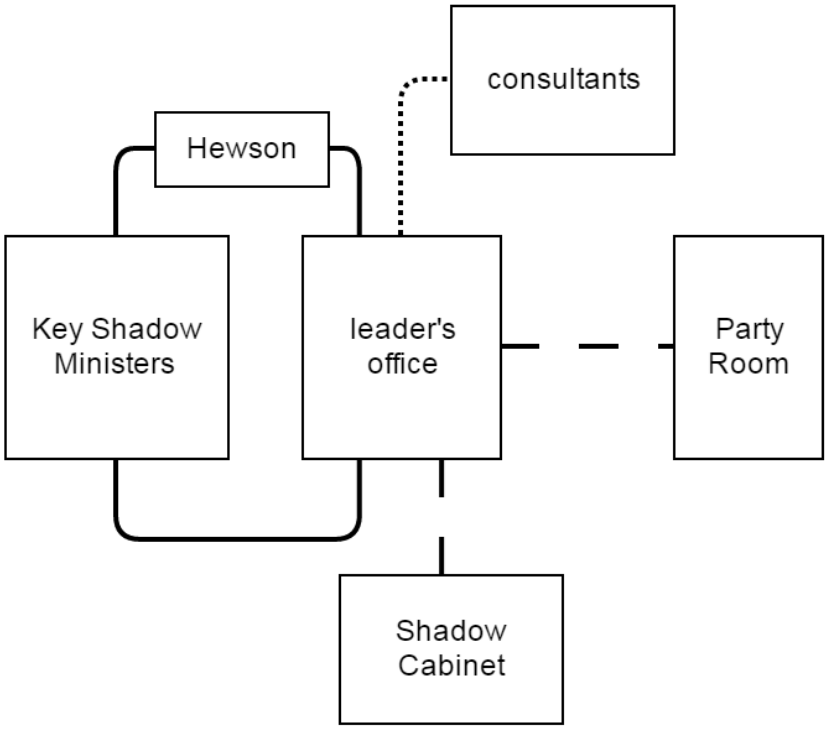
Hewson divided shadows into seven policy groupings and expected shadows to discuss and streamline policies in overlapping policy areas, such as aged care and health. The PDCC regularly wrote to shadows asking them to identify policy goals and consider the implementation of their policies in a more structured and specific way than previously. For example, the opposition under Hewson established a grassroots information gathering exercise asking members of the public to write to the party to outline their vision for Australia by the year 2000. The results of this exercise were released in 1991 as the *Australia 2000* document. Shadows were also asked to outline their portfolio areas in terms of short term and long term goals, including the party's goals for the year 2000. As head of the PDCC, Carlton's office collated all the shadow ministers' responses. Collected together, most shadows were able to identify current issues and to develop a medium term response, but many found it difficult to articulate a goal for the year 2000.[663]

Running parallel to this process was the development of *Fightback!* (see figure 5.5). The policy manifesto was formulated by a small group, including Hewson, Peter Reith and David Kemp along with a small group of support staff, late at night after the main business of the parliamentary day had been done. The result was the most comprehensive policy document in Australian political history since Whitlam's platform. *Fightback!* was more than simply a tax reform package — it was

[663] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 6 2013.

also grounded in a clear and powerful articulation of liberal philosophy largely driven by David Kemp.[664]

Figure 5.5 The *Fightback!* process



The *Fightback!* process typified a greater level of centralisation than ever seen before in the LPA. Part of this was due to the nature of the policy package. Because 'it was an integrated proposition, more so than what you would normally see, or have ever seen since … every policy aspect [had to] be drafted', then it needed 'to be examined for consistency with the entire package'.[665] *Fightback!* also drew extensively on outside advice, because as Hewson put it ,'we're not the repository of all wisdom'. Moreover, the party was embarking on such a significant policy shift that they needed to be 'as professional as we could' in order to withstand the inevitable criticism and political attacks.[666] The decision to release the policy mid-term was made in order to 'garner full support or as much support as possible'; moreover, 'from the point of view of treating the electorate in the way it should be treated, well it was a decision that really was irrefutable.'[667]

[664] Liberal Party of Australia and National Party of Australia, *Fightback!: The Way to Rebuild and Reward Australia: Executive Summary* (Canberra: Liberal-National Coalition, 1991), 26–29, http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/library/partypol/1281707/upload_binary/1281707.pdf;fileType=application/pdf#search=%221990s%201991%20liberal-national%20coalition%22.
[665] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on July 11 2013.
[666] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 6 2013.
[667] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on July 11 2013.

The centralisation that *Fightback!* represented was part of a slow trend within the party. The resources concentrated around the leader's office also built on the party's habit of defining itself philosophically by the values and beliefs of its leader. Over the 1980s, the party shifted from a process where policy was 'largely done through the shadow cabinet', where papers were circulated by shadow ministers and were 'discussed and finalised', to a situation where 'by the time we got to *Fightback!* most of that was done in the leader's office.'[668] This policy process also had implications for internal political debate and discussions because 'the confidentiality of the package [*Fightback!*] was such a crucial element of it. That confidentiality would have inhibited debate within the party about it [*Fightback!*].'[669]

However, the escalation in centralisation during the Hewson years was also the result of the circumstances in which the LPA found itself in 1990, and the personal qualities and formidable policy skills of Dr Hewson. Years of leadership tension between Andrew Peacock and John Howard, coupled with a noisy public debate about the LPA's future philosophical approach, created the impression of a divided and disorganised party. With the Coalition split in 1987, and serious policy missteps in both the 1987 and 1990 campaigns, the party entered the 1990s already having spent seven years in opposition — the longest such period in the party's history. Critically, Hewson's leadership represented an opportunity for the LPA to put the damaging Peacock-Howard rivalry behind it; but also, Hewson, with his long record as an advocate for economic reform, embodied the spirit of the times and the ascension of the dry position within the LPA, which will be explored further in chapter eight. The combination of these factors and Hewson's skills as an economist enabled him to impose his own vision upon the Liberal party with little vocalised internal criticism or dissent.

However, not everyone supported Hewson's approach and some were even alienated. Neil Brown decided to exit politics after noting that the nature of the work had changed.[670] Peter Shack, Peter Baume and Fred Chaney all announced their retirements at or before the 1993 election. But for the majority of members, Hewson's initial political success to critically weaken Hawke's prime ministership, made the Coalition eager to go along with his vision and approach. *Fightback!* was a significant policy achievement and also a major achievement of organisation and co-ordination for a party in opposition. Policy on this scale 'was done once and it's never been done in quite the same

[668] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on February 25 2014.
[669] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on July 15 2013.
[670] Abjorensen, *John Hewson*, 149, 159.

way' since.[671] The whole process was also a major exercise in skilling-up ordinary Liberal parliamentary party members:

> The Coalition in opposition in 1993 was like a university education in politics and economics, because they all had to learn it. They had to be able to know what to say when you stand in front of a group of pensioners and tell them that the price of bananas is going up by ten per cent. ... I think a lot of people in the Coalition learned more about economics and politics in those three years than most of them, half of them had ever known.[672]

Indeed, the 'Hewson experiment' was the high water mark of the Coalition's emphasis on practising positive opposition. But it was ultimately unsuccessful. Still, the model of a centralised office remained attractive to future leaders — a factor which will be explored in greater detail in chapters six and eight.

Downer and Howard: walking back from *Fightback!*

Alexander Downer became leader in 1994 after Hewson's leadership collapsed. His tenure in the leadership was brief and quickly marred by political missteps and gaffs. There was only time to walk away from the more radical elements of *Fightback!* and to produce *The Things That Matter*, a policy book in line with *Future Directions*, which restated much of the Liberal party's philosophy from the late 1980s onwards. Howard's own tenure in the leadership in the lead-up to the 1996 election has been covered in detail elsewhere.[673] Howard, having learnt from successive failures throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, de-emphasised policy and instead highlighted values and gave a general outline of a Howard government's intent to govern in a series of headland speeches. This is elaborated on a little further in chapter seven.

Critically, many of the key figures such as Andrew Robb, federal director from 1990-1998, former deputy federal director and South Australian state director, Nick Minchin, and Tony Abbott as a media advisor to John Hewson, would go on to become key actors in the LPA's most recent period of opposition (2007-2013). As either first hand observers of, or participants in, the Hewson experiment and its eventual failure to win the 'unlosable election', the lessons they garnered from the experience are evident in the Abbott-led opposition's highly disciplined small target strategy, which is explored in the next chapter. This, coupled with the LPA's upgrading of its political research and party machine along with and the retention of key figures like Andrew Robb, Mark Textor and Brian

[671] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on February 25 2014.
[672] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on July 11 2013.
[673] Williams, *The Victory*; Manne, *The Howard Years*.

Loughnane and their institutional memory would prove to be a critical factor in the LPA's 2013 election victory.[674]

The LPA 1983-1996: a positive interpretation of opposition

Until losing the 1993 election, the Liberal party placed greater emphasis on acknowledging the tension between the positive and negative roles of opposition and the challenge of managing the party's policy goals and its desire to win the next election. This had two aspects: 'confronting the government', which Coalition parliamentarians considered 'very tactical'; and, 'over time developing your own alternatives.' This was 'more strategic' and played out during 'debate[s] about the detail, [and] general direction' of the opposition.[675]

During the 1980s, the LPA's leaders, particularly Hewson and Howard, often explicitly embraced a positive model of opposition: 'The role of an opposition is not merely to criticise but also to propose and prepare for government.'[676] Howard made a virtue of his emphasis on policy: 'people knew what I stood for' and they 'said to me, "well, you know, love you or leave you, we know what you believe in."'[677] It was a deliberate strategy for Howard: 'I always kept trying, while I was opposition leader, to have an attitude, [to] have a position. It cost me a lot of support on various occasions.' For Howard, his difficulties as leader at that time did not stem from his insistence on policy, but because 'I ended up leader [in 1985] by accident, and it was always a problem.'[678]

For shadow ministers engaged and motivated by the policy debate in the 1980s and 1990s, there was an awareness of the changing policy paradigm. In an address to the press club in 1986, Howard articulated this ethos: 'the next Liberal and National party government will be far different from any of our predecessors, which is not to denigrate the performance of previous Coalition governments', but to acknowledge the 'dramatically different challenges that will now require quite different solutions' and 'we will face the task of shaping an Australia in a world in many ways far different from that which Australians lived' in the past.[679] It was for this reason that Howard repeatedly stated that he did not intend to win office 'by default'.

The pre-1996 opposition constantly struggled to manage the tension between supporting the government's policy proposals, where they were considered to be in the national interest, and the opposition's natural instinct to oppose government. Liberals, such as Peter Shack, who had

[674] See Williams, *The Victory*.
[675] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 5 2013.
[676] Howard, 'Foundations for government', 1.
[677] Ibid.
[678] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 13 2013.
[679] Ibid., 13.

supported the Hawke government's agenda in the 1980s, argued that 'the success of the Hawke-Keating years was because it had a rational opposition — a rational opposition that often supported the government when there was no rational reason not to. '[680] As Fred Chaney elaborated, 'we essentially did not try to destroy economic reforms even though they were, as most economic reforms are, unpopular.'[681] This course of action was perceived to be costly to the Coalition's overall electoral chances. As Jim Carlton explained, 'a lot of people would accuse me of keeping us in opposition for 13 years.' But for Carlton it was a worthwhile trade-off despite criticism from:

> people who were saying, people who were hard political operators and not so interested in policy. You need those people, but if you allow them to operate in what we regard as an unprincipled way, just to get a political advantage, well then, that's dreadful.[682]

Indeed, Chaney recalled that Carlton would often say to colleagues that 'the first task is to get the right answer and the second task is to work out how to sell it.' Today, Chaney feels that 'we appear to have descended into a process where too often it is what can we sell.'[683]

However, we should also be cautious about viewing the past with rose-tinted glasses. There were many instances in the mid-1980s when the opposition was not constructive. The party successfully campaigned against the pensions assets test at the 1984 election, opposed a tax on gold, opposed the petroleum resource rent tax and refused to participate in the tax summit — all policy processes which produced lasting economic reforms and were not reversed by future governments.

Despite these caveats, it remains broadly true that the Coalition during the 1980s supported the Hawke-Keating government in its reform agenda. As Hawke and Keating moved economically to the right, in effect dragging the left faction along with them, the Coalition was an important element in ensuring reforms were passed.[684] But Labor's drift is what also made support for their policy agenda possible in the first place. Had the Hawke government not moved into the ideological space of the Coalition, then the opposition's approach in parliament would have been different. In this way we can see that the Coalition's approach to opposition is contingent on external factors as much as on internal dynamics and preferences.

[680] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on March 10 2013.
[681] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 18 2013.
[682] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on December 6 2012.
[683] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 18 2013.
[684] For a theoretical conception of this point see McCaffrie, 'Understanding the Success of Presidents and Prime Ministers'.

Conclusion

In the pre-1996 period, the Liberal party in opposition was interested in alternative policy ideas, both at the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary level. Policy was seen as important domain in which to invest time and resources. Moreover, the opposition understood its role in positive terms — it was not enough to win government 'by default'. Shadow ministry processes largely mirrored structures that existed in government and policy making was often an ad-hoc exercise. Hewson as leader imposed a new structure and new standards on shadow ministers, raising the bar of professionalism considerably. He also centralised policy making into his own office, to better manage the complex and integrated nature of *Fightback!*. Politicians from the 1983-1996 era, particularly if they did not go on to serve in the Howard government, remained idealistic about the virtues of their pursuit of policy, which is probably the result of deep convictions and a way of salvaging greater meaning out of their long winter in opposition. The next chapter will explore how policy was formulated in the post-2007 opposition era.

Chapter 6
Managing policy 2007-2013

Introduction

This chapter examines how the Coalition in opposition managed its policy processes in the post-2007 era. First, it examines how oppositions lose governing experience and institutional memory over time and how this interacts with party renewal. Second, it examines the policy process adopted by the opposition in the post-2007 period and compares the approaches to opposition under Brendan Nelson, Malcolm Turnbull and Tony Abbott. The aim of this comparison is to explore the relationship between policy and the leader's authority. The argument of the chapter is that Abbott was able to manage policy disputes because he maintained his authority over the party due to the extra-ordinary circumstances of the hung parliament. It further argues that the Coalition's approach to opposition in the post-2007 period was largely negative, focused on destroying the government's credibility. Finally, it concludes that there are five purposes to policy-making for the opposition: as an exercise in self-definition, to establish credibility to govern, to foster internal party discipline, to invite third party support and to help define the values of the leader.

Into opposition again

In contrast to the way in which many members characterised the Fraser government's election defeat in 1983, few Coalition members felt that the government had 'deserved' to lose in 2007. Given the healthy state of the Australian economy, and the Howard government's general record of good management, Coalition members were frustrated that the government was going to lose the 2007 election to Labor's Kevin Rudd who had built his success on presenting himself as 'the son of Howard' (or as 'Howard lite'). When defeat finally came, there was some debate about the reason for the Howard government's loss, with many siding with a more conservative interpretation of a combination of 'it's time' factors and political overreach typified by *Workchoices*.[685] However a smaller group argued that the Coalition had lost as a result of a broader range of issues, including climate change and identity politics as discussed in chapter three.[686]

The second difference is the state of the party machine. Like in 1983, long years in government saw the federal secretary's general support and policy machinery erode. Indeed, as Errington has argued, Howard had effectively neglected to take on the difficult reform process from a position of

[685] *Liberals and Power*.
[686] George Brandis, 'John Howard and the Australian Liberal Tradition', in *Liberals and Power: The Road Ahead*, ed. Peter Van Onselen (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 2008).

strength.[687] Tony Staley and Peter Reith reviewed the party in the wake of election defeats in 2007 and 2010, and their observations are canvassed below.

Policy and the post-Howard era: the party organisation's response

Familiar problems were highlighted by three party reports that appeared after 2007, most notably calls for reforms to the structure of the party to better facilitate the party organisation's involvement in decisions, including policy. In his 2008 report, Tony Staley rejected internal calls for the expansion of the federal executive, which it was argued did not have a wide enough focus.[688] Staley instead recommended that the federal executive be granted additional reserve powers to intervene in troublesome divisions and, in an indication of its low levels of activity, that it meet at least four times a year.[689]

Writing three years later, Reith began his report by directly quoting the Staley Report and the 2010 Leeser Report on Tasmania (and noted several other neglected reports from the late 1990s and 2000s), observing that many of the recommendations had not been implemented and remained relevant.[690] Reith's concerns stemmed from his assessment that the federal party organisation had become 'principally a campaign unit'.[691] This meant that it was failing to maintain proper internal processes and even failing to adhere to its own constitution by maintaining a dialogue with the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary wings.[692] Reith supported Staley's calls for constitutional changes that would give the party a more national focus and linked these increased powers to more policy activism on the part of the federal organisation and the state divisions.[693]

In terms of policy-making, Staley's report did not express the same level of concern and anxiety about the party's policy direction as had been the case in *Facing the Facts*. Underlying Staley's conclusions was the feeling that 'the Coalition had many excellent policies' and that it was the government's failure to link policies to 'a broader theme or vision' that was the key problem.[694] Indeed, Staley's recommendations in the policy sphere related largely to campaign teething problems: more co-ordination between policy units and campaign units, policies were too lengthy and not easily adaptable for campaign purposes and that announcements need to be better co-

[687] Errington, 'The Liberal Party: Electoral Success despite Organisational Drift'.
[688] Tony Staley, 'Review of the 2007 Federal Election Campaign & Review of the Liberal Party Federal Constitution' (Liberal Party of Australia, September 2008), 19.
[689] Ibid., 19–20.
[690] Peter Reith, 'Review of the 2010 Federal Election' ([Canberra?]: Liberal Party Australia, 25 May 2011), 9–13.
[691] Ibid., 23.
[692] Ibid., 23–24.
[693] Ibid., 24.
[694] Staley, 'Review of the 2007 Federal Election Campaign & Review of the Liberal Party Federal Constitution', 7.

ordinated.[695] Staley called for more resources to be given to (and donors to be directed to) the Menzies Research Centre, which would help build up the party's internal policy-making capacity.[696]

Reith was far more concerned about the state of policy-making within the Liberal party's organisational wing, and by inference, the parliamentary party. He reported with alarm that the party's advisory committee on federal policy had not met for years.[697] Stressing the importance of policy-making, he urged the extra-parliamentary party to assertively re-insert itself into the parliamentary party's policy processes.[698] While Reith was careful to acknowledge the parliamentary party's primacy in policy-making, he judged that concerns about leaks were not acceptable reasons for meetings not to have agendas or for the failure to circulate papers beforehand.[699]

Reith argued that a more active role by the party machine in policy-making was an important way to revitalise the party's membership decline. In an echo of *Facing the Facts* 27 years earlier, Reith revealed that the party even lacked the protocols to send out a party-wide email and that many on the executive felt like strangers within their own party, such was the lack of contact and exchange with the parliamentary party.[700] Yet, Reith's calls for broader involvement of the membership in policy-making were really confined to the executive echelons of the party. The rank and file's involvement in policy-making would be limited to having a broad enough membership base in order to select well qualified and representative candidates.[701] The party organisation should have a greater say in the parliamentary party's policy offerings, but it should remain a heavily mediated discussion that filtered up through to the elite decision-makers. Although Reith's recommendations were accepted by Tony Abbott as leader, it appears that his report suffered the same fate as those that had come before. They were praised and then largely ignored.

At the time of writing, there are no current reports on the state of the federal party. However, the 2015 report *Good Government for Victoria* is a comprehensive examination of the party at that state level and explicitly discusses managing opposition.[702] Strikingly, policy work in the opposition context is mentioned in only two aspects. First, it is mentioned in the form of a recommendation to hold regular round-tables with members of the business community and other relevant policy interest

[695] Ibid., 8.
[696] Ibid., 17.
[697] Reith, 'Review of the 2010 Federal Election', 12.
[698] Ibid., 13.
[699] Ibid., 24–25.
[700] Ibid., 26.
[701] Ibid., 28.
[702] Liberal Party of Australia (Victorian Division), 'Good Government for Victoria: Review of the 2014 State Election' (Melbourne: Liberal Party of Australia (Victorian Division), 2015).

groups.[703] Second, the report recommended the development of key performance indicators for shadow ministers, though the exact criteria remained unspecified.[704] Instead, the Victorian report is overwhelmingly concerned with narrative building, management and communication and campaigning strategies for the opposition.[705] Given the analysis to follow below and particularly in chapter eight, it is likely that were a similar report to be written at the federal level the emphasis would be the same.

Before examining the nature of policy-making by the parliamentary party in the post-2007 years, it is important to examine the impact that institutional memory loss and the erosion of ministerial experience and skills has on the opposition.

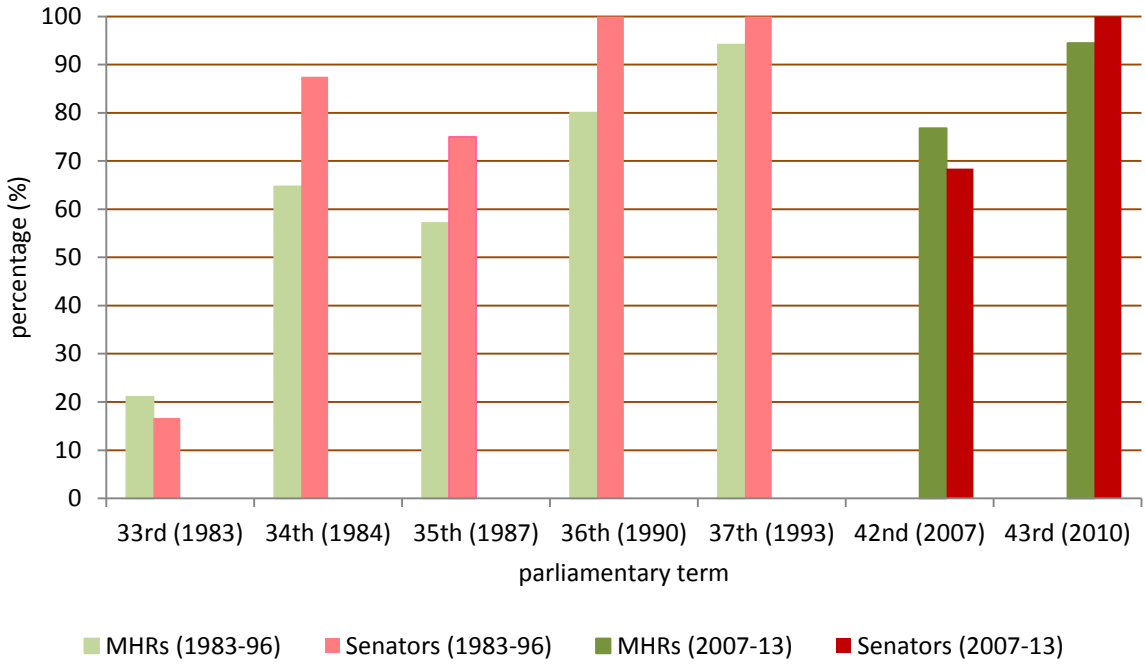
Institutional memory loss and the erosion of ministerial skills

A significant problem facing oppositions is the gradual erosion of governmental experience and ministerial skills in its parliamentary executive. Outside of ministerial experience, the opposition shadow ministry is a key training ground for future ministers. For parties that spend a long time in opposition, it is likely the only training and experience they will gain for their future responsibilities as ministers.[706]

Figure 6.1 demonstrates the stark impact of successive election losses on the ability of politicians to survive periods of opposition and carry through their experience and institutional memories. Of those that entered opposition in 1983, only 21 per cent of MPs and 17 per cent of senators returned to government in 1996. This is a significantly lower return rate than for those that entered the next year in 1984, where their chance stood at 65 per cent for MPs and at 87 per cent for senators. In contrast, for those who entered opposition in 2007, 77 per cent of MPs and 68 per cent of senators returned to office. The large difference in survival chance between the 1983 cohort and the 1984 cohort speaks to the large-scale loss of governmental experience by the Coalition by the time of their return to government in 1996. In 2013, the Coalition had experience in relatively less turnover, particularly in the House of Representatives.

[703] Ibid., 85.
[704] Ibid., 84.
[705] Ibid., 78, 81–82, 85–90.
[706] Tiernan and Weller, *Learning to Be a Minister*, Chapters 2 and 3.

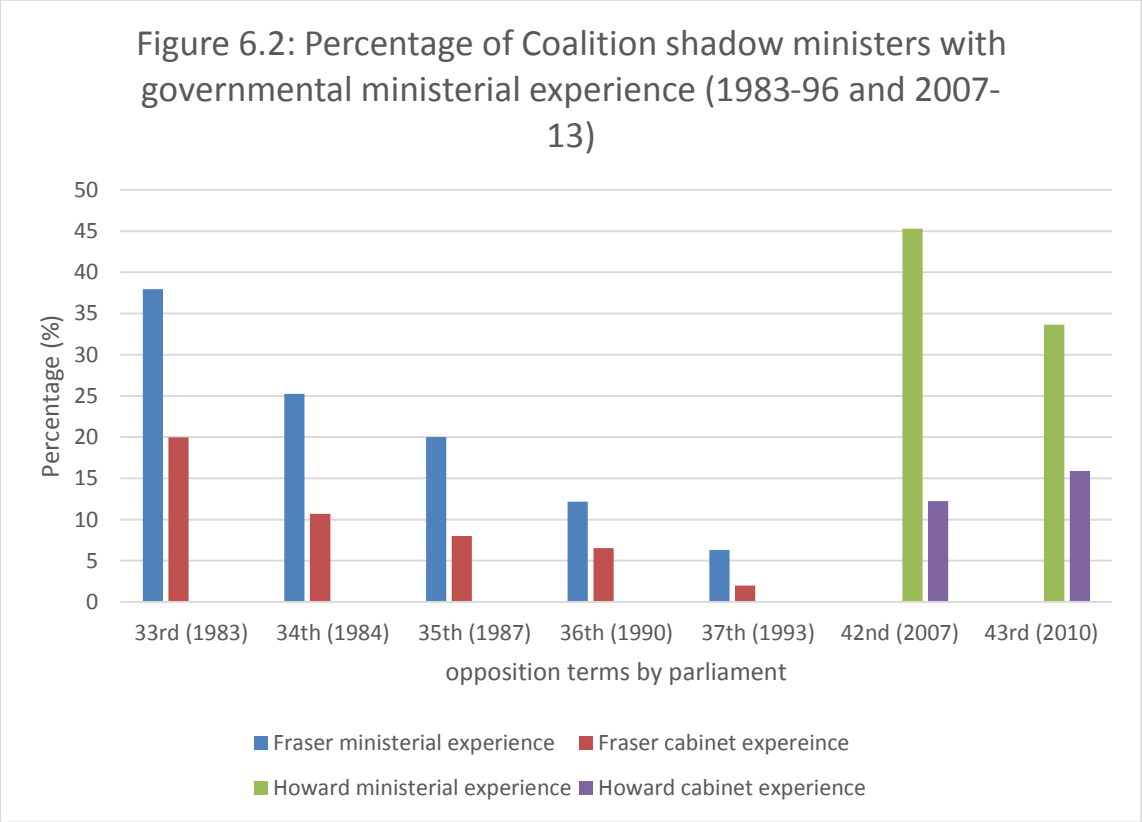
Figure 6.1: Percentage chance of Coalition members surviving opposition to government by first year serving in opposition (1983-1996 and 2007-2013)



The situation is more striking still when we consider ministerial experience. In 1983, 38 per cent of the Coalition party room had ministerial experience in the Fraser government and 20 per cent also had cabinet experience (figure 6.2). By 1993, ministerial experience had deteriorated to just six per cent of the Coalition party room and Less than five per cent had cabinet experience. The figure was lower still in 1996, with only two memebrs of the incoming government — Howard and John Moore — having any ministerial experience at the federal level.

As figure 6.2 demonstrates, extended periods out of office steadily erode the overall experience levels of the opposition. As figure 6.1 demonstrates, the trend line of politicians with ministerial experience leaving politics was consistent between 1983 and 1993. However, the Coalition was reasonably successful in retaining Coalition parliamentarians with cabinet experience after the initial wave of retirements at the 1984 election. As discussed in chapter three it is important for parties to engage in renewal of personnel. Importantly, the above figure does not capture the fact that some members are forcibly removed from parliament through pre-selection contests, nor does it capture the slower rates of turnover amongst senators due to their six-year terms. However, it does demonstrate that four terms in opposition proved to be the significant threshold for most Liberal parliamentarians with cabinet experience to leave politics. Many of those who stayed on after the

defeat in 1990, who had also been important and influential figures, such as Fred Chaney, Peter Shack, Jim Carlton and Andrew Peacock, chose to retire at the 1993 election or soon after.



By contrast, between 2007 and 2013, the Coalition was able to carry through high levels of ministerial experience into its next government. Forty-five per cent of the Coalition had some experience in the Howard ministry, however, there remained considerably less cabinet experience (only 12 per cent). In fact, as other Coalition parliamentarians retired at the 2010 election, the proportion of those with experience of the Howard cabinet increased to 15 per cent while the ministry's overall ministerial experience fell to 34 per cent.

High retention rates were overwhelmingly a product of the Coalition's short time in opposition in the post-2007 era. Another important factor was Tony Abbott's approach to managing his shadow cabinet, which emphasised continuity. After failing to form government in 2010, Tony Smith was the only high profile demotion from the frontbench as a result of the Coalition's poor performance in the communications portfolio. Abbott's strategy was to resist engaging in any major reshuffles during the course of his leadership and thus avoid upsetting colleagues. Abbott even refrained from using the Gillard government's change to ministerial numbers (limiting the size of the ministry to 30) as an opportunity to remove two shadow ministers.[707]

[707] Peter Van Onselen, 'Abbott Should Prune Frontbench Dead Wood', *The Australian*, March 17 2012.

While this meant that Abbott's shadow cabinet had a high level of ministerial experience, it was, as many commentators — most notably Peter Van Onselen — argued, ultimately a lost opportunity. The failure to promote new talent bred frustration amongst the many younger and talented members of the Liberal party room. Abbott did attempt to provide talented younger MPs with opportunities to develop skills by involving them in taskforces and small policy initiatives, such as Jamie Briggs' work on government waste, Kelly O'Dwyer's participation on the deregulation task force, and Paul Fletcher's work on e-safety for children. However, Abbott prioritised discipline and internal party management considerations over the party's long-term policy development and preparations for a successful transition into government. His approach actively denied the next generation of Liberal leaders the opportunity to practice policy-making and advocacy skills. Moreover, 'the generational divide', as Van Onselen has termed it, meant that the party remained firmly fixed within the ageing policy mindset of the Howard years.[708]

Policy-making and the coalition's approach to opposition 2007-2013

A major challenge of this study was gaining access to the Coalition's policy-making processes in the 2007-2013 period of opposition. The reasons for this are obvious. First, it is always difficult to gain access to internal party processes and even more so when they are contemporaneous. Second, the opposition's decision to run a small-target strategy (to be discussed further in chapter eight) deliberately minimised policy debates and obscured internal party processes from public view.

Mostly constructive opposition: Nelson and Turnbull

Peter Costello's refusal to take up the leadership in late 2007 cast the Liberal party adrift and removed any certainties about the Coalition's transition into opposition. As noted in chapter three, many from the Liberal frontbench went into a period of mourning, which had been exacerbated by the feeling that they had not deserved to lose office. This had implications for the party's policy direction, as unlike 1983, party members did not feel a dramatically new direction was required.

In the immediate aftermath of defeat a policy audit was undertaken by the deputy leader Julie Bishop, which ultimately left most of the party's policy settings in place. Brendan Nelson's approach to opposition in the first few months out of office was predicated on the belief that the opposition had to lay down a positive framework in which to build up an image of the opposition. It was also a framing exercise which would allow the opposition to 'criticise the government where it was appropriate and keep them to account, to set some benchmarks against which they could be judged

[708] Peter Van Onselen, 'What's Right? The Future of the Liberal Party', *The Monthly*, 2011; See also Errington and Van Onselen, *Battleground*.

over the longer term.'[709] This framework was based on 'five key priorities for Australia', which included 'economic prosperity, the governance of the country, the federation, environmental issues and climate change, security and defence and then the cohesion of our society.'[710] Thus, it was both a framework for the opposition's policy agenda, and a foundation upon which to build a communication strategy.

Like all new oppositions, much of its policy work at this time was typified by reacting to the government's agenda. Given Rudd's popularity and the nature of Rudd's early agenda — the apology to the stolen generations and the dismantling of Howard's *WorkChoices* industrial relations policy — this was often difficult for the opposition.[711] But, for many MPs, the incentive to invest in policy-making was low, because 'no one was listening anyway' and many on the frontbench were demoralised. They were enveloped in a sense of futility and caught up in the thinking that 'well, we've got at least six years, probably ten years in opposition'. Many 'went missing without leave', descended into 'a deep funk' and were preoccupied with the need to come to terms with the end of the Howard era.[712] Tony Abbott was perhaps the most publicly visible in this regard when it was reported that he missed the key vote on the government's $42 billion stimulus package because he was asleep in his office after a boozy dinner with colleagues.[713]

Despite Nelson's attempts to lay the foundations for the Coalition's policy framework much of his time in office was focused on leadership tension and speculation. Unfortunately for Nelson, he was beset on the one hand by potential leadership draftee, Peter Costello, who at that time was writing his memoirs from the backbench, and on the other by leadership aspirant, Malcolm Turnbull. Costello remained uninterested in the leadership, eventually retiring from parliament, and in just over nine months, Turnbull succeeded in replacing Nelson as leader.

Much of Turnbull's tenure as opposition leader was focused on negotiating the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS), boat people, and the ill-fated 'ute-gate affair'. Turnbull's approach to policy was similar to Nelson's. Interviewees in this study reported that policy work was happening in the background, but it was focused on reviewing current policy rather than branching out in new and bold directions. As many Liberals have noted, policy-making at this time remained largely *ad-hoc* and at the discretion of shadow ministers. Moreover, the modest policy proposals presented at the

[709] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 11 2013.
[710] Ibid.
[711] Cooper Hayden, 'Coalition Still Split on Wording of Stolen Generations Apology', *Lateline* (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, July 2 2008), http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/content/2007/s2157289.htm; Mark Davis, 'Coalition Fumes as Work Choices Shown the Door', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 20 2008, http://static.thebigchair.com.au/egnonline/smh/?s_cid=207.
[712] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 11 2013.
[713] Shari Markson, 'Abbott slept through key vote'*, The Sunday Telegraph*, March 9 2008.

2010 election attest to the minimal work done in this field during the Coalition's first term in opposition.

Like Nelson before him, Turnbull's policy agenda was driven by his position within the political cycle (in the middle of a parliamentary term) and mostly involved reacting to the government's agenda which was dominated by its response to the global financial crisis, the return of boat arrivals (which is discussed in chapter eight) and the CPRS. After deciding to vote against the government's second stimulus package, the major area of policy that occupied the Turnbull opposition was its response to the government's CPRS.[714] The policy split the party several ways: the shadow cabinet and the party room; senators and MHRs; 'moderates' and 'conservatives'; and, the National party was also implacably opposed to pricing carbon.[715] Turnbull's approach was governed by his convictions about climate change and his desire to act constructively to ameliorate a scheme designed by Labor. Turnbull placed Ian Macfarlane in charge of the CPRS negotiations with the government's minister Penny Wong. Turnbull attempted to manage the unsympathetic attitude of his party room through consultation at key points during the negotiations.[716] While Turnbull was able to secure tentative agreement from his party room in September 2009 to continue negotiations, ultimately, he was unable to secure the party room's support for the government's bill. He infamously lost the leadership of the party by one vote on December 1, 2009.

Turnbull's handling of the climate change debate demonstrates the limits of opposition leadership in the Liberal party as outlined in chapter three. Climate change policy called for a radical restricting of the priorities of government and their relationships with citizens and the economy. For many Coalition members, the policy was unpalatable because it was 'nothing more than a big new bureaucracy', which would 'make our country less competitive'.[717] Julian McGauran argued that it was the most divisive issue to face the Liberal party since the native title debates in the late 1990s and 'a good leader would have picked that up'.[718] Dissenting Liberals argued that the party was not bound by the Coalition's 2007 election position because the political situation facing the Howard government had demanded party discipline and a response that was in keeping with public opinion. In 2006 and 2007, the party and been 'intimidated by the force of the climate change debate' and were swept up in the momentum that had built up around the issue as a result of the drought and Al

[714] This study was unable to obtain information that would dramatically alter the already extensive coverage of these events and will therefore confine itself to a more specific discussion of their significance for policy-making and their relationship with Liberal party leadership.
[715] Kelly, *Triumph and Demise*, Chapter 16.
[716] Sarah Ferguson, 'Malcolm and the Malcontents', *Four Corners* (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, September 11 2009), http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/content/2009/s2737676.htm.
[717] See Mathias Cormann and Brett Mason quoted in ibid.
[718] See Julian McGauran quoted in ibid.

Gore's global publicity campaign, in addition to the secretary of PM&C Peter Shergold convincing Howard of the need for interim carbon reductions.[719] The implication from the party room and the climate change 'denialists' was that a party in opposition was not subject to the same need for discipline.

The justifications also spoke to the contingent nature of Liberal party leadership, the essential weakness of the opposition leader and the limitations of the leader's policy-making capacities. As Bernardi put it, the party room was 'not in the habit of rolling a prime minister months out from an election on an issue that was, you know, so important to the public.'[720] In essence the Liberal party's conservatives were asserting the authority of the party room to shape policy debate in opposition, arguing that 'one front bencher doesn't speak for the party room, and particularly on this issue.'[721] Turnbull in turn argued that the climate rebels spoke for nobody but themselves and transformed the issue into a question of leadership when he asserted that he would not lead a party that did not have a credible position on climate change.[722]

As an avatar for ideas, policy is a regular cause of conflict in political parties, but the question of climate change was diabolical for the Liberal party because it went to the party's core assumptions about the role of the state and the primacy of the economy over the environment. As leader, Turnbull recognised the policy's significance, but failed to recognise the bounds of his own leadership authority and failed to effectively manage these internal tensions in a way that might have secured begrudging co-operation. With the prospect of electoral victory unlikely, Turnbull's colleagues perhaps rightly judged that the leader in opposition did not have the same authority as a prime minister. For the conservatives, they judged that on balance, changing the leader was less damaging than the risks posed by climate policy to the long-term cohesion of the party and the long-term future of the nation.[723]

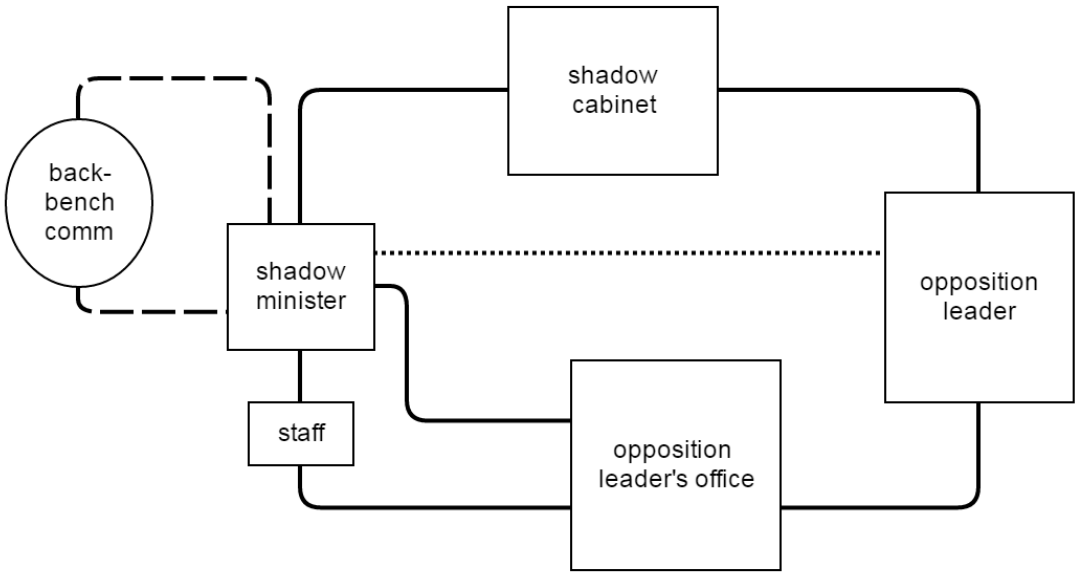
Unsurprisingly, given the context of a long-term government going into opposition, and significant tension about both the leadership and future direction of the party, the Nelson and Turnbull years were reminiscent of the policy processes during Peacock and Howard (1983-1990) years. Just as Howard had lost the leadership through the combination of policy overreach and his personal leadership style in 1989, so too had Malcolm Turnbull, 30 years later.

[719] See Julian McGauran quoted in ibid.
[720] See Cory Bernardi quoted in ibid.
[721] See Cory Bernardi quoted in ibid.
[722] Phillip Coorey, 'You speak for no one, Turnbull tells climate rebels', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 1 2009.
[723] 'Nick Minchin Joins The 7.30 Report', *The 7.30 Report* (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, November 27 2009), http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2009/s2756029.htm.

Policy structures in the post-2007 period of opposition

The impending election of 2010 encouraged the Coalition to prepare its preferred policies for the contest. Planning for the election began in mid-2009, but it is likely that this process was disrupted as a result of the leadership change in late 2009. Based on interviews undertaken for this study between 2012 and early 2014, the policy process for individual opposition shadow ministers is illustrated in figure 6.3.

Figure 6.3 Policy process for an individual shadow (cabinet) minister



When drafting policy in the post-2007 era, shadow ministers were given a considerable degree of independence to undertake consultations with the relevant policy sector. For some shadow ministers, establishing their own principled position on a policy question was a first-order priority. They went over 'those principles, over and over again, because from that point forward you're the advocate for your position' and because 'there's no point trying to steer something which you're not fully aligned with … you just won't have the passion.' [724] However, it should be noted that this approach was less common than a more functional approach to policy-making.

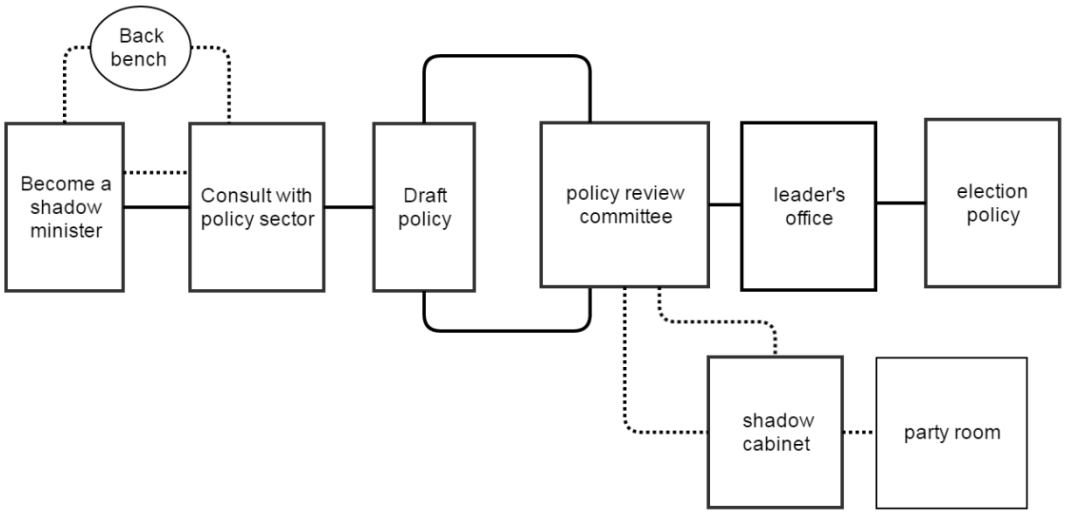
More commonly, shadow ministers would start with consultation: 'we do lunches, dinners, weddings, anything just to find out what the mood of the business community is.'[725] Ministers would also seek out international visitors where possible.[726] Shadows reported drawing on the work of the think tanks, particularly the Liberal party affiliated Menzies Research Institute and some also mentioned the Institute of Public Affairs. However, as Andrew Robb noted, it was important to work

[724] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on April 15 2013.
[725] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on August 15 2012.
[726] Ibid.

closely with 'external helpers' otherwise their final product could be 'somewhat removed from what you want, and everyone can end up very thin lipped.'[727] Importantly, as the opposition's political position improved, shadows reported that interest groups were suggesting 'more and more stuff because they think we got a good chance of being government and it's getting close.'[728]

A major challenge reported by shadow ministers was managing the information they collected. For some it was a matter of taking 'on board everything that the industry says to us'.[729] For others, it was a filtering exercise because 'people obviously tell stories to suit their own books' and 'that is where the experience and judgment come in.' For this shadow, this was the very reason why opposition policies were often 'shallow', because the party 'just [doesn't] have the research base to put the depth into it'.[730]

Figure 6.4: Policy process in the opposition 2007-2013



Several shadow ministers emphasised the importance of discussing policy with their colleagues and some reported that they drew on their backbench committees as a sounding board. Nevertheless, more often than not, consultation with the backbench often appeared to be a mere courtesy, or worse still, an afterthought, suggesting a major change in the use of these committees since the 1980s (see chapter five). Yet backbenchers involved in policy work emphasised the committee's importance, alongside the party room, as their key site to have a stake in, and influence, the policy-making process. As had been the case in the pre-1996 period, responsibility for policy drafting

[727] Michelle Grattan, 'Time Coming for the Libs to Tell of Their Plans', *The Age*, July 29 2011.
[728] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on August 20 2012.
[729] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on August 15 2012.
[730] Ibid.

remained with shadow ministers and particularly shadow cabinet ministers.[731] Moreover, with the increase in staff numbers, shadow ministers almost uniformly reported on their important influential role and would most often draft their policy documents with their staff's assistance. Depending on the type of policy, or its eventual purpose, suggested briefs would then proceed through the party's policy processes in different ways. Figure 6.4 (above) illustrates the policy process.

Typically a party in opposition is dealing with a 'hybrid' policy process that manages policy based on its purpose (electoral policy or responding to the government agenda) and how controversial it is. The most common is reacting to the government's agenda and much of the deliberative work of the shadow cabinet and the party room is occupied in this manner. These types of policy debates can prove to be troubling for the opposition, because a government decision might force the opposition to encounter a policy idea it has ignored or deferred, such as climate change, sparking some of the party's 'fiercest debates'. The party has to respond quickly, which means 'severe truncating' of the usual policy process. Responding to government initiatives often sparks controversies because

> there will always be those who say, 'it's the government we should oppose it,' and others who say, 'well actually that's quite a good policy and in the national interest we should be supporting it.' 'Pity we didn't think of it first,' sort of thing.[732]

The party room remains the site where 'the big issues' are managed because, 'in the end, if you're to hold your discipline, the party room is the place where you can work out a lot of these issues.'[733] For example, in the debate around the CPRS, the party room was used as a vehicle to drive policy debate, placing the party room on a collision course with the shadow cabinet. Importantly, interviewees argued that the joint party room was often an important vehicle for National party members to force deliberation of policy questions close to that party's interests. However, some Coalition members noted that the party room's effectiveness can be undermined 'when people know that what you say in the party room is now going to be widely reported', as journalists are increasingly skilled at co-opting party members into leaking via text messages an almost minute-by-minute account of the party room's proceedings.[734]

For election policies, the process is more centralised, non-consultative and often secretive. Election policies are typically not presented to shadow cabinet. The return of Andrew Robb to the frontbench after the 2010 election saw the establishment of a more coherent and managed policy process,

[731] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on August 20 2012.
[732] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on April 24 2013.
[733] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on March 26 2014.
[734] Ibid.

largely driven by the Policy Development Committee (PDC). This committee — chaired by Robb, with Tony Smith, and later, Greg Hunt, as deputy chairs — was supported by staff from the leader's office, Robb's office and Shadow Treasurer Joe Hockey's office. When the 2010 election returned a hung parliament, the urgency of the policy task in preparation for another possible election was not lost on shadow ministers:

> If something happened within three months, they could be a minister. So they were seized more than they might be that in the first year than any other opposition period.[735]

The PDC asked shadow ministers to review their policy areas, either by updating existing policy taken to the 2010 election, or by redrafting policy entirely. Shadows were expected to present their policies to the PDC where it would be measured against the four benchmarks established by the Coalition: to live within our means; to reverse the 'nanny state'; to back Australia's strengths; and to restore a culture of personal responsibility.

Policy proposals often went through several iterations before being presented to a high level committee, chaired by Abbott, with Robb as deputy, and constituted by the leadership group. The result was a set of draft policies ready for review by mid-2011 and finalisation soon after in case of a snap election. Each policy had:

> a cover and narrative which explains the context in which policies need to be or policy issues need to be dealt with, then a set of policies, then just a page on what we feel Labor has done or not done in this area and costings.[736]

In late July 2011, much of the policy work was still in the hands of Robb. At that stage, Abbott was still investing most of his time into campaigning and so would not be briefed in detail until late August.[737] The value of having a centralised committee process was that its members could, particularly when speaking with outside interest groups, 'immediately assess whether [we]'ve already got that covered or that's an improvement on what we've got, or that's better than what we've got, we should replace what we've got with this.'[738] In particular, the committee had 'a particular eye on things that don't cost us money', because policies that signal ideology or values are particularly useful to oppositions given their poor access to accurate budget figures.[739] The pressure of the hung parliament had the effect of truncating the usual policy process and the Coalition asserted that it had locked in its election policies by the mid-way point of the parliamentary term.

[735] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on August 20 2012.
[736] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on August 20 2012.
[737] Grattan, 'Time Coming for the Libs to Tell of Their Plans'.
[738] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on August 20 2012.
[739] Ibid.

Centralisation and secrecy were key to this policy process. Shadow ministers accepted that some policy would be 'formulated on a tactical basis', and secrecy also maximises the opposition's flexibility to adjust and adapt as the political landscape evolved. In this approach to policy-making, only issues that were 'highly controversial' are likely to be taken 'through a shadow cabinet process for endorsement'.[740] It is 'difficult or impossible' for the parliamentary party to have 'decent input' into policy formation, because election policy is ultimately about political communication, a theme explored in greater detail in chapters seven and eight. Opening up the policy debate early would expose issues that are 'too sensitive or too valuable to [be] wasted before a particular point' and are best presented 'during the election campaign.'[741] It was not uncommon for the opposition to have announced a policy, which 'frankly' came 'as a surprise to the members of the frontbench, perhaps not the shadow [cabinet] ministers, but the frontbench.'[742] As another long-serving shadow minister observed, centralisation has changed the way policy is formulated over time, 'with the sensitivities about surprise, the need to do work which doesn't necessarily tell people in advance where you're going'. This process necessitates that policy is 'much more closely managed in a leader's office'.[743]

Moreover, the federal secretariat's limited capacity to hire policy writers, coupled with the increased funding for staff in parliamentary offices discussed in chapter two has led to the concentration of policy expertise in the leader's office. Unlike the pre-1996 period, shadow cabinet did not 'sit down day after day, deliberating on conflicts, issues.'[744] Moreover, the leader's policy capacity also meant that policies might be announced that were 'immaculate conceptions', such as the paid parental leave scheme, which emerged fully formed from the leader's office with limited consultation.[745]

It is for these reasons that much internal policy debate happens between the shadow minister and the opposition leader's office. Discussion between shadow ministerial offices, particularly at the staff-to-staff level is near constant, particularly when policies are under development. Shadow ministers reported that they were more likely to discuss policy matters with the relevant policy advisor in the opposition leader's office, or his chief of staff, Peta Credlin. As one shadow noted, 'I'll only go to Tony where I can't resolve the issue prior to that. So, if I'm not getting anywhere with his office, I'll go straight to him and I'll sit down, we'd sort it out between us.'[746] During the period of interview collection, very few ministers complained of difficulties in gaining access to Abbott's office;

[740] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on March 26 2014.
[741] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on August 30 2012.
[742] Ibid.
[743] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on March 26 2014.
[744] Ibid.
[745] Ibid.; Errington and Van Onselen, *Battleground*, 53.
[746] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on August 16 2012.

the few that did were rare and spoke in interviews that took place after the Coalition won office.[747] However, there was a consistent trickle of reports which pointed to disquiet about consultation which will be explored below.

Tony Abbott and the effectiveness of relentless negativity

Tony Abbott was an accidental leader of the Liberal party, stunned but pleased at his own ascension.[748] Abbott's success lay in his discipline, his sustained capacity for devastating negative attacks on Labor and no small measure of luck. Compared with his predecessors, Abbott's great strength was his capacity to set the agenda using a negative campaign and exploit the changes in the media landscape discussed in chapter four. Unlike Nelson or Turnbull, Abbott's success at the 2010 election, which forced Labor into minority government, granted Abbott an authority never extended to his predecessors. In the policy domain Abbott used this authority to suppress policy debates and, on occasion, impose policies on the party without consultation.

The neat picture of policy-making processes presented above does not fully match reporting from the time. Underlying Abbott's political success was regular reporting of internal complaints about policy processes and particularly the absence of consultation. Abbott's tenure as opposition leader saw many internal disputes over policy such as the opposition's response to government policies regarding wheat marketing deregulation, the Murray-Darling Basin, and the Henry Tax Review, not to mention the opposition's own policies on workplace relations, asylum seekers, the party's direct action climate change policy, and Joe Hockey's proposal to tax trusts as companies.[749] Disputes over wheat marketing saw some Liberal MPs cross the floor, and Hockey was forced into an embarrassing climb-down over his tax proposal. Here we see a pattern of behaviour which uncannily foreshadowed the prime ministerial-treasurer relationship in government.[750]

On multiple occasions, Abbott was accused of failing to consult effectively. Laurie Oakes reported that some Liberals complained that Abbott was a 'one man band'; others complained that the approach to policy formulation was haphazard and that consultation was often 'a phone call the day before, rather than real consultation'.[751] Others defending Abbott pointed to the truncated sitting period, arguing that this retarded the capacity for the party to have debates in the party room.[752]

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[747] This is unsurprising, as most interviews were undertaken during the period of the opposition's ascendency and there would be little incentive for Coalition actors to complain about conditions within the party when the prospect of an imminent election victory placed a premium on discipline.
[748] Abbott, *Battlelines*, Afterword.
[749] Louise Dodson, 'One-Line Tony's Opposition', *Australian Financial Review*, April 21 2011; Michelle Grattan, 'Headaches for Abbott as Tactics Falter', *The Age*, November 2 2012.
[750] Errington and Van Onselen, *Battleground*, 87–92.
[751] Dodson, 'One-Line Tony's Opposition'.
[752] Ibid.

Foreshadowing one of the major grievances of his colleagues during his tenure as prime minister, Abbott urged his colleagues in November 2012 to call him if they needed to get in touch.[753]

Another factor worrying Abbott's colleagues was his preference for pragmatic but simplistic policy positions that would offer maximum contrast between government and the opposition (again foreshadowing a major problem of his government's policy processes). Nick Minchin, the architect of Abbott's rise to the leadership, attacked Abbott in the party room after his refusal to support the Gillard government's implementation of a Howard government proposal to increase the excise on LNG, LPG and compressed natural gas. When he addressed the party room, Abbott replied that in 'a choice between policy purity and pragmatism, "I'll take pragmatism every time".'[754] Abbott's relentless pursuit of a negative policy line in conjunction with his discipline rendered him 'robotic', eroded his credibility and, after two years, there were signs that it was impacting negatively on the Coalition's primary vote.[755] As the hung parliament entered its final year, Abbott deliberately switched to a less aggressive tone, allowing his senior ministers to engage in more negative attacks.

But unlike Nelson or Turnbull, Abbott was able to maintain his authority over the party. Abbott's signature paid parental leave scheme became the most potent example of this. When announcing his generous paid maternity leave scheme, he declared that 'sometimes it's better to ask for forgiveness than for permission'.[756] Despite the serious irritation and disquiet this policy caused among his colleagues, it was tolerated with only minimal public protest from Alex Hawke and defended by his senior shadow cabinet ministers.[757] Importantly, Abbott's paid maternity leave plan was not a policy choice on the same order of magnitude as Turnbull's support of pricing carbon, however it was a demonstration of his authority that he was able to keep the policy in place for the duration of his time as opposition leader. Just as significantly, Abbott's eventual abandonment of his

[753] Grattan, 'Headaches for Abbott as Tactics Falter'.
[754] Laurie Oakes, 'Trash Talk over Political Mess', *The Herald Sun*, July 2 2011.
[755] Michelle Grattan, 'Is Abbott on Thin Ice? Absolutely', *The Age*, August 24 2012; Michelle Grattan, 'Tony Abbott's "Real" Challenge', *The Age*, September 17 2012.
[756] Samantha Hawley, 'Abbott Apologises for Not Consulting', *PM* (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, March 9 2010), http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2010/s2841070.htm.
[757] Alex Hawke, 'Time to Dump Costly Parental Leave Scheme', *IPA Review* 65, no. May (2013): 1–4; Michelle Grattan, 'Prominent Liberal Calls on Abbott to Front Party Room on Paid Parental Leave', *The Conversation*, May 6 2013, http://theconversation.com/prominent-liberal-calls-on-abbott-to-front-party-room-on-paid-parental-leave-13967; Michael Gordon, 'Hockey Backs Abbott's Parental Leave Scheme', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 6 2013, http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/political-news/hockey-backs-abbotts-parental-leave-scheme-20130506-2j24n.html.

paid maternity scheme just before the first leadership challenge in February 2015 demonstrated he had lost his earlier authority to dominate the party's policy agenda.[758]

The Abbott-led opposition's approach to costing policies also reflected Abbott's content-light, risk adverse and small-target strategy. It symbolised a thin policy process more concerned with *managing* policy rather than developing a coherent vision for a future government. A major innovation of the hung parliament was the creation of the parliamentary budget office (PBO), which was a significant boost to the potential resources of the opposition. For the first time, the opposition would gain access to government economic figures via the PBO's staff.[759] This would also include the capacity to have the PBO cost the opposition's policies in the lead up to the election and, it was hoped, avoid the constant focus on policy costing debates and 'budget black holes'.

Early indications suggested that the opposition was eager to use the PBO to neutralise debate over costings that had marred the 2010 campaign. Ultimately, the opposition proved reluctant to utilise the PBO.[760] This may have been as a result of the 'leaking' of the costings of the opposition parental leave policy, which was purported to be from the PBO itself.[761] During the 2013 caretaker period, the Coalition did not submit a single policy to the PBO for costing.[762] When the opposition did finally release its budget costings, in late August, Joe Hockey boasted of his party's policy effort and rigour, declaring that 'no other opposition has done this'. *The Sydney Morning Herald* met this claim with derision, reminding readers of both Jim Carlton's 1987 tax package, and Hewson's *Fightback!*.[763] Just days before the election, on September 5, 2013, the Coalition released further budget figures in an audit conducted by three eminent Australians: Geoff Carmody, formerly head of Access Economics, Peter Shergold, formerly head of the prime minister's department and Len Scanlan, formerly Queensland auditor general. The committee delivered a one-page letter report in which they stated

[758] Matthew Knott, 'Prime Minister Tony Abbott Prepares to Dump Paid Parental Leave Scheme', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 31 2015, http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/prime-minister-tony-abbott-prepares-to-dump-paid-parental-leave-scheme-20150130-132m90.html.
[759] 'Establishment, role and legislation', Parliamentary Budget Office, http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Budget_Office/role.
[760] Grattan, 'Time coming for the Libs to tell of their plans', *The Age*, July 29 2011.
[761] Phillip Coorey, 'As the Coalition Knows, There Is a Long History of Costing Opposition Policies', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, November 7 2012, http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-opinion/as-the-coalition-knows-there-is-a-long-history-of-costing-opposition-policies-20121107-28xbo.html; 'Costing to Come on Paid Parental Leave Plan: Tony Abbott', *The Australian*, May 16 2016, http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/costing-to-come-on-paid-parental-leave-plan-tony-abbott/story-fn59niix-1226637690941.
[762] '2013 election costings', Parliamentary Budget Office, http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Budget_Office/2013_election_costings
[763] Bianca Hall, 'Coalition Releases Savings, but Voters Have to Wait for Full Bottom Line', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 28 2013, http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/federal-election-2013/coalition-releases-savings-but-voters-have-to-wait-for-full-bottom-line-20130828-2spfn.html; Joe Hockey and Andrew Robb, 'Coalition Costings', August 28 2013.

that the Coalition's policies were based on 'reasonable assumptions and calculations'.[764] Hockey and Robb also released a costings document, which they informed journalists had been undertaken by the PBO.[765] Labor continuously attacked the opposition during the campaign on its costing problems, but has Reece as noted, the opposition's momentum was so great that it was actually able to limit the amount of information released during the campaign.[766] Two years after the election, Len Scanlan was found guilty of breeching auditing standards by the Charted Accountants Association.[767]

It is difficult to comprehend the failure of Abbott's government (2013-2015) without some consideration of the party's tactical negativism and thin policy processes during opposition. The disjuncture between the policy narratives of the opposition and those that appeared in the 2014 budget is the most obvious example. Recent commentary has focused on the importance of Abbott's internal party management skills, which was a considerable source of government dysfunction.[768] It is difficult to truly understand the relationship between poor policy planning in opposition and government practices without access to internal party papers. However, this dimension of policy planning has already been admitted by political actors themselves. Andrew Robb summed up the problem with the 2014 budget, and unpopular policies such as university deregulation as the party offering a 'solution to problems [Australians] weren't aware [they] had'.[769]

Approaches to opposition

In the post-2007 era, the understanding of the role of opposition by the main party actors became distinctly more negative in its interpretation. The emphasis for many Coalition MPs was to 'articulate the problem of the government: why they need to be defeated.'[770] The opposition was less a handmaiden to government or an improver of legislation. Rather, opposition actors expressed their

[764] Geoff Carmody, Peter Shergold and Len Scanlan, 'Letter to Federal Director Brian Loughnane, September 5 2013. http://www.smh.com.au/cqstatic/gjhczw/Letter-from-Panel.pdf.
[765] Mark Kenny, 'Hockey's 11th-Hour Costings', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 5 2013, http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/federal-election-2013/hockeys-11thhour-costings-20130904-2t5n7.html; Joe Hockey and Andrew Robb, 'Final Update on Federal Coalition Election Policy Commitments', September 5 2013; Parliamentary Budget Office [unconfirmed], 'Fiscal Budget Impact of the Federal Coalition Policies', September 5 2013, http://images.theage.com.au/file/2013/09/05/4722015/2013%252009%252005%2520TABLE.pdf.
[766] Reece, 'Making Policy and Winning Votes: Election Promises and Political Strategies in the 2013 Campaign', in *Abbott's Gambit: The 2013 Australian Federal Election*, ed. Carol Johnson, John Wanna, and Hsu-Ann Lee (ANU, Acton, A.C.T: ANU Press, 2014), 111–12, 120.
[767] Peter Martin, 'Coalition auditor for 2013 election costings breached standards', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 7 2015, http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/coalition-auditor-for-2013-election-costings-breached-standards-20150905-gjfxwj.html; For the infringement notice see http://www.cpaaustralia.com.au/about-us/member-conduct-and-discipline/outcome-of-disciplinary-hearings/outcome-of-disciplinary-hearings-2015/name-not-disclosed-107-queensland.
[768] Savva, *The Road to Ruin*; Errington and Van Onselen, *Battleground*.
[769] Andrew Robb quoted in Errington and Van Onselen, *Battleground*, 11.
[770] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on November 28 2012.

negative interpretation of opposition as a 'duty' like that of 'a prosecuting attorney, to flush the government out; to prove that the government does not know what they're doing'.[771] In this interpretation, the opposition is the watchman, 'because quite often they [the opposition] will pick up stuff that might well have been missed.'[772] For many post-2007 Coalition members, the role of opposition was often about stopping 'decisions not because they're right or they're wrong, but because the government has shown that they haven't got a clue what they're doing. Or they haven't done their own homework and that is extremely dangerous.'[773]

After his political career ended, Nelson reflected that Abbott had a better grasp of the opposition's role. Nelson argued that he felt that the opposition 'needed to frame the government, you needed to criticise the government where it was appropriate and keep them to account.' However, after observing Abbott he concluded:

> Apparently, well it now seems that the thing you should do is spend two or three years just doing nothing but smash the government. And perhaps that's why I'm probably not that well-suited to it because whilst I was very happy to criticise the government, and I certainly did, [but] when they did things that I thought were worthy of support, [I thought] we should support them.[774]

However, this is not to suggest that a positive role for the opposition or the articulation of a positive agenda was absent. But, it was a secondary priority to destroying the government's credibility. The first task was to 'articulate the problem of the government, [and] why they need to be defeated.' Only then should the opposition 'outline [its] values and beliefs about how [the opposition would] govern.'[775] Another reason was the clear understanding that the expectations on the opposition are lower, because 'you are going to articulate some detailed policies and so forth, but I don't think they're nearly as important as how you would govern.'[776] Coalition members regularly referred to Howard's details-light, but values-rich, headland speeches as an exemplar of how oppositions should approach the positive, agenda outlining stages of opposition. For one Liberal, the lower expectations had 'some charms' because the opposition 'can pursue issues … but nobody really expects you to have serious, well thought through answers on the same scale' as the government.[777]

[771] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on April 15 2013.
[772] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on February 7 2013.
[773] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on April 15 2013.
[774] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 11 2013.
[775] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on November 28 2012.
[776] Ibid.
[777] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on September 18 2012.

Thus, Coalition MPs that served in the post-2007 period of opposition had a different approach to the role of opposition. They felt that the opposition needed to meet a lower bar as an alternative government compared to the pre-1996 opposition members (particularly those who served during the 1980s). The post-2007 Coalition had the example of Howard's successful 1996 strategy to justify their argument. Moreover, it is highly likely, from today's vantage point, that the negative interpretation of opposition from 2010 was the product of the hung parliament as the Coalition asserted its ascendency over the Gillard Labor government. However, if we take a historical view of the situation and consider the conduct of the opposition between 1972 and 1975, we see greater parallels between that opposition and Abbott's time as opposition leader, which will be examined further below. The Coalition in the 1970s and in the 2010s focused much of its energy on destroying the credibility of the government and neglected to invest in an alternative agenda. The emphasis on a positive role for opposition during the 1980s in particular seems the exception rather than the rule for the Coalition.

What is the purpose of policy-making for the opposition?

Policy development serves five main functions for the opposition. First, policy development translates party ideology and philosophy into real world solutions and is, in effect, an exercise in self-definition. In an ideal world, the translation of ideology into policy should be the highest goal of a political party, but this work is difficult, particularly for an organisation starved of resources. Moreover, policy work, by its very nature, is less visible. Today, ambitious politicians might weigh up the benefits of deep engagement in a policy area versus investing time promoting their public profile, the benefits of which are not only more tangible, but also reaped sooner. Given that politicians and political parties are in the business of ideas, *having* an agenda is almost as important as the *content* of that agenda.

Moreover, the challenge for policy development only increases for the opposition over time as its frontbench not only loses first-hand experience of government but also slowly deskills as the practice of government changes over time. Formulating policy over multiple election cycles is also a considerable challenge. As a senior Liberal party figure stated:

> It gets harder to come up with genuinely new ideas. If you've been in opposition for say, three terms, then you tend to get a bit cold on policy ideas that have already run around the track and haven't won. [It] doesn't mean they weren't good. It just means at the time the electorate wasn't ready for it yet.[778]

[778] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on March 5 2013.

Senior Liberal party figures also noted that the government would have 'pinched' any of the opposition's good ideas and implemented them. The effect is that 'the longer you are in opposition, the harder policy is and the more I think you revert to principles, values, and sort of "it's time for a change".'

Second, policy-making helps establish baseline credibility as an alternative government. It is a threshold that political actors recognise must be crossed on the way to winning government:

> The public needs to know that you've got a set of clear policies of, clear ideas about what you want to do as a government. So I think policy, having your policies properly developed and properly costed satisfies that requirement.[779]

However, it is arguable whether more investment will naturally lead to better results. In fact, Australian history has revealed decidedly mixed results, most famously with Dr John Hewson's defeat in the 'unlosable' election in 1993 after exhaustive preparations.[780] Written policy documents, particularly those light on details, such as Abbott's *Real Solutions,* are useful to deflect questioning. Journalists or members of the public can be referred to a policy document even if that document contains little information.

Third, policy is also a useful device for disciplining parliamentary party members. Written policy is both an aid to MPs, particularly backbenchers, as a reference point for the party's position on issues, but it also forces MPs to stick to a specific script on a topic. As a senior Liberal figure explained:

> If there's a difference [in policy positions] that is a serious setback in the campaign or any time. It's dangerous. That's why written policies are still important, to avoid confusion.[781]

The experience of division the LPA in the 1980s demonstrated clearly that a divided party struggled to win the confidence of the public and this deeply affected the party's culture. Succinct and uniform messaging was an important step in establishing the perception of unity and discipline, which are the most basic levels of credibility as an alternative government.

Fourth, policy announcements generate third party support from the media and from interest groups. As noted in the previous chapter, the LPA invested more heavily in this strategy in the pre-1996 period. In the post-2007 era, the opposition refrained from releasing major policy initiatives until the election campaign.

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[779] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on October 11 2012.
[780] Taflaga, 'The Challenges of Transitioning from Opposition to Government: Liberal Party Planning for Government 1983 – 1996'.
[781] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on March 5 2013.

Last, policy is also a useful tool to craft an image of the party and the leader as part of their overall strategy to sell themselves to the electorate. Ideas are a means of branding a leader and declaring what a party stands for. As noted in the previous chapter, the Coalition constantly struggled to grapple with its policy-making structures. Today, Coalition actors view the relationship differently. Today the goal of an opposition, 'partly through policy and partly through the reputation that their front benchers [gain] over a period of years being shadow ministers, is to look like an alternative government. Not like an opposition, but like a group of people who could be the government.' While there is 'always a threshold of public scepticism', the opposition's task is to reassure people 'who are thinking about voting for change' that the 'opposition could do the job'. Policy is 'an essential ingredient', but it is 'not necessarily the most important ingredient.'[782]

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the opposition's approach to policy under Brendan Nelson and Malcolm Turnbull was, broadly, a positive conception of the opposition's responsibilities and political behaviour. However, after the ascension of Tony Abbott, the opposition's approach shifted to emphasise a decidedly negative approach, predicated on destroying the credibility of the government. The chapter demonstrated how policy procedures in the post-2007 period granted reasonably high levels of autonomy to shadow ministers in the early stages of policy drafting, before becoming increasingly centralised. In the case of election policy it was also highly secretive in order to boost the Coalition's campaigning capacities.

Where Turnbull was unable assert his authority and effectively manage policy difficulties and divisions, Abbott was effective despite several policy disputes during his leadership tenure. Abbott greatly benefited from the extra-ordinary circumstances of the hung parliament, but his relentless negative campaigning and the highly centralised nature of policy communication came at a cost. It irritated his colleagues, eroded his credibility and ultimately weakened his capacity to transition into being a successful prime minister.

Finally, the chapter has argued that there were five reasons for opposition to invest in policy-making. First, as an activity it helps the opposition define its future direction and identity; second, it builds its credibility as an alternative government; third, it promotes discipline by providing a set position to a political issue or problem; fourth, it provides an opportunity for third parties to offer support and endorse the Coalition's plans; and, finally, policy is a useful way to help flesh out the leader's image. The next two chapters will build on these findings. It will explore how the Liberal

[782] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on October 11 2012.

party turned policy ideas into political communication narratives in the pre-1996 and post-2007 eras.

Chapter 7
Policy as political communication and its consequences, 1983 -1996

Introduction

This chapter examines the continuities and changes in political actors' assumptions about political communication and how to relate to the media. The first half of this chapter will compare the assumptions of political actors in the post-2007 opposition with their counterparts from the pre-1996 opposition. First, it will argue that where political actors in the 1980s believed that ideas were central to a successful political communication strategy, political actors today consider tactical flexibility the most important element of political communication. Second, it will extend the argument established in chapter five that the party believed in early policy releases to build momentum and will examine how this occurred. Third, it will argue that the party's research technologies (polling, focus groups, etc.), particularly during election times, imposed limitations on the types of campaigns that could and should be run, especially as these technologies evolved.

The second part of this chapter will examine three case studies in the party's attempts to transform policies into campaign narratives: first, the industrial relations policy in 1986 championed by Neil Brown; second, *Future Directions* and the role that 'directional documents' played in the party's increasingly sophisticated communications strategies; and finally the attempts to market *Fightback!* to the Australian electorate. The chapter will conclude by arguing that the party's emphasis on establishing itself as a credible alternative government (in the positive mode of opposition) is the reason why the party continued to emphasise policy substance in the wake of repeated election losses.

What did Liberal party actors think about political communication in the 1980s and early 1990s?

Ideas matter

The Coalition entered opposition in 1983 ready to recommit itself to proselytising the party's core values and philosophies. For many Liberals the Fraser government had descended into a chaotic pragmatism and holding power for power's sake.[783] Thus, in this context, it is unsurprising that the

[783] Liberal Party of Australia. Committee of Review and Valder, *Facing the Facts*, 12.

party would initially emphasise policy 'product', over 'packaging' in its political communication.[784] *Facing the Facts,* the Liberal party's post-election review in 1983 also emphasised the normative aspects of political parties' work. It questioned the worth of expensive advertising campaigns at election times and argued in favour of reinvigorating the party organisation. This, it followed, would improve the LPA's capacity to communicate:

> The party will achieve greater electoral success by building up over a period its policies, its leaders, its candidates and its organisation, than by spending huge sums of money on advertising just during election campaigns.[785]

The report also urged the party to make use of free media opportunities such as current affairs television, which implied that the party had to have something worthy to say.[786] Undoubtedly, the recommendation for a strategy which emphasised drawing on its membership base was also a tacit acknowledgement by the committee of the party's financially strapped circumstances.

Letters to Andrew Peacock by LPA parliamentarians such as David Hamer and John Spender demonstrate that Liberal parliamentarians also emphasised that policy should be the central piece of the party's political communications strategy. Spender argued for 'the need to take positions on major issues as early as possible so as to project a clear message to the electorate.'[787] This would cement the party's image as a credible alternative government. An emphasis on the importance of policy was also indicated by a majority of the former Liberals interviewed. For Liberals serving in the 1980s, most of whom quit before 1996, the purpose of running for office was 'to make changes that you believe will benefit the country.'[788] It was 'the core of why you're there [in parliament].'[789] Significantly, to those who went on to serve in the Howard government and beyond, policy and ideological debates were subsequently seen as divisive and 'unhelpful' for winning elections.[790]

The capacity to prosecute ideas was a core skill of the era, as the case studies that follow demonstrate. The challenge was to craft a set of policies that were acceptable to voters and saleable. This was a difficult task for a party that had been the natural party of government, but which in the 1980s found itself pushed further to right as the ALP moved to take the lead in the economic debate.

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[784] Ibid., 89–90.
[785] Ibid., 90.
[786] Ibid.
[787] NAA: M2239, 75, memo, Senator David Hamer to all Liberal Party parliamentarians, April 4 1984; NAA: M2239, 132, letter, John Spender to Andrew Peacock, attention of Brian Jeffriess, December 5 1984.
[788] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on March 10 2014.
[789] Ibid.
[790] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on June 5 2013.

Staged early policy releases build momentum and educate voters

The second factor shaping the relationship between policy and political communication was the assumption by LPA actors that the party needed to build momentum *before* the campaign began. Another assumption was that voters needed time to absorb and understand the Liberal party's policy prescription. There was a sense that the party had to make tough decisions, and this was not just a belief shared by those in the Liberal party; Labor's attacks on the Liberals maintained that the LPA led by Peacock was not 'tough enough' to commit to hard decisions and implement them. The belief that policy substance was required was also expressed by the media as well, as illustrated by this *Canberra Times* editorial:

> The task for the opposition is to convince the electorate that it has both the policies and the capacity to carry them through in government. It has a limited period in which to spread that conviction because, ironically, the immediate lead-up to an election is by no means the best time to have complicated issues debated. That time is largely devoted to rhetoric and slanging matches.[791]

This belief was based on a further assumption by both Coalition MPs and the media that the ideas and policies presented by the parties ought to be comprehensive and sufficiently detailed to allow proper scrutiny. This raised the bar considerably for oppositions, often beyond what their resources could sustain.

Voter education was important to Liberal party actors, but building political momentum and demonstrating the Coalition's alternative government credentials was a more commonly stated reason for a staged policy release. Following from this, the question of how to 'maximise impact' was a long running focus of strategy meetings. In the early 1980s, policy releases lined up with LPA objectives to 'demonstrate our positives', 'clear up ambiguities' and show the party 'mean[s] business'.[792] Policy releases could 'indicate a firm stance' and a 'clear sense of direction and a choice *vis-a-vis* Labor'.[793] Yet, the challenges and problems identified by the party were all too familiar: how to 'obtain a favourable reception' and make 'lasting impact'.[794] The party had to manage timing to avoid confusion or undercutting their own messages or distract from political events at the state level. They needed to counter a lack of interest, wrestle with the uncertainties of promise-making and manage expectations.[795] Staged policy releases and mid-term campaigning were seen as useful management tools.

[791] 'Shock not disaster', *The Canberra Times,* March 22 1986, 2.
[792] NAA: M1435, 132, 'Policy releases: maximising impact', circa 1984, 1
[793] Ibid.
[794] Ibid.
[795] Ibid.

The policy strategy from early 1984 demonstrated this use of policy as part of the Coalition's campaign narrative. It also demonstrated the shortcomings of the Coalition's policy planning at that time, a situation which became more acute as speculation of an early election grew more fevered. The 1984 strategy modelled set-piece policy launches, using a seminar-style series. Peacock as leader would offer a broad introduction and then shorter presentations by the shadow minster would follow.[796] As election talk heated up, political considerations came to dominate thinking. For example, foreign affairs and defence was mooted as the first policy launch because this would accommodate both Peacock and Ian Sinclair, the Nationals' leader and shadow minister for defence, to share the stage. Although lacking a 'totally new direction' for the Coalition, the strategy group argued that opening with foreign affairs and defence would provide a useful contrast with the ALP.[797] But, well laid plans were quickly dumped and replaced by a presentation on the economy by the triumvirate of Peacock, Sinclair and Howard — a launch whose success was widely questioned. Paul Kelly characterised it as 'free market economics and dangerous politics'; Ross Gittens wrote it was 'amazing' that 'there is nothing in it aimed at winning votes'; while *The Canberra Times* panned it as 'one of the more bizarre political acts of recent years'.[798]

Further policy launches followed over the coming weeks, which the party hoped would build momentum. But the party's strategy hit several snags. While some policies were reported soberly, reflecting the position of a credible alternative government,[799] others generated controversy. The Coalition's rural policy generated complaints from the Cattle Council of Australia, nervous about the Coalition's stiffening resolve to abandon protection.[800] The party's foreign policy launch on May 1 was marred because the policy did not explicitly condemn apartheid, transforming the debate into one about whether or not the party was coy on racism and South Africa.[801] Rounding out a lacklustre performance, the Coalition was forced to delay the announcement of its immigration policy after internal disagreements spilled out into the open.[802]

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[796] NAA: M1435, 132, minutes of, 'Policy marketing group: Recommendations from a meeting on Thursday, 1 March 1984', 1.
[797] Ibid.
[798] Paul Kelly, Libs' dilemma: planning the best way to lose', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April 13 1984; Ross Gittens, 'The Post-Fraser Libs: everything old is new again', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April 18 1984; 'Coalition's Troubles' *The Canberra Times*, April 18 1984.
[799] Howard Conkey, 'Coalition to restore base grants', *The Canberra* Times, May 11 1984; Teresa Mannix, 'Consultation promise in policy' *The Canberra Times*, May 16 1984; Jane Button, 'Opposition puts industrial relations policy', *The Canberra Times*, April 17 1984.
[800] Debbie Cameron, 'Coalition launches $50 million rural plan', *The Canberra Times,* May 25 1984.
[801] Paul Malone, 'Opposition foreign policy criticised', *The Canberra Times*, May 2 1984; 'Young Liberals condemn S. Africa Policies', June 4 1984.
[802] 'Opposition delays migration policy', *The Canberra Times*, July 21 1984.

Without effective management of issues and policies, a schedule of staged policy releases proved to be damaging for the opposition's credibility, particularly as policy releases sparked internal division and complaints from backbenchers wanting a greater say in policy development.[803] Despite the uninspiring results of its policy launches, Peacock went on to campaign effectively at the 1984 election on a relatively policy-light and overwhelmingly negatively campaign.

The fact that the party subsequently argued for more strenuous policy processes in the wake of that election, particularly after the shift to Howard, demonstrated the importance of policy to LPA actors, placing it at the centre of their strategy to win government. Future campaigns would bear this out and the party would continue to emphasise early and staged policy releases over time.

Approaches to managing media and political research technologies

The Liberal Party was not immune from technological changes which transformed telecommunications, media and political research. Technological change was both an opportunity and a challenge, one that, in general, the Liberal Party sought to engage. For much of the 1980s, internal memos and public reports constantly emphasised that the Liberal party had improved its use of the media. The LPA was constantly attempting to catch-up to the ALP and struggled to get the most out of media opportunities because of a deficiency in skills, resources and the difficulty of trying to capture and set the national agenda from the opposition. The party's interest in using mass media more effectively was already firmly entrenched during the Fraser years. In the late 1970s, campaigning activities were still locally focused, but campaign organisers and leading government ministers were being encouraged to present content suitable for national news coverage.[804] This meant a shift away from traditional interpersonal communication activities such as rallies and public meetings with the party faithful, towards activities that would elicit media interest.[805]

While in government during the 1980 campaign, the Liberals recognised the opportunities of mass-media coverage and attempted to engineer a centralised campaign system that could accommodate the realities of a federated party spread over a continent with only fixed-line telecommunications.[806] Despite the technological difficulties, the party had invested heavily in media monitoring through its Melbourne campaign headquarters and used telex services intensively to communicate with

[803] Paul Ellercamp, 'ALP has factions: Libs have 'free spirits'', *The Australian*, April 24 1984; Kate Legge, 'Coalition MPs want bigger say on policy', *The Age*, May 15 1984.
[804] NAA: M1601, 3/7, minute, 'Election Planning 1980: Function: Ministerial Co-ordination', 13 May 1980, 3.
[805] Ibid., 1-2.
[806] Ibid., 1.

parliamentarians across the nation.[807] In opposition, the party could not match this level of campaign infrastructure.

As opposition leader, Peacock's office drew directly on the lessons learned from previous election campaigns, and attempted to improve on past performance.[808] Publically, the LPA reaffirmed its commitment to a centralised campaign run by the federal secretariat in conjunction with the federal leader (as advocated by *Facing the Facts),* whilst paying due lip-service to the need for flexibility for campaigns to be adapted to local conditions.[809]

However, adaptation to the new media opportunities was nowhere near uniform across the party. State divisions exercised their prerogative to adapt national campaign themes to 'conditions on the ground', as they were still largely responsible for organising events for federal ministers within their own state. Neither federal nor state party organs could account for the 'side deals' that shadow ministers and backbenchers organised in order to visit their local electorates.[810] Gaps between what was planned centrally and what would eventuate on the ground were not uncommon. The best that the federal secretariat could hope for was to attempt to exercise some oversight so opportunities were not wasted.

Even when organisation was smooth, divisions could not always agree on campaign tactics. For example, in the 1983 post-election wash-up, NSW complained that although ministers were 'encouraged' to participate in events such as street walks and visits to retirement homes, some ministers were 'reluctant' to participate. Instead, the NSW division complained that these ministers preferred to seek 'major media coverage',[811] demonstrating the disjuncture in goals between the federal and state party organs. Indeed, translating national campaigns on the ground in individual states remains a recurring source of tension within the party to this day.[812]

Another factor forcing both sides of politics to adapt was the recognition by political actors of the changing power balance between politicians and the press. Advice submitted to the leadership of the LPA reflects an understanding of this shift in power. A planning memo from the 1980 campaign, used as source material by Peacock's office, advised that care should be taken when calling press conferences as 'the media become "bored" if Ministers have nothing new to say'.[813] Seven years

[807] Hughes, 'A Close Run Thing', 285.
[808] NAA: M1601, 3/7, minute, for Andrew Peacock, 'Federal election campaign co-ordination for Shadow Ministers,' July 20 1984.
[809] Liberal Party of Australia. Committee of Review and Valder, *Facing the Facts*, 88.
[810] NAA: M1601, 3/7, minute, 'Campaign Co-ordination'.
[811] NAA: M1601, 3/7, 'extract of NSW division 1983 campaign report', 7.
[812] Hancock, *The Liberals*.
[813] NAA: M1601, 3/7, memo, 'Ministerial Co-ordination', September 1980, 6.

later, Tony Eggleton was still reminding the leadership group that shadow ministers 'are not news in themselves if they don't have a message' and that they may only become 'news' if they stuff up or commit a gaffe.[814]

Planning by party apparatchiks also reflected the party's adaptation to news production process in the early 1980s. This included the split between news production services to cater for local markets and an increasing focus on 'national' news broadcasting, in addition to a greater focus on political news from Canberra. In the mid-1980s, memos sent to campaign organisers reflected a growing awareness of the work patterns of the media. Thus, there was no point placing shadow ministers in the same city as the opposition leader, because given the limited space in news bulletins, the shadow minister would struggle to compete for coverage with Peacock.[815] The increasing centrality of media coverage in the party's communication strategy is summed up neatly by its campaign goals for its planned 1986 mid-term campaign to 'generally raise the party's profile and convince the media that a united and determined Liberal party is up and running with confidence.'[816] If the LPA could convince the media that the party was united, then voters would in all likelihood believe it too.

At the other end of the political communication spectrum, Stephen Mills' 1986 classic, *The New Machine Men*, illustrated the evolution in the political party's research skill sets in the 1980s. Indeed, the LPA's research capacity was largely in its infancy and well behind the systematic use of political research used by the ALP and its researcher ANOP. Mills outlines the LPA's shift to a long-term campaign based on the principles of commercial marketing, which was spearheaded by Stephen Litchfield who developed these techniques for Nick Greiner's NSW state level opposition.[817] Litchfield advocated that politics ought to be researched and marketed just like 'cornflakes or beer'.[818] His philosophy was to 'produce a product people want' and to then monitor its progress. Mills documents the success of direct-mail campaigns in NSW, which were then adopted by the federal party in the lead up to the 1984 election.[819] Yet, Mills' picture of the successful insurgency campaign is too neat. Policy was still crafted by MPs in their own offices, even if these were not the messages emphasised in the campaign. Although centralisation did occur, the reality on the ground did not match the hopes of central campaigners. State directors and individual MPs still had a large degree of independence, which they used to shape and execute campaigns in for much of the 1980s.

[814] NAA: M3417, 864, memo, Tony Eggleton to Leadership Group, 'Raising the profile of the Frontbench', November 23 1987, 3.
[815] NAA: M1601, 3/7, minute, 'Campaign Co-ordination'.
[816] NAA: M1601, 4/24, memo, Tony Eggleton, '1986 mid-term: agency brief', June 20 1985, 2.
[817] Mills, *The New Machine Men*, 104.
[818] Ibid.,
[819] Ibid., p. 106-7; NAA: M1601, 4/24, memo Allister Drysdale to Andrew Peacock, July 1 1985.

Selling narratives: ideas and agenda setting as the building blocks of political communication

To understand the Coalition's relationship between narrative-building and campaigning on policy ideas, this chapter examines three examples in detail. First, the launch and sale of Deputy Leader Neil Brown's industrial relations policy in 1986, which represents a typical approach to policy-making and policy release in the 1980s. Second, the LPA's approach to mid-term campaigning through 'directional documents'. Third, the LPA's attempt to explain, sell and construct a narrative with *Fightback!* is explored, as an atypical and extraordinary example of ideas-as-political-communication. Finally, the chapter will conclude by reflecting on the lessons learnt by both the federal Party and John Howard in the lead up to the 1996 election.

Selling a deregulatory industrial relations policy in the mid-1980s

Industrial relations was a long-standing contentious policy area for the Coalition. This was the result of the Coalition's natural enmity towards a labour movement, which by the late 1970s had become overly aggressive in campaigns for wage increases that fed into the economy's significant problems with inflation.[820] Second, the Fraser government's IR policy had vacillated between aggressive laws against unions and a conciliatory attempt to co-ordinate its own incomes policy in late 1982, known as 'pause for a cause'. Third, the ascension of John Howard to the Liberal leadership in September 1985 marked a distinct change in approach by the LPA in this policy area. Industrial relations had already been the cause of internal tensions between Howard and high profile 'wet' Ian Macphee in 1984. The policy, which the Coalition took to the 1984 election had subtly shifted the party's policy away from wage fixation and the arbitration commission.[821]

For the Liberal party, industrial relations had become a potent symbol of a future Australia that the ascendant 'dry' faction sought to project. Reform of industrial relations meant adopting a policy prescription that took on the complacent 'IR Club', many of whose supporters were in the Melbourne business community and had powerful advocates, such as Ian Macphee, within the Liberal party itself.[822] By the mid-1980s Howard's own anti-union credentials were well established.[823] Moreover, Hawke's 1982-83 accord with the unions made industrial relations a key point of difference between the parties. Thus, Industrial Relations provided an opportunity to offer a distinct alternative to the ALP's corporatism and, for Howard personally, a chance to signal a decisive

[820] Ian W. McLean, *Why Australia Prospered: The Shifting Sources of Economic Growth* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2013), 210–11, 217–18, 227.
[821] Kelly, *The End of Certainty*, 111–20.
[822] Bongiorno, *The Eighties*, 168.
[823] Howard, *Lazarus Rising*, 20–21.

policy shift and establish the party's policy credentials. Finally, a decisive industrial relations policy was thought as a way to win back business, which had lost faith in the party in the mid-1980s.[824]

Neil Brown had become shadow industrial relations minister and deputy leader of the Liberal party as a result of a bungled leadership challenge in September 1985 from Peacock to Howard.[825] Brown's approach to crafting the policy was typical of the policy-making process in the mid-1980s: Brown reviewed the previous policy; engaged stake holders; drafted the policy and sent it out for review to his backbench committee, the Joint Standing Committee on Federal Policy and the policy review committee; and circulated it to small group of trusted shadow ministers.[826] After less than six months, Brown was preparing the policy for release.[827]

By, mid-February 1986, planning discussions between Brown, Howard and the federal secretariat had begun to market Brown's industrial relations policy in earnest. Although, the next election was not due until the second half of 1987, Brown was urging its release in February or March 1986. However, circumstances would ensure that the policy would not be released until mid-May. The fragmented record of letters and memorandum reveal that Brown and the party organisation were wary of the media and cognisant of the fact that the industrial relations policy was likely to face resistance and criticism, despite the relatively modest prescriptions.

Brown's misgivings were well founded. On 5 February 1986, details of a consultation meeting with the BCA held two days previously, were leaked to the *Australian Financial Review*. The report suggested that acrimony had characterised the meeting canvassing the Coalition's industrial relations policy, when in fact the meeting had been constructive. Reporting along these lines played into the existing negative perception of the Coalition as radical and ideological.[828]

Brown's approach to launching the policy was framed in the context of suspicion of the media and weak party discipline. While Brown's papers do not explicitly mention the BCA meeting, they do reveal signs of tension and wariness. In a letter to Howard in February, Brown outlined his eagerness to move rapidly after obtaining party room approval, suggesting that there should be 'no gap between the joint-parties meeting and the launch' of the policy.[829] Presumably, this would limit opportunities for those hostile to the policy to negatively brief the press. Brown's unease about the

[824] As just one example: NAA: M2239, 119, memo, Hugh Morgan and the Liberals rapport with business', July 17 1984.
[825] Peacock attempted to spill Howard's position as deputy leader. When he lost the motion he announced he had to consider his position and shortly thereafter resigned as leader of the Liberal Party.
[826] NAA: M3039, 28, letter, Neil Brown to John Howard, 're: industrial relations policy', February 17 1986.
[827] Ibid.
[828] Shaun Carney, *Australia in Accord: Politics and Industrial Relations under the Hawke Government* (South Melbourne: Sun Books, 1988), 131.
[829] Ibid.

media was expressed again three days later in another letter to Howard, responding to a memorandum by the federal secretariat[830] which canvassed ideas for launching the policy. Brown argued against the secretariat's suggestion of launching the policy at a business luncheon, as he was 'troubled' by the 'possibility of the press talking to people who may for some reason or other want to criticise parts of the policy'.[831] Instead, Brown argued that the party's launch should focus on satisfying the media — they could not stop questions, because, 'if the journalists are not questioning me they will be questioning other people'.[832] The party could organise events for business separately.

At the same time, the tension between policy substance and its marketing potential was apparent between Brown's finalised policy draft and the federal secretariat's advice about how it should be marketed. Brown was resistant to suggestions by the secretariat to hire a public relations consultant to 'redraft' the document. Brown conceded that they might use 'better language from a public relations point of view' but that 're-drafting raises unnecessary problems about the constitutionality of some of the proposals.'[833] By early March, Brown submitted a policy release timetable for circulation between the secretariat, and likely Howard as well. The plan focused on the logistics of organising printing, shepherding the policy through shadow cabinet and the party room, and finally, the administrative details of the launch itself.[834]

Once again, Brown's wariness of the media was evident when he suggested that the launch invitations should 'only' state 'that a major Liberal Party statement on IR policy will be made on that day: NOT that the policy will be launched.'[835] David Trebeck, a senior policy advisor from the secretariat noted that he 'understood why' Brown would make this request, but cautioned that such an approach would suppress media interest.[836] That same month, Brown was marshalling support for the publicity campaign from the party's industrial relations backbench committee, asking committee members to brainstorm ideas to support the policy's launch.[837]

Yet, Brown's initial timetable was disrupted by a breakdown in discipline and internal disagreement over the policy direction. The second meeting on 25 February 1986 with the BCA generated a passionate outburst from Ian Macphee who criticised both the policy content and its portrayal as

[830] At the time of writing, I only have access to Brown's side of the correspondence.
[831] NAA: M3039, 28, letter, Neil Brown to John Howard, 're: industrial relations policy launch', February 20 1986, 2.
[832] Ibid., 3.
[833] Ibid., 2.
[834] NAA: M3039, 31, 'Draft: Industrial Relations Policy Launch: Timetable and checklists'.
[835] Ibid., 4
[836] Ibid.
[837] NAA: M3039, 28, letter, Neil Brown to Stewart McArthur, March 13 1986.

official party policy. He argued it had not been approved by either the shadow cabinet or the party room. Given Macphee's opposition it was likely to face significant resistance by some sections of the party who shared Macphee's views.[838] The policy's launch was further disrupted by the leak of a confidential briefing note by David Trebeck, which had drawn up lists of 'supporters', 'neutrals' and 'hostile' commentators in the media and in business. The memo was disastrously leaked to Labor minister, Ralph Willis.[839]

These missteps invited public criticism of the Liberal party and drew attention to the party's internal management problems, distracting from the policy itself. John Stone argued that the Liberal party was worried about the wrong people, and should focus on the '600,000 or so businessmen and women, most of them not at all prominent, who comprise the business element of middle Australia', rather than ten businessmen. Northern Territory Liberal MP, Paul Everingham publically decried the damage caused by the leaks. It 'was not that it named target people in the media and industry' or 'that was interpreted as having some kind of sinister implication.' Nor 'was it just that the document appeared to be such a pathetically naive attempt to work up a marketing strategy and reflected on party organisation and security.' For Everingham, the damage was caused because the scandal obscured the policy that the federal secretariat was intending 'to sell.'[840] Everingham had stumbled onto a problem that the federal secretariat was starting to become increasingly mindful of itself: that 'increased speed and efficiency of communications places demands on the politician and the party which must be met instantly, efficiently and coherently — or else we fail'.[841] How would the party manage the needs of the media and its own desires to put policy at the centre of its communications strategy?

Controversy over Macphee's outburst and the leaked memo delayed planning for the policy launch until April. Like Groundhog Day, planning focused on organising for the policy to go through shadow cabinet and the party room.[842] By early May the finishing touches on the party's marketing strategy were implemented. The strategy would be a mix of interpersonal campaigning led by Coalition parliamentarians and a mass media approach of content delivered for national distribution. John Howard would make a speech at the Press Club on 8 May foreshadowing Brown's announcement, outlining the policy in broad terms. He claimed that 'the policy proposes the most important reform

[838] Carney, *Australia in Accord*, 133–35.
[839] Paul Malone, 'Liberals' list adds to their troubles', *The Canberra Times*, March 21 1986.
[840] 'Libs told to modernise', *The Canberra Times*, April 7 1986.
[841] Ibid.
[842] NAA: M3039, 28, letter, Neil Brown to John Howard, April 7 1986; NAA: M3039, 28, letter, John Howard to Neil Brown, April 9 1986.

in Australia's industrial relations since the passing of the *Conciliation and Arbitration Act* in 1904.'[843] The speech was intended to foreshadow Brown's launch a few days later and was supported by an advance mail-out to business groups, particularly those mentioned in the infamously leaked memo as well as selected media editors. The party also paid for an insert in the *Australian Financial Review,* and it produced a 'man in the street' pamphlet for distribution by Coalition members.[844] After the launch, a wider mail-out to business and the media would follow and backbenchers would receive further support and materials to help them sell the policy.

The policy received a mixed welcome, but Brown's view that it had gone well was justified. While, the policy did face criticism, they were standard complaints that typically arise when an entrenched system of power are threatened.[845] The *Australian Financial Review* praised the party's bravery but remained critical of the structure of the policy, which struggled with coherence and technical problems.[846] Importantly, the policy was considered to be 'far more restrained' than what had been foreshadowed by Howard in 1985.[847] Michelle Grattan also noted that the policy was 'better put together intellectually' than the 1984 policy and she noted that it had the support of many in business community.[848] However, the policy struggled to overcome the concerns raised by Grattan and others that implementing the policy would cause friction. The media asked rhetorically if it was truly a better path than Labor's accord?[849]

Voters decided it was not. The Coalition lost the 1987 election. In his branch newsletter, *The Menzies Report*, Brown concluded that the main reasons for defeat were not solely the disunity arising from the 'Joh for PM' debacle or mistakes in some of their policies. 'We did not have all of our policies ready on time and in time for the pubic to digest them' and 'the public just did not accept us as a reliable, alternative government,' he argued.[850] Staged policy release was not just a matter of building up momentum but also allowing time for voters to learn and understand the Coalition's policies. The industrial relations policy also demonstrated the difficulties posed by a lack of party discipline, particularly on such a contentious matter. It would have been challenge enough to

[843] John Howard, 'Foundations for Government', Speech delivered to the National Press Club, May 8 1986, 8-9, http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/media/pressrel/HPR09019230/upload_binary/HPR09019230.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22john%20howard%20press%20club%201980s%201986%22
[844] NAA: M3039, 28, memo, David Trebeck to Neil Brown, 'IR policy launch', May 5 1986.
[845] Michael Pirrie and John Masanauskas, 'Business finds fault with Lib Policy', *The Age*, May 13 1986; Paul Robinson, 'Employers lukewarm on Lib wage policy', *The Age*, May 12 1986.
[846] Gregory Hywood, 'Libs' limp industrial revolution', *The Australian Financial Review,* May 12 1986; Michael Stutchbury, 'Macroeconomic vacuum', *The Australian Financial Review,* May 12 1986; Gerard Noonan, 'Many technical problems', *The Australian Financial Review,* May 12 1986.
[847] Matthew Moore, 'Libs go for industrial restraint', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 12 1986.
[848] Michelle Grattan, 'Will the Liberals founder on a strong accord?', *The Age,* May 12 1986.
[849] Ibid.
[850] NAA: M3039, 35, 'The Menzies Report' December 1987, 3.

manage an issue like industrial relations with a united team. But without discipline and with Brown's (understandable) unease towards the media it was impossible. Brown's wariness about the press meant that the LPA was unable to exploit some of the principles of active public relations explored in chapter four, such as cultivating favourable coverage from journalists. Despite the difficulties, placing policy at the centre of the Coalition's communication strategy was reindorsed by Brown and other party members.

Learning to manage expectations and major issues: continuous campaigning 1986-1989

Liberal party plans for mid-term campaigning between mid-1986 and mid-1989 illustrate the evolution in the party's approach to political communication over the parliamentary term. Plans developed for a mini-campaign in mid-1986 were drafted between the immediate aftermath of the 1984 election and the winter of 1985 — before Peacock lost the leadership to John Howard. By May 1985, internal thinking on political communication remained consistent with the recommendations of the Valder committee outlined above.[851] Peacock's mid-term campaign would span three weeks and act as the thematic bedrock of the party's re-election campaign in 1987.[852] Research would be commissioned to help with the 'themes, issues and marketing strategy' of the campaign. But the party's ambition did not stop there.[853] Proposals for the campaign (which never materialised) included a 'highly-publicised' launch by Peacock with a 'directional document', followed up by nation-wide bill-board advertising, a 'comprehensive, interstate itinerary for Andrew Peacock and the other leaders', sweeps of key marginal seats, including state leaders, and even a 'peace and deterrence' conference.[854] Naturally, media coverage had to be 'maximised'. There was even talk of hiring a charter plane so Peacock's media team would be able to travel alongside.

At the state division level, the plan emphasised events to build up the capacity of the party such as membership drives, direct mail campaigns, rallies and meetings, and reinvigorated talk-back radio and letter writing teams. Pre-selection of candidates would also be finalised early, so that candidates could fully benefit from the mid-term campaign.[855] As a strategy, it would mimic an election campaign and would lean heavily on the party's human capital. As usual, the problem was finding the money to pay for it all.

By 1989, the party's thinking and strategies about political communication had evolved. Howard's mid-term campaign repeated many of the obvious points of the 1985 document — that the party

[851] NAA: M1601, 4/24, 'Secretariat discussion paper: mid-term campaign in 1986', May 1985, 2.
[852] NAA: M1601, 4/24, memo, Tony Eggleton, '1986 mid-term: agency brief', June 20 1985, 3.
[853] Ibid., 4.
[854] Ibid., 3–4.
[855] Ibid., 4.

retain Coalition seats, increase its margin in Labor-held electorates and win enough marginal seats to form government. Based on five points, the strategy repeated tried and true aphorisms, such as, the party must 'show leadership, vision and unity', 'adhere to comprehensive strategies in winnable seats' and called for discipline in their communications strategy.[856] The strategy Howard presented to his shadow ministry in August 1988 underlined the need to 'maintain a disciplined focus on a maximum of 4 major issues that best reflect OUR MISSION' and a greater focus on an organised and sustained campaign against the ALP.[857]

From this Howard deduced a further 'ten conditions of winning' to inform the party's broad strategy. Again many of the 'conditions' were practical: preselecting candidates on time and developing campaigning plans for winnable seats well before the next election.[858] Like Peacock, the Liberal party under Howard recognised the important role of the leader who must 'focus on the positive and stick rigidly to the major issues' — leaving other issues to shadow ministers. The biggest difference between the Peacock and Howard plans was recognition of the importance of managing issues and the resources involved. One of Howard's conditions of winning was the designation of a senior person to the leader's office 'with a single responsibility — "issue management"'.[859] The task of the 'implementer' was to 'ensure discipline among our spokesmen, to telegraph the leader's view, to ensure adherence to overall strategy and prepare strategy to run each issue.'[860]

Howard also identified four issues which the party needed to set the agenda. First, in health, particularly in relation to the costs and quality of service; second, tax, specifically superannuation with an emphasis on the Coalition's plans to favour families in the tax system; third, eligibility for welfare with an increased emphasis on mutual obligation; and finally Howard's vision of 'One Australia', which emphasised managing the immigration intake to recognise the needs of social cohesion.[861] In a recognition of the binary nature of political communication, Howard's plan called for the adoption of an 'uncompromising position' on one or two 'contentious, but narrowly based policy issues' such as opposing an Aboriginal Treaty, which would demonstrate the Coalition's 'resolve to deliver'.[862]

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[856] NAA: M3417, 864, memo, John Howard to the Leadership group, 'A winning strategy', August 5 1988, 2.
[857] Ibid.
[858] Ibid., 3.
[859] Ibid.
[860] Ibid.
[861] Ibid.; Marija Taflaga, 'The Influence of Alternative Prime Ministers on Major Public Debates', Australian Prime Minister's Centre, Museum of Australian Democracy, Old Parliament House, Canberra, June 13 2014.', in *Australian Prime Minister's Centre* (Museum of Australian Democracy, Old Parliament House, Canberra, 2014).
[862] Ibid.

The 'ten conditions of winning' demonstrated party actors' growing understanding of the importance of managing issues on a continuous basis. In 1983, continuous campaigning meant hiring field officers to undertake political canvassing and campaigning. By the late 1980s, there were still many within the party (though not at the highest levels) who called for this approach. Howard's 1988 strategy planning shows a clear evolution towards more use of media and a more disciplined, centralised and managed approach, aimed at trying to keep on top of the message at all times rather than using mid-term campaigns to re-set the political landscape.

Parts of Howard's strategy were delivered before he was deposed as leader in May 1989. *Future Directions*, released in late 1988, was a product of mid-term campaign planning. By 1988, the federal secretariat was increasingly cognisant of the importance of managing policy expectations, which with each consecutive election loss were becoming harder to manage.[863] The challenge was how to present policy ideas that had failed at the 1987 election, but which would remain party policy. Graham Wynn, *Future Direction'*s principle author, argued that the party should emphasise new, specific initiatives, such as the privatisation of Qantas, which would distract from the reality that few policies had changed since the election.[864] Moreover, a 'directional' document like *Future Directions,* gave the Coalition something to release, perhaps at the launch of its mid-term campaign. More importantly, as Tony Eggleton argued, it allowed the party to 'skate around the detail of incomplete policies'.[865] A directional document was not designed to replace existing literature, rather it was designed specifically to influence media commentators and opinion leaders.[866]

Subsequently, many long-serving party apparatchiks and parliamentarians believed that *Future Directions* was a success because it spoke to ordinary Australians and foreshadowed the mix of economic and social conservatism of the Howard government. Yet, as a document designed for the media, it failed. *Future Directions* was mocked by many journalists for its 1950s-style traditional family values, which appeared out of step with the dynamic 1980s. However, the directional document as an expression of 'issues management' would have a prominent future (see chapter eight).

[863] NAA: M3417, 864, memo, Graham Wynn, 'Policy Release Programme', March 1988, 1.
[864] Ibid.
[865] NAA: M3417, 864, memo, Tony Eggleton to John Howard, 'A plan for marketing our policies', March 3 1988.
[866] NAA: M3417, 864, memo, Graham Wynn, 'Policy Release Programme', March 1988, 2. Indeed, the idea for a directional document had appeared in the planning for the 1986 mid-term campaign but there appears to be little evidence that much work got underway.

Fightback!: the high watermark of comprehensive policy ideas as political communication.

Policy as the key building block of a political communication strategy reached its high watermark with *Fightback!*. To use Landerer's framework, it also represented the height of the Coalition's adoption of 'normative political logic' — that is, approaching politics according to their belief of the public good, rather than a vote maximisation strategy.[867] The inclusion of detailed economic modelling in *Fightback!* made it the most detailed and specific policy proposals released before or since by a party in opposition. Consequently, the Coalition strategy was premised on an early release of detailed policy with the twin aims of wresting the agenda from the government and leaving the opposition enough time to educate the public.[868] In doing so, voters would not only see that the Coalition had a coherent and detailed plan for the future (rather than a vision in outline), and it would also convince the electorate that they were a credible alternative government.

Yet, failure at the 1993 election discredited the grand ideas-as-political-communication model not only for the Liberal party in coalition but also subsequent oppositions from both sides in Australian politics. Given the energy expended in both crafting and attempting to sell *Fightback!*, it could not be reasonably argued that the party could have tried more, had 'better' policies or released them earlier. As this section will outline, from the perspective of Fred Chaney, the Coalition MP charged with responsibility for selling *Fightback!* to the public, the whole endeavour was enormous. Ultimately, it proved to be beyond the logistical capacity of a party in opposition and the package's complexity proved resistant to simplification. Ultimately, the LPA was unable to reassure voters that they could be trusted. In the wake of the defeat of *Fightback!* the party then adopted different strategies to attract voters, in preparation for the 1996 election.

As outlined in chapter five, *Fightback!* was a complex and detailed policy platform, whose overarching goal was to reconstruct the community's relationship with government. Its implications flowed through virtually all corners of Australian life. Moreover, *Fightback!* was specific and laid bare its assumptions. Thus, the opposition became a giant, stationary target half way through the parliamentary term. Two decades on, *Fightback!* is popularly known as the 'longest suicide note' in Australian history. Yet, the package was neither solely the product of John Hewson's formidable personal will, nor was it the Liberal party's ideological fantasies run wild. *Fightback!* was developed in the unfolding shadow of the 1990 recession, Australia's worst since the Great Depression, and after almost a decade of on-going economic reform in Australia.[869] The LPA's own modest internal research pointed to a population hungry for solutions. Quantitative research undertaken in 1990 and

[867] Landerer, 'Rethinking the Logics', 248–49.
[868] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on July 11 2013.
[869] McLean, *Why Australia Prospered*, Chapter 9.

early 1991 revealed that over sixty per cent of Australians believed that the country was 'seriously heading in the wrong direction'.[870] The Coalition was also building on their lead as preferred economic managers.[871] Party research revealed a viable level of support for a consumption tax (50.1 per cent in favour in September 1990) because it represented a 'fairer taxation system'.[872] Nonetheless, the same research cautioned that there remained high levels of confusion about a consumption tax. Despite disenchantment with Labor, 'disenchantment alone is not generating a positive disposition to the Coalition'.[873] The party's own research was telling them that they could not hope to coast into government.

Qualitative research by Hugh Mackay undertaken in 1990 revealed a similar picture.[874] Australians were using the language of personal responsibility and 'restraint', and they were resigned to the need for tough solutions to assuage Australia's hangover after the corporate excess and high debt-fuelled consumer spending of the late 1980s.[875] According to Mackay, voters were disenchanted with politics but retained some hope that 'somewhere' there was 'a political leader who has a clear vision for Australia, unquestionable personality integrity, 'the common touch' and a strength of purpose'.[876] However, Mackay's research also pointed to the dangers for the Coalition: evidence of reform fatigue, suspicion of foreign investment, especially from Asia, persistent emotional attachment to a 'viable' manufacturing sector and a desire for more regulation, authority and discipline imposed on the nation and its profligate business class.[877] Mackay's research both pointed a way forward for the Coalition but simultaneously uncovered the potholes which would bring the Coalition undone.

The Coalition started planning *Fightback!* almost immediately after the 1990 election. Hewson secured party room support for the consumption tax as the centrepiece of his policy reform agenda. The party also considered how to market *Fightback!*. The early days of this planning work are unclear given the primary source collections available, but what is clear is that planning was well underway by late 1990. The summary notes of a strategy meeting held at the end of November reveal both continuities and differences in the LPA's approach to communication strategies. The similarities were the basics of campaigning: set the agenda, win media support, and convince voters that Coalition policy is good for Australia. The differences reflected a further refining of Coalition

[870] NAA: M1435, 102, 'Political issues quantitative research', February 1991, 1.
[871] Ibid., 6; NAA: M1435, 102, 'Political issues' and 'best party for' quantitative research, September 1990, 6.
[872] NAA: M1435, 102, 'Political issues' and 'best party for' quantitative research, September 1990, 7-8.; NAA: M1435, 102, 'selling policy (b)' *The Mackay Report* 1990, 42.
[873] NAA: M1435, 102, 'Political issues Quantitative Research', February 1991, 2.
[874] NAA: M1435, 102,*The Mackay Report* 1990, 53.
[875] Ibid., 11, 16, 54–55.
[876] Ibid., 33.
[877] Ibid., 10, 45, 59.

thinking since the 1988 mid-term campaigning efforts and reflected the Coalition's more sophisticated understanding of *how* the party could aim to set the agenda and their own agency in doing so. In their planning documents, the Coalition was drilling down further into the specifics of how to construct their campaigns and framing their political communication approach in terms of strategic positioning: what perceptions exists among voters about the Coalition versus Labor; how will Labor attempt to frame us, therefore, how do we structure our own campaign to anticipate this attack; what issues are our strengths; and which issues need to be neutralised?[878]

The implication of this approach was that communication strategies had to be actively crafted and maintained. Hence the meeting attendees entreated that the focus must be 'on outcomes and end benefits rather than the means (ie you don't talk about tariffs but a viable manufacturing industry). Watch the language or you lose the battle on your issues'.[879] Fred Chaney was appointed by Hewson in March 1991 to manage communicating and marketing *Fightback!*. In his introductory briefing, Andrew Robb explained the party's political communications approach designed to unpack messaging ideas using a 'grid'. The 'grid' was a framework designed to link Hewson's personal characteristics to party policy and image. Robb explained that this was both as a means of explaining what the party stood for and how the party would use Hewson himself as a symbol:

> The grid helps clearly identify (and explain to others) those issues that are our strengths and should be the constant focus of our public comment, those issues which are Labor's strengths and are to be avoided, and those issues that we think we can shift between now and the next election campaign either to our advantage or to neutralise.[880]

Thus Hewson's academic qualities were linked to competence and implied a strong ministerial team and detailed policy, while his non-political image meant he was 'honest' and that he wouldn't descend into 'empty rhetoric' or 'platitudes'.[881] Leaders had always been important sales figures and symbols for the party, but previous documentary evidence does not show this level of granular strategizing and planning to link the leader to a set of symbols and ideas. In the past, ideas had been left as unpacked statements, their assumptions unexplored. Perhaps this was the work for the advertising agency.

Finally, planners identified specific strategies to adopt and delineated why they were useful. These included telephone canvassing, direct mail and marginal seat campaigning. In addition, the party broke the electorate down into different interest groups and they attempted to apply different vote

[878] NAA: M1435, 102, 'Strategy meeting, November 30 and December 1 1990: Summary of Main points", 2, 7.
[879] Ibid., 2.
[880] NAA: M1435, 102, letter, Andrew Robb to Fred Chaney, 'Marketing Coalition Policies', March 13 1991.
[881] NAA: M1435, 101, memo, Fred Chaney to John Hewson, 'Selling our policies', May 30 1991, 5.

harvesting strategies to each group. Some groups would be actively recruited (elderly, small business, women or senate vote), others would be attacked (the Australian Democrats).[882] Thus, planning was more sophisticated than it had been for previous campaigns. By reflecting on lessons learnt from the 1980s, the LPA adapted its strategies and attempted to seize new opportunities afforded by mass communications and more sophisticated research methods.

It is likely that the federal secretariat in conjunction with Hewson's office was responsible for deciding how *Fightback!* would be presented and packaged for release, the details of which are not present in the Chaney papers. Operating as a mobiliser or fixer, Chaney worked closely with the federal secretariat to develop a strategy which anticipated the party's future approach to managing its communications later in the decade. However, what was planned and what eventuated in 1992 were different.[883] Chaney's approach was clearly shaped by thinking in the federal secretariat and his role was to build on these foundations. Chaney noted the previous successful campaigns were based on broad overarching themes such as 'time for change' or 'return to verities'. Importantly, the theme must 'sit easily and naturally with him [Hewson] and explain him.'[884] 'The secret', argued Chaney, was in 'conveying key attitudes with concrete examples' that could ground themes and slogans in reality.[885] However, the reality was that communication between the Chaney and Hewson was formal in tone and infrequent, suggesting a level of coolness between the two men and a relative lack of co-ordination between policy development and how it would be marketed.

At the policy's launch on 21 November 1991, *Fightback!* was marketed in the traditional manner: a major speech at the Press Club, followed up by interviews and further speeches by John Hewson, Shadow Treasurer Peter Reith and other senior frontbenchers. A new innovation, typical of Hewson's dictum of 'giving everyone a job', was the announcement of eleven major task forces (such as aged care, transport or youth) and four smaller task forces (such as women or ethnic affairs), which would co-ordinate and organise around policy areas in order to explain aspects of 'the package' and to target voter segments and interest groups.[886] There were also dedicated liaisons and special response groups in each state.[887]

Fightback!'s launch was successful. Newspapers ran large lift-out spreads akin to budget night and the scope, depth and detail of *Fightback!* impressed the press gallery, even if most reacted with

[882] NAA: M1435, 102, 'Strategy meeting, November 30 and December 1 1990: Summary of Main points', 4–6.
[883] This section's analysis is largely based on Fred Chaney's papers and therefore is only partial its findings. It is likely that these conclusions will be subject to further revision in the future when more Liberal Party archive materials become available.
[884] NAA: M1435, 101, 'selling our policies' May 30 1991, 2.
[885] Ibid., 3.
[886] NAA: M1435, 318, 'Tax reform Campaign Task Forces'.
[887] Ibid.

some caution while they processed the detail.[888] A stunned ALP was further bruised after their attempt to leak the package the night before the launch backfired. Instead, the press gallery roundly criticised Hawke for wasting time leaking the opposition's policies rather than coming up with his own.[889] Indeed, *Fightback!* precipitated the final series of crises for Hawke's prime ministership, which saw Paul Keating finally triumph in a leadership spill in December 1991. Moreover, the Coalition saw its poll numbers rise significantly from the mid-forties to highs of 53 per cent in several polls.[890] Yet, after the initial shock and awe of *Fightback!'s* arrival, the Coalition began to lose steam in early 1992. In Paul Keating, they faced a new prime minister, who was equally capable and ruthless in his attacks on the package and Hewson.

Even at this early stage, the Coalition was struggling with the two recurrent problems that would plague the LPA to polling day. The first was the party's deficient capacity to prosecute its argument in the electorate. The logistical challenge of organising a mass education campaign proved to be overwhelming for the party. Indeed, the subsequent closeness of the 1998 election — where Howard's government campaigned for the GST alone is a telling indication of the challenge that Hewson's LPA had taken on. Only a month after *Fightback!*'s launch, Chaney was already cautioning that the party risked losing the community and would fail to 'galvanise the business community into action' if they did not illustrate the 'concrete future' that *Fightback*! would deliver. He was worried that the plan was too complex and abstract.[891]

Three months after the launch, the logistical problems that would ultimately overwhelm the campaign began to emerge. For example, only five of the eleven major task forces had even met. Of the remaining groups only two had arranged public meetings and another two had distributed promotional material.[892] The lack of action amongst the co-ordination groups was typical of the problems facing the party organisation, which stemmed from the party's limited capacity to draw on paid staff and the overall lower levels of political professionalisation within the LPA's MPs and Senators at that time.

Second, Coalition members faced significant challenges in explaining the complex package. At a joint party meeting on 26 February for Members and Senators, concerns were expressed that the initial

[888] Peter Hartcher, 'Brothers, have you the faith?', *The Sydney Morning Herald,* November 22 1991.; Geoff Kitney, 'Bold plan could make Hewson PM', *The Australian Financial Review,* November 22 1991.; Simon Lloyd, 'Publicity Coup Rebuilds Coalition's Image', *Australian Financial Review*, December 17 1991..
[889] Tony Wright, 'A vision of independence', *The Canberra Times*, November 22 1991; Joanne Gray, 'A leak bought the ship home', *Australian Financial Review,* November 22 1991.
[890] Simon Lloyd, 'Publicity Coup Rebuilds Coalition's Image', *Australian Financial Review*.
[891] NAA: M1435, 96, 'folder title: Leader of the Opposition - John Hewson [correspondence]' letter Chaney to John Hewson, December 17 1991, 2.
[892] NAA: M1435, 317, memo, David Connolly to John Hewson, 'Tax reform campaign task forces', January 16 1992.

positive reaction towards *Fightback!* would be eroded by high levels of confusion amongst voters. Coalition members complained about delays in the distribution of pamphlets which could 'simply' explain the package, or that the material they had was 'unconvincing' and that the party was 'fooling ourselves if we think we are being effective'.[893] The co-ordination of activities by MPs was again typical Hewson: members were surveyed about the campaign's effectiveness and asked to report their activities. Eighty-five per cent of the sixty Coalition parliamentarians that responded reported that *Fightback!* materials were adequate to their needs, but members asked for more specialist brochures on specific topics and for simpler language.[894] Most members were putting their efforts into letter writing campaigns (44 respondents), interest group meetings (39), public meetings (35) and 'personal contact' (31). Door knocking, street stalls and telephone polling were used by five or less respondents.[895]

The workload alone proved to be overwhelming for the party's limited resources. Hewson responded with a reshuffle on 28 April 1992, which established the *Fightback!* Co-ordination and Marketing Group, headed by Chaney with David Connolly as deputy.[896] MPs struggled to give concrete answers to constituents about their personal circumstances. Worse still, parliamentarians often did not know where to obtain accurate information. The circumstances bred frustration, with one MP complaining to Connolly that his job would be 'considerably easier if the federal secretariat pulled their fingers out and installed the feedback system which I paid for nearly two and half months ago!'[897]

The Coalition struggled with its own internal paper flow to equip shadow ministers with appropriate material to respond to criticisms of the package. One memo illustrated the problem evocatively. A staff member in Hewson's office would pass on material to Alexander Downer — tasked with responding to criticism of *Fightback!*. Downer or his staff member would prepare responses for shadow ministers. But Downer had recently lost his staff allocation to Andrew Peacock and now, without support, did not want the job. It was thought by Chaney's advisor, Keith Kessell that perhaps David Connolly, who had the most experience with this issue might take it on. Kessell, resigned to the situation, concluded his memo to Chaney noting 'whatever you and he decide, a new memo

[893] NAA: M1435, 317, David Connolly, 'Joint Party Meeting for members and senators to raise issues relating to the fightback package February 26 1992 at 9.am', 1.
[894] NAA: M1435, 317, 'Fightback Check list responses', 1–2.
[895] Ibid., 1.
[896] NAA: M1435, 318, Press release, 'Shadow Ministry', April 28 1992.
[897] NAA: M1435, 314, letter, Michael Ronaldson to David Connolly, August 10 1992.

needs to be sent around to your colleagues who only recently got one telling them to send the media reports to Alexander [Downer].'[898]

Even assuming the Liberal Party could overcome its logistical problems, *Fightback!*'s complexity was a constant headache. A memo drafted by one of Chaney's staff about the situation in Western Australia which likely typified the situation across the country. Although there was 'intense interest' in *Fightback!* among state and federal candidates, they were struggling to sell the package effectively and counter Labor's disinformation campaign. The report outlined that candidates were 'a bit frustrated and disillusioned' by 'the lack of backup they are receiving both at the national and local level'.[899] Electorate staff were struggling to cope with 'the flood of material … pouring into their offices' and despite all the information, few felt 'confident with their level of comprehension of the package'.[900] The general feeling of confusion gripping candidates, electorate staff and regular party members was exacerbated by the absence of a central information distribution point or clear lines of responsibility between Shadow Ministers. Most troubling was that 'sometimes when different people are asked you get different answers from the "experts"'.[901]

The situation was no better for federal parliamentarians. Despite regular briefings in parliament on specific aspects of *Fightback!*, MPs still struggled with providing accurate responses to sector-specific concerns. Impotency in the face of questioning was disempowering for parliamentarians. Peter Nugent, the member for Aston, was initially upbeat about *Fightback!* in his letters to Connolly and Chaney. In February 1992, Nugent was quietly hopeful, though noted the tendency of the *Fightback!* message and materials to slip into 'jargonese' and the difficulties translating the average case into the specific circumstances of individual voters.[902] By August, still up-beat, Nugent reported that after an initial problem with his *Fightback!* mail out, he had received a thousand replies from constituents, 'some 400 required detailed follow-up'.[903] However, Nugent, noted the difficulties with pensioner organisations running campaigns against *Fightback!*, hesitancy amongst voters about a GST on food and scepticism that the package was actually deliverable. Nugent reported that 'when you can get to people they are usually persuadable.'[904] 'However, my concern is the great mass you

[898] Chaney papers, NAA: M1435, 318, memo, Keith Kessell to Fred Chaney, May 4 1992; It is not clear from the evidence available to this study whether Downer continued in the role.
[899] NAA: M1435, 314, Linda [Kropp?] to Fred Chaney and Keith Kessell, 'Selling of Fightback!', May 5 1992, 1.
[900] Ibid., 2.
[901] Ibid.
[902] NAA: M1435, 317, letter, Peter Nugent, To Mr David Connolly, February 25 1992.
[903] NAA: M1435, 316, letter, Peter Nugent to Fred Chaney, August 17 1992, 1.
[904] Ibid.

cannot get to, who do not read mail, the papers or go to meetings. TV is the only way and the money must be found,' he urged.[905]

Six weeks later, Nugent again wrote to Chaney, demoralised. There was 'a fundamental lack of understanding' of the GST by the average voter despite 'all the writing information I have provided.'[906] Indeed, Chaney's own feelings on written material were highlighted by a memo he circulated noting the high levels of adult illiteracy in Western Australia.[907] Nugent's frustration shone through as he once again reported on voters questioning him as to why the Coalition did not advertise on television. By November 1992, frustration with selling the policy clearly was wearing away at discipline, forcing Chaney to circulate a memo to all Coalition MPs urging his colleagues to emphasise to the media 'the positive nature of our efforts to date' in what is 'probably an unprecedented public information campaign'.[908]

The television advertisements had in fact started on 24 September (except in Melbourne).[909] The campaign was negative and designed to discredit Keating as the man who gave Australia the 'recession we had to have'.[910] The advertisements appeared in the wake of monthly rolling campaigns targeting specific groups such as the family, small business and the elderly, which had focused on meetings with interest and community groups and stalls at shopping centres. However, it was not enough to dam the pressure on *Fightback!*. After a month of negative advertising the Coalition's national polling had fallen, although according to reporting, the LPA's private polling showed a lead in key marginal seats in South and Western Australia.[911]

By December 1992, Hewson had capitulated, removing the 15 per cent GST from food and some services. The work began to recast *Fightback!* in more caring language. On 23 December, Chaney had reported improvement in public approval, but he reminded his leader that the recent gains were prone to 'wear out' and the problem of maintaining an ongoing program remained.[912] Chaney

[905] Ibid.
[906] NAA: M1435, 316, letter, Peter Nugent to Fred Chaney, September 28 1992, 1.
[907] NAA: M1435, 316, letter Fred Chaney to Andrew Robb, 'Sale of Fightback!', July 20 1992, 2.
[908] NAA: M1435, 317, memo, Chaney to Coalition senators and Members, November 17 1992.
[909] Although the Hawke government's 1991 political advertisement ban may have had an effect on the Coalition's capacity to advertise, a small amount of evidence from Chaney's papers suggest that the party believed that their capacity to advertise would not be affected. Without access to the appropriate federal secretariat collections and the Hewson papers, it is difficult to know whether the initial assessment that the ad ban was not a problem was ever amended. Whether the advertising ban, funding or some other factor was the decisive element in delaying television advertising is uncertain.
[910] This was to avoid clashing with the Victorian state election and would also reflect why Nugent had not seen any advertising as he represented the Victorian seat of Aston; Michael Millett, 'Libs focus TV campaign on Keating', *The Sydney Morning Herald,* September 25 1992; Simon Lloyd, 'Liberals ads fail to play off', *Australian Financial Review*, November 24 1992.
[911] Ibid.
[912] NAA: M1435, 96, letter, Fred Chaney to Hewson, 'Ongoing Campaign', December 23 1992, 1.

concluded that it was vital to 'avoid reference to selling anything, particularly *Fightback!*, as it adds to the cynicism'.[913] Chaney's complaint summed up the difficulty for the Liberal party. The public's understanding of *Fightback!* was dominated by the overt 'selling' of the package, it's mechanics and the political manoeuvrings around it. It was not focused on the policy's outcomes or its vision for Australia's future. By the end of 1992, the Coalition's approach was defensive; it struggled to overcome the package's complexity and the barrage of negative and misleading attacks. In the last few weeks of the 1993 election campaign, *Fightback!* would be overwhelmed by attack and criticism and deliver Labor an unexpected victory. *Fightback!* was held to a similar standard as a government policy by both the media and the ALP, but without the resources to adequately defend it.

Given the cynicism around politics and politicians, there is more than an aura of pathos to *Fightback!'s* failure. Jim Carlton reminded his fellows in a draft report to the marketing and co-ordination group that 'overall we need to remind ourselves that we have all the ingredients for success.'[914] These ingredients were: 'an outstanding leader; the best policies ever; Coalition unity; a failed government in the middle of a recession [and]; the most loathsome opponent ever.'[915] All that was left to do was to capitalise on the party's advantages and win the election. But, *Fightback!* failed to convince voters and in doing so, discredited the notion of policy at the centre of the party's political communication strategy. In hindsight, it is easy to see *Fightback!* as a worthy but ultimately flawed endeavour. The scope of Hewson's ambition to educate voters and win an election on a platform of complex and major reforms proved to be significantly greater challenge than the party could meet. The lesson drawn by the major parties — to give away as little detail as possible — has also resulted in less policy thinking overall.

Australia's future in sketch: Howard's headland speeches

Drafted into the leadership in early 1995, John Howard developed a different approach to policy-making and campaigning. Both Williams and Mills have chronicled how the LPA developed new political research techniques, which will not be covered in detail in this chapter.[916] Williams and Mills illustrated that the LPA went from infrequent and large sample size research reports done by outside consultancies to a more mixed method approach which used large scale research, focus groups and rolling polling. Critically, the LPA developed a research edge over Labor by learning to match focus group data to what the large scale trends were telling them. Andrew Robb dubbed this 'quantifying the qualitative'.[917] This capacity for *political* interpretation by Mark Textor and Lynton Crosby

[913] Ibid., 2.
[914] NAA: M1435, 314, Jim Carlton, 'The Fightback! co-ordination and marketing group', May 4 1992, 5.
[915] Ibid.
[916] See Williams, *The Victory*; Mills, *The New Machine Men*; Mills, *The Professionals*.
[917] Mills, *The Professionals*, 175.

marked the turning point. Prior to this, as this chapter has demonstrated, the Liberal party had limited access to analytical research and often struggled to translate it into political action.

Howard combined effective political research to frame his opponent with his own reputation for credibility and substance. After *Fightback!* the party had learnt what was essential for political communication in Strömbäck's third age of mediatisation. Even before Howard's ascension, Robb understood that an effective political communications strategy boiled down to core messages and discipline — the process of politics was often a distraction; the key was to stick to the party's core messages.[918] Howard used 'headland speeches' to outline his broad vision, rather than provide exhaustive detail.[919] After two decades in parliament it was enough to fulfil the credibility test. Finally, Howard began to dump the party's baggage from the 1980s. Howard promised to retain Medicare, he repudiated his previous comments about Asian immigration and he promised to 'never ever' introduce a GST. Coupled with an intellectually exhausted government, which never recovered from its own broken promises, voters were ready and willing to vote for change.

For parties seeking to govern, ideology and pragmatism remain perpetually in tension. During their wilderness years the Coalition vacillated between populism and policy purity. The emphasis on policy detail and ideology reached its peak in 1991 with the release of *Fightback!*. Yet, by the time the Coalition won government in 1996, a new understanding of the relationship between policy and communication would emerge, one that emphasised the importance of clear messages and which deliberately de-emphasised policy detail. This is not to suggest that the party was never expedient when making policy in the early 1980s — far from it. Rather, political actors felt that the content of policy, and its release throughout the parliamentary term was an important part of political campaigning to win government. The emphasis on policy as the core of a political communications strategy would, by 1996 be overturned after the bitter lessons of repeated failures. Moreover, the implications of these lessons would remain relevant to the present day as the next chapter will demonstrate.

Why did the party put so much faith in the importance of policy ideas?

Despite continuously losing elections the LPA reaffirmed its commitment to the importance of its policy agenda as a vital part of their political communication strategy until 1993. Why did the party do this? The answer lies in the emphasis placed on the importance of ideas. First, as argued in chapter five, the LPA's executive leadership desired to present themselves as a credible alternative

[918] Andrew Robb, 'Report by Federal Director Andrew Robb to the Liberal Party of Australia, 44th Federal Council', Albury, 29 October 1994.
[919] Carol Johnson, 'John Howard's "Values" and Australian Identity', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 2 (June 2007): 195–209.

government. Policy would have to be an essential ingredient of any political communications strategy. 'Firm, unambiguous positions on key issues (leave no doubt where we stand)' internal memos declared.[920] It was the first task towards establishing the party's alternative government credentials. Ideas were branding. The values of the leader provided the means to encapsulate their ideas and symbolise them for voters. But the leader did not stand in place of ideas altogether.

Presenting as an alternative government was conceived as an active strategy, even if the Coalition regularly struggled to maintain their own agency in events and were regularly the victims of circumstance, internal problems or more powerful institutions. Early strategy documents identified the core challenges facing the party: first, 'to ensure a coherent policy approach', second to 'regenerate interest and confidence in the Coalition', which would convince the electorate that the coalition is 'truly an alternative government'.[921] In strategy documents which would follow over the next decade, the need to be a credible alternative government was regularly the first point or a close second to the need for party unity and discipline.

The emphasis on a collective alternative *government* also reflected the limited power of leaders from 1983 to 1996 to centralise all policy and political communications in their office. Both technology and the capacity of the federal secretariat to act as a neutral information distribution service worked against the centralising desires of party leaders. Moreover, the concept of 'the team' as the alternative government was powerful. A 'well identified front-bench team that can be stacked up credibly alongside Labor (a true alternative government)' was an important goal for the party.[922] Leaders could not represent the party then as totally as they have come to today as technological changes have enabled the increasing personalisation of our politics.

A final reason for the LPA's emphasis on policy detail was a legacy of the party's dominance in government up until 1983. The Coalition had governed for thirty-one out the previous thirty-four years. The political culture of the parliamentary party was profoundly shaped by being a *party of government*. As a government, the party had learned to campaign on specifics and on the basis of the government's record. Moreover, the collapse of the Whitlam government into scandal and ignominy allowed the Coalition to coast back into power without very much hard work or thinking about the party's direction. The emphasis on policy during the 1980s also encouraged the party to stick to its natural instincts of associating credible policy with relatively detailed proposals. Thus in this way we can see that Coalition actors made active choices about political strategy — they valued credibility and set high standards for themselves. Yet at the same time, party actors were subject to

[920] NAA: M3417, 864, memo, 'Winning in 89: Objectives and strategy pointers', August 1987, 1.
[921] NAA: M1435, 132, 'Policy releases: maximising impact', circa 1984, 1.
[922] NAA: M3417, 864, memo, 'Winning in 89: Objectives and strategy pointers', August 1987, 4.

external forces and standards. They were aware of some of these, such as the calls from the press and the government for their own alternative but others, such as changing media practices, they did not always recognise or fully understand.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that ideas mattered to Liberal party actors. They were important because they built up the party's credibility as an alternative government, demonstrated the party's policy convictions and reflected the party's political culture, which was steeped in the rituals of government. Political actors in the 1980s were still driven to a large degree by 'normative political logic' — that is, they were still highly motivated by pursing the public good. The LPA faced significant challenges going into opposition in 1983, which saw their campaigning capacity severely downgraded. Over the course of the 1980s, the Liberal party's approach to campaigning became more sophisticated, despite its wariness of the media. The party attempted to produce campaign products for the media such as *Future Directions* with mixed results. The party's attempt to launch a mass-education campaign to sell *Fightback!* proved too much for what was essentially a volunteer organisation. However, the exercise proved to be an important milestone. As noted in chapter five, it greatly increased the policy depth of backbenchers, but also provided the final proof that detailed policy proposals were not the way to win government. The lessons learnt from *Fightback!* in conjunction with improved polling capacity, proved to be the impetus for the party to emphasise values over specific proposals in their strategy. They would no longer invest heavily in policy, but remain flexible and nimble by using a so-called 'small-target strategy' to win office in 1996. The next chapter will explore the implications of this decision and how processes of mediatisation have affected the LPA approach to political communication in the post-2007 era.

Chapter 8
Political communication and crafting narratives: 2007-2013

Introduction

This chapter seeks to examine how processes of 'mediatisation' have impacted on the behaviour of Liberal party actors in the post-2007 era. Firstly, the chapter explores the assumptions of Liberal party actors about media communications. It argues that political actors are highly motivated by 'market political logic' and that they understand political communication as a zero-sum contest with their political opponents. Second, the chapter explores the relationship between narrative development and the preferences and styles of leaders. Third, the chapter explores how the LPA has operationalised its media management strategies. It explores two examples of defensive media management tactics through an examination of the opposition's approach to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and the Gonski education funding reforms. Then it explores how the opposition used offensive media management tactics through an examination of the opposition's approach to asylum seeker boat arrivals. Finally, the chapter concludes by arguing that whereas leading Liberal political actors in the 1980s were attempting to *adapt* to 'media logic', the post-2007 opposition leadership entered opposition already having *internalised* 'media logic'.[923]

How do political actors understand political communication in the early twenty-first century?

Daily media tactics matter

The previous chapter argued that political actors believed that ideas were central to a political communication strategy until the failure of *Fightback!* at the 1993 election. Challenged by the difficulties of selling Fightback!, campaign professionals in the federal secretariat and the party's most media-savvy shadow ministers began to understand the importance of adapting to the needs of the media's new production processes.[924] In the 1980s, most Coalition parliamentarians did not

[923] As discussed in chapter one, 'media logic' has come to mean an emphasis on seeking publicity. Media logic also encompasses 'the grammar', format and production processes of media products. Thus, actors who are aware of 'media logic' are better equipped to achieve maximum media coverage. By contrast, 'political logic' is often seen as the inverse. It is concerned with notions of the public good and is therefore seen as less pejorative. Landerer (see discussion in chapter one) has further expanded these concepts to include normative and market dimensions to both media and political logic. The market dimension reflects behaviours which maximise audience or votes and the normative dimension emphasises the public good.

[924] These findings compliment Sally Young's work on politicians' resistance to embracing short television advertisements instead of more detailed, policy focused newspaper advertising in the early 1980s: Sally Ann

have an internalised understanding of the nature of the media (media logic) and had to be reminded, coaxed, cajoled and trained into behaving in a way that would increase their chances of eliciting media coverage.

In the post-2007 opposition years, most political actors interviewed for this thesis demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of media logic, particularly the dynamics and implications of the 24-hour news cycle. (However, as chapter four demonstrated, Coalition parliamentarians were significantly less comfortable with social media.) Given that many more LPA politicians have experience as political staff, it is unsurprising that their understanding of the media would be better developed, even when they have not been in parliament for long.[925] In the post-2007 period of opposition, political actors hold different assumptions about how power relations between parties and the media operate and what role they play in the processes of political communication and narrative creation.

For political actors in the post-2007 period, the notion that the party must produce material that attracts the attention of the media was self-evident. LPA members often did not bother to outline the point explicitly and instead moved onto more complex and contested elements of political communication. Liberal party actors had a clear understanding of the work practices and finite attention span of the media and an understanding that content must be 'media friendly'.

In addition, there was a growing awareness by more experienced parliamentarians that power relationships between political actors and the media were not always to their disadvantage, as they most often were in the 1980s and early 1990s. A senior Liberal figure observed how in one portfolio, which was at the centre of a heated political debate, it was not a matter of working the media, but rather, responding to the flood of requests: 'You're turning media away more than you're seeking them out.'[926] This experience only intensified when the government's policy got into trouble: 'the media was just relentless in seeking me out. I didn't have to chase them.'[927] However, the same shadow minister reported that 'you do have to really work harder at getting your message out'[928] when working in another portfolio which courted little controversy in a smaller, specialised journalistic field.

Young, *The Persuaders: Inside the Hidden Machine of Political Advertising* (North Melbourne, Vic: Pluto Press, 2004), 37–38.

[925] Miragliotta and Errington, 'Legislative Recruitment and Models of Party Organisation'.

[926] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on May 1 2013.

[927] Ibid.

[928] Ibid.

As discussed in chapter four, new media platforms increased demand for content and opened up new opportunities for the opposition that had not existed in the pre-1996 years. Moreover, as the media became more reactive due to the rise of the 24-hour media cycle, there was awareness by political actors of new opportunities but also new challenges. 'It's good that you can get your message out, but your message doesn't stay out there for very long before the next story comes in and knocks it off,' one frontbencher noted.[929]

Where John Howard had assiduously worked the media, taking up every opportunity available, shadow ministers in the post-2007 period were far more discerning about *how* they used their time. Not all audiences were created equal. As one shadow minister explained, 'what's the point of going on this station when the audience is 2000 people in the back blocks when I've been asked to do something else'.[930] Ultimately, ministers had to 'make a judgment' about the 'the opportunity cost' of their appearances.

The proliferation and endurance of information in the internet age had injected a new edge into media participation. In the 1980s, the pre-1996 opposition had to contend with the monitoring of the Hawke government's National Media Liaison Service (NMLS). However, in the digital age, media monitoring can be undertaken by the average citizen and gaffes can live on long after they were committed. Therefore, discipline in messaging was of even greater importance to political actors. Shadow ministers that 'responded to every media request because they are desperate for coverage,' placed their credibility at risk by saying 'something stupid that can then embarrass you and your own side.'[931] In a mediatised polity, controlling the collective nature of political communication for any political party is intensified. Like a choir, parties rely on their parliamentarians singing from the same song-sheet. Some voices are clearly dominant and more important, adding highlights and content, but if background singers suddenly sing off-key it jars and is distracting.

The rise of small-target strategies

Since the 1980s, parties in Australia have developed different political communications strategies that they attempt to execute throughout the parliamentary term. In the mid-1980s, Stephen Mills documented the ALP's polling advantage and its capacity to manage issues far more effectively than the Coalition. Mill also classified two types of political communication strategies: incumbent and insurgent strategies.[932] Incumbent strategies attempted to buttress the natural advantages of the incumbent and reinforce campaign messages such as 'don't switch horses in mid-stream' or 'better

[929] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on August 15 2012.
[930] Ibid.
[931] Ibid.
[932] Mills, *The New Machine Men*, 87–88.

the devil you know'. As the name suggests, insurgent strategies were intermittent raids on the government's position, before returning the safety of one's own ground. We can think of this as an 'all care and no responsibility' strategy. This second strategy is not mutually exclusive to the first and could eventually after some effective 'raids' provide voters with specific details about the opposition's policy.

As parties in opposition became more mindful of how they managed issues (see chapters five and six), an insurgent strategy increasingly went hand in hand with a 'small-target strategy'. A small-target strategy is an information strategy that minimises political differences to a few salient points. These points of difference were preferably advantageous to the party running the strategy. It emphasised impressions about a party's likely actions in office over specific policy programs. The small-target strategy was an evolution of the insurgent strategy and was first used by the Liberal party at the state level and was later embraced as reaction against *Fightback!* by Howard's campaign in 1996. Significantly, many of the key actors involved in policy development, policy management and political communication after 2007 were front line witnesses of the Hewson experiment.

The challenge facing the post-2007 opposition was not the struggle to get *into* the media in the first place but, rather, how to maintain momentum. Another assumption of political actors was that contesting the daily media battle was vitally important. However, unlike their counterparts in the mid-1980s, a majority of political actors operated on the logic that 'the vast majority of legislation you actually don't oppose' and 'the media only focus on the ones you oppose', because those items are the issues that are 'really interesting, as far as media is concerned.'[933] Put another way, through its decision to support or oppose policy decisions by the government, the opposition could shape the media's preferred adversarial narrative of inter-party conflict. The implications of this are that media dynamics, and what is considered newsworthy, was far more likely to drive the party's political communication strategy than in the mid-1980s, where LPA's focus was on its alternative policy platform. The admission that this logic 'makes complete sense,' as one frontbencher put it, is an indication of the extent that media logic has been internalised by Coalition parliamentarians.

By choosing which issues to noisily affirm and which to quietly ignore, political actors attempt to shape the news agenda and manage issues on a daily basis.[934] Moreover, political actors operate under the assumption that their opponents' motivations mirror their own motives (that is to dominate the agenda, build momentum and win elections). This further reinforces both major

[933] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on April 15 2013.
[934] Reece has discussed aspects of this in relation to the conduct of election campaigns Reece, 'Making Policy and Winning Votes: Election Promises and Political Strategies in the 2013 Campaign'.

party's adoption of 'media logic' as opposed to 'political logic' as the underlying emphasis of their political communication strategies. Each party is aiming to keep the national political conversation on their preferred areas of strength. As one senior figure explained, the government will rarely attempt to launch policy ideas or issues in 'our territory', rather 'they choose to fight in areas that are not our strengths'.[935]

The rationale behind party's use of media tactics helps explain precisely why small-target strategies have become the standard approach to political communication strategies in opposition. Since 1993, many opposition actors on both sides of politics feel they do not have the resources and capabilities, or do not want to run the risk of defending a larger-target strategy:

> Ministers demand and get more airtime, so if their government is deciding to demand an attack on something that we're doing or proposing to do, they can often marshal a lot more armaments and firepower, and then we would spend weeks on the back foot. They would seek to misrepresent what we're putting forward [a policy] and then we would seek to rebut it.[936]

Such tit-for-tat politicking boils down to a simple proposition that oppositions cannot 'demonstrate by outcomes' but only issue 'promises' about what they intend to do. A large-target strategy heightens the possibility of increasing criticism from many flanks and magnifying communities of discontent, whereas a small-target can contain attacks on opposition policies.[937] As the previous chapter demonstrated, *Fightback!* was held to a higher standard because of its rigour and came in for diagnostic criticism. Subsequently LPA members interviewed for this study were quick to draw on Hewson's failed campaign as a self-evident justification for a small-target strategy.

Politicians in both the pre-1996 and post-2007 period were trying to build political momentum. Both MPs and journalists reported that momentum was crucial to winning election campaigns. In the era of small-target strategies, momentum provides the necessary cover for oppositions offering thin policy positions. Moreover, momentum, or put crudely — political success — shapes the way journalists usually write about politicians. For example, the Abbott-led opposition successfully attacked the Gillard government's trustworthiness with its sustained campaign against the carbon tax; it repeatedly called for a fresh election while simultaneously refusing to outline its alternative program. The combination of both factors and the failure of the Gillard government to effectively respond, allowed the opposition to continuously build momentum. This in turn gave them political cover for both the obstructionist nature of their campaign and the policy thinness of their objection

[935] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on August 20 2012.
[936] Ibid.
[937] Ibid.

to the carbon tax. It was *because* the Coalition's position improved in the polls, and because the opposition so was effective at damaging the government that many journalists concluded that even if the strategy was distasteful and damaging, it had been politically effective.[938]

In the 1980s, the Liberal party put its energies into its alternative policy platform as a strategy to set the agenda and hopefully build momentum. Today, actors build momentum by attempting to manage issues through daily media tactics with the aim of continuing to dominant the news agenda. For the first two years of the hung parliament, the LPA's strategy attempted to derail the government's dominant position and keep them off-balance:

> The [Gillard] government is in … all sorts of strife; they are desperate to get other issues out. The prime minister today has put out something on school funding. … She'd love us to come out and spend all of Question Time trying to pick holes in their education policy. [But then] the carbon tax is not being discussed … all this suspicion about what happened seven or eight years ago with the AWU [Australian Workers Union] is not being discussed. Little things that are hurting them are not being discussed because she [Gillard] has got another agenda running. So we won't give her the comfort … we'll say something [about schools policy], but we'll go back on the things where we think the government is most vulnerable and which will help us to convey what we think are the weaknesses.[939]

This justification of the Abbott's opposition's approach demonstrates what Landerer describes as 'market political logic', which adopts an approach to politics that focuses on vote maximisation.[940] Put another way, the LPA tailored their approach and response to policy issues with an eye to what would most appeal to media audiences (market media logic) and what would maximise publicity for the opposition on its own terms (market political logic) rather than putting the public good before the party's interests (normative political logic). They did this because if LPA spent time 'trying to pick holes' in the Gillard government's education policy, 'then the carbon tax is not being discussed'. That is, the media would be redirected to issues, in this case education policy, that the Coalition considered a strength for the Labor government, rather than the carbon tax, which the Coalition used to devastating effect to undermine public trust in Gillard's political leadership.

At its most extreme, the small-target strategy is zero-sum: the assumption is that every moment in the media cycle counts and every moment that a party fails to dominate is an opportunity lost. Thus,

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[938] Paul Kelly, 'Abbott defies Labor's agenda', *The Australian*, May 14 2011; Laurie Oakes, 'Trash talk over political mess', *The Herald* Sun, July 2 2011; Michelle Grattan, 'Time coming for the Libs to tell of their plans', *The* Age, July 29 2011; Peter Hartcher, 'Small-target, big letdown', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April 28 2012; Michelle Grattan, 'Is Abbott on thin ice? Absolutely', *The Age*, August 24 2012.
[939] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on August 20 2012.
[940] Landerer, 'Rethinking the Logics'.

the major difference between the two periods is that political actors today demonstrate an explicit understanding of how these dynamics work. That is, they have adopted and internalised 'media logic'. Instead of being the victim of events and other players in the political system as it was in the 1980s, the LPA, particularly under the leadership of Tony Abbott, was active and effective in their attempts to shape and manage narratives about their own party and their opponents.

Narrative building through issues management

Over the long term, daily political tactics accumulate into broader narratives. Therefore, just as managing the daily cycle is a set of deliberate choices, so too are a party's big picture narratives. Parties make calculated and calibrated choices informed by political research and personal judgment over the course of a parliamentary term. Politicians interviewed also acknowledge that these narratives are an act of deliberate construction. They must actively 'create them' because 'they don't just happen' on their own.[941] Indeed, parties need to 'create a few issues which are the compare and contrast issues', because 'everything in politics is comparative… if the government says me too, so what. It's not an issue.'[942] While this is related to election campaigning, it is not the same process and the bulk of the work is carried out by different actors (the federal secretariat and extra-parliamentary wing is far more heavily involved in election campaigning).[943] The overarching narrative that the LPA attempts to construct about itself and its opponents is prosecuted daily by its parliamentary politicians.

Leader preferences in the construction of narratives

Deciding policy preferences and building narratives are two sides of the same coin. Thus, just as leader's preferences shape policy, so too will they shape political communication strategies. Different opposition leaders interpret political communication strategies on their own terms. As outlined in the previous chapter, both Brendan Nelson and Malcolm Turnbull's approach to opposition was a more positive and constructive interpretation of opposition. Both leaders attempted to match the government wherever possible, especially because it was a newly elected government and Rudd occupied the middle ground. The task of the opposition, as interpreted by Turnbull and Nelson, was to start a process of questioning and plant seeds of doubt in the public's mind without being dragged too far away from the centre. The opposition's approach to the apology to the stolen generations and the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) typified the problems

[941] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on March 5 2013.
[942] Ibid.
[943] For Australian campaign narratives see David Bartlett and Jennifer Rayner, '"This Campaign Is All About…" Dissecting Australian Campaign Narratives', *Communication, Politics & Culture* 47, no. 1 (2014): 51–68.

facing the opposition as both policies were judged by the leaders as too risky or unsuitable terrain for the opposition to attempt to differentiate itself from the government.

By contrast, Abbott's conception of opposition was overwhelmingly negative and focused on destroying the government's credibility. We should not underestimate the latitude the minority parliament gave Abbott to interpret the role of opposition, both positively and negatively. Abbott opted for negativity because he instinctively understood the zero-sum logic of managing the party's political agenda. Throughout his tenure as opposition leader, Abbott demonstrated his discipline and skill in managing media messages, a talent that both his predecessors lacked.

Narratives are a combination of internal party research and the instincts and prejudices of the leader and their closest advisors.[944] Despite the importance of political research, many senior figures continue to emphasise the role of instinct and judgment over tested media lines. When deciding on narratives, As one senior figure explained,

> Most of it is instinct, intuition, feels right, the leader is comfortable with it, the troops, it smells right … there's no great formula. Everyone thinks everyone goes out and researches everything. Bullshit. Don't get time to do it ... That's why you elect leaders. Hopefully they have good judgment.[945]

This emphasis on leadership and judgment makes sense in the context of politics. After all, politicians are in the business of political representation and if they, and especially senior party members, did not back their own instincts how could they be trusted to represent the party or claim to represent those they seek to govern?

Indeed, despite the prevalence and importance of political research it is important to remember that not everything a political party does is carefully planned and managed. In the rough and tumble of politics the responses of party actors are informed by the party's overall strategy, but the reality is that individual responses are often improvised and even *ad hoc*. The hope is that they will comply with the party's main strategic thrust, and if nothing else, will do no harm. As one senior adviser to Howard put it 'sometimes a long term strategy in opposition or in government is 'how the hell do we get to 11 o-clock' at night without 'a mess' on our hands. Moreover, the implication is that the party's tactics and overall strategy must remain flexible because 'the idea that you can go three years and end up exactly where you started, what your plan was, is probably not real.'[946] Parties

[944] For an Australian perspective see Young, *The Persuaders*; Mills, *The Professionals*.
[945] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on March 5 2013.
[946] Ibid.

must retain the capacity to react swiftly to events and do not have the luxury of assuming their carefully laid plans will remain relevant in the long term.

Defensive media management strategies

National Disability Insurance Scheme

The LPA's navigation of the NDIS demonstrated the LPA's defensive agenda management techniques but also their limits. The tug-of-war between government and opposition also demonstrated the theatre and posturing that goes hand in hand with political communication. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that both the ALP and the LPA treated the NDIS as an 'issue above politics', yet the approach of both parties was (unsurprisingly) tempered by politics. Indeed, for the Labor government, the NDIS represented an opportunity to present the ALP as progressive reformers and protectors of citizens' social welfare.[947] For the Coalition the challenge was twofold: how to give the Coalition maximum flexibility in enacting the NDIS (given that they were likely to win office) and simultaneously, how to link the NDIS to their own narratives about fiscal rectitude without appearing to stand in the way of better services for some of Australia's most vulnerable citizens.

The LPA's management of the NDIS issue was aimed at framing the issue on their terms. In his first speech for 2012, Abbott announced that the Coalition's support for the NDIS was primarily aspirational and indicated the program would not be implemented until the budget was back in surplus.[948] Abbott linked the NDIS to the Coalition's narrative about its superior economic management, arguing that as the Coalition was the best party to bring about a surplus it was also the party most likely to deliver the NDIS.[949] The government changed its own position, and sought to bring forward the start of regional trials, which consequently increased the pressure on Abbott to clarify his support for the scheme. Abbott responded by expressing reservations about the implementation and planning processes, but emphasised that the policy ought to be the product of both sides of politics, which, he argued, would see better implementation of the NDIS. Although unacknowledged, Abbott's nuanced position was also recognition that he risked giving the ALP the ability to claim the credit for the NDIS and attack the Coalition as heartless. This anxiety to avoid being depicted as an opponent of the NDIS was regularly reiterated and was reaffirmed once again

[947] Peter Van Onselen, 'There are no votes in playing politics with the NDIS', *The Australian*, July 28 2012.
[948] Tony Abbott, 'My plan for a stronger economy and a stronger Australia', Australian National Press Club, Canberra, January 31 2012, http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/media/pressrel/1382133/upload_binary/1382133.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%222010s%2001%202012%20tony%20abbott%20press%20club%22.
[949] Tony Abbott, 'Doorstop Interview, Parliament House Canberra', April 1 2012, http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/22487/20120425-.0217/www.tonyabbott.com.au/LatestNews/InterviewTranscripts/tabid/85/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/8659/Doorstop-Interview-Parliament-House-Canberra.html.

in the Coalition's 2013 election policy, which stated that the NDIS 'should be the property of the parliament as a whole, on behalf of the Australian people, rather than that of any particular political party'.[950]

Indeed, managing the tension between signing up for the $15 billion program and countering the ALP's increasingly strident attempts to use the NDIS as a framing issue for the election would characterise each new stage of negotiations to settle the funding for the NDIS. When the Gillard government sought agreement with state governments to fund trial sites in July 2012, the effectiveness of the Coalition's management of the agenda since September 2010 was evident in Gillard's reluctance to fund the NDIS via a levy. Gillard feared another Abbott-led tax scare campaign, despite the states' in-principle support for a levy.[951] Gillard's objections were not totally unfounded as Abbott also rejected the notion that the NDIS be funded by a levy, and linked it to the Coalition's ongoing narrative that the government was 'addicted to wasteful and unnecessary spending' and the Coalition's broader no new taxes stance.[952] However, within a matter of days the opposition's position became untenable. Abbott was forced to publicly back the plan while calling for a joint parliamentary committee to sort out the details of the legislation.[953]

By May 2013, as the Gillard government was seeking to pass legislation outlining the funding for the NDIS, which included a 0.5% levy, the Coalition once again attempted to manage the difficulty of an issue the LPA perceived as Labor's. The Coalition continued to oppose a levy and shadow treasurer Joe Hockey again linked the NDIS to the Coalition's broader narratives on economic management and taxes, arguing that the levy could curb growth if the economy underperforms and chided the government, saying, 'you don't tax it [the economy] to increase performance… this is something the Labor party just doesn't get.'[954]

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[950] Liberal Party of Australia, *The Coalition's policy or disability and carers*, August 2013, https://www.liberal.org.au/disability-and-carers.

[951] Peter Van Onselen, 'Julia Gillard rejected states' NDIS offer', *The Australian* July 26 2012, http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/julia-gillard-rejected-states-ndis-offer/story-fn59niix-1226436230067.

[952] Ben Packham and Imre Salusinszky 'Tony Abbott fails to back Liberal premiers on NDIS levy plan', *The Australian*, July 27 2012, http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/tony-abbott-fails-to-back-liberal-premiers-on-ndis-levy-plan/story-fn59niix-1226436567710.

[953] Cortlan Bennett, 'Abbott backs national disability scheme', *The Sydney Morning Herald,* April 30 2012, http://www.smh.com.au//breaking-news-national/abbott-backs-national-disability-scheme-20120430-1xumn.html.

[954] Ben Packham, 'NDIS levy could curb growth: Joe Hockey, *The Australian,* April 30 2013, http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/treasury/ndis-levy-could-curb-growth-joe-hockey/story-fn59nsif-1226632138754.

For Gillard, Abbott's belligerence was useful. She elevated the stakes when she cited Coalition obstructionism as a reason to delay introducing the bills to fund the NDIS until after the election. At a stroke, Gillard had attempted to transform the NDIS into an election issue. But it was not to be. Abbott countered Gillard by demanding she bring the bill forward, refusing to back the scheme until he saw all the detail. However, as Michelle Grattan observed, both parties were outplayed by the disability sector and neither decided they could afford to be seen to play politics with the issue.[955] The bill was eventually passed with an increase on the Medicare levy.

The Gonski Education Reforms

The opposition's approach to the Gonksi school funding reform was also defensive, but a policy agenda where the opposition carved out space to maintain its own policy preferences. Again, the opposition was reluctant to commit to the significant spending increases. Moreover, school funding addressed a Liberal party touchstone—parental choice in education. Thus, in their response to the Gonski education forms, the Coalition framed their response in terms of parental choice and aspiration.[956] In July 2012, the opposition announced it would repeal any measures relating to Gonski if it won government, arguing that the government's policy disadvantaged private school children and the opposition would not support policy that would undermine non-government school funding.[957] The opposition limited their exposure to demands that they provide an alternative funding solution by advocating an extension of the existing funding arrangements and a focus on teacher quality.[958]

However between August 2012 and August 2013 the Coalition's position slid from first matching the government's policy for the first year to its eventual election position to matching the government for the first 'four years across the budget's forward estimates'.[959] This allowed the LPA to neutralise

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[955] Michelle Grattan, 'Grattan on Friday: a taxing issue', *The Conversation*, May 3 2013 http://theconversation.com/grattan-on-friday-a-taxing-solution-13903.

[956] Christopher Pyne, 'Transcript: The Hon Christopher Pyne MP, Doorstop Interview', Adelaide, February 21 2012,http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/media/pressrel/1438932/upload_binary/1438932.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%222010s%202012%2002%20christopher%20pyne%2021%22.

[957] Jewel Topsfield, 'Coalition to dump Gonski reforms: Pyne', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, July 26 2012, http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/coalition-to-dump-gonski-reforms-pyne-20120725-22qy6.html.

[958] Christopher Pyne, 'Achieving Teacher Quality: The Coalition's approach', The Sydney Institute, July 16 2012, https://www.pyneonline.com.au/media-centre/speeches/sydney-institute-address-achieving-teacher-quality-the-coalitions-approach; Tony Abbott, 'Transcript of the Hon. Tony Abbott MHR, Address to the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia and Independent Schools Council of Australia National Forum', Canberra, August 20 2012, http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2013/s3837147.htm; For the progression of the Coalition's policy position on Gonski Education funding see Bernard Keane, 'Confused by Coalition on Gonski? Let Tony and Chris Explain...' *Crikey*, August 3 2013, http://www.crikey.com.au/2013/08/03/confused-by-coalition-on-gonski-let-tony-and-chris-explain/.

[959] Emma Griffiths, 'Tony Abbott says Coalition will honour Gonski school funding plan for four years', *ABC News*, August 2 2013, http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-08-02/coalition-to-support-gonski-school-

school funding as an election issue and a source of differentiation for the ALP. Significantly, Abbott could claim to be on a 'unity ticket' with the government, despite the reality that the bulk of the new spending was scheduled to flow after the first four years, in years five and six. The opposition had successfully minimised school funding as a policy area where Labor could offer a clear contrast to voters. However, the opposition policy commitment in the election campaign was driven by a desire to *manage* the policy during an election campaign rather than to formulate a coherent plan for the future.[960]

The consequences soon became apparent after winning the 2013 election. The Abbott government then attempted to renege on this election promise, while simultaneously arguing that it had not broken its promise. This ploy revealed the effectiveness of the opposition's policy management tactics during opposition. However, it also demonstrated its deficiency when it came time for the opposition to successfully transition into to government. Moreover, Pyne's alternative policy to call for a review into teacher quality looked thin given he had spent five years in the shadow ministerial role.[961] It was another policy domain where the Abbott-led Coalition appeared to struggle to make a successful transition into government and fed into the developing narrative about the Abbott government's 'unfair' cuts to services.

The opposition's approach to both the NDIS and Gonksi were driven by strategies of minimum differentiation: that is strategies designed to limit points of difference with the government and therefore limit potential debate on issues that the LPA considered favourable to the ALP. These issues represented hurdles to be managed and overcome by the opposition, they were not areas in which the opposition sought to focus attention or invest heavily in narrative building beyond reinforcing the Coalition's prominent narrative on economic management.

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funding/4861102; Tony Abbott and Christopher Pyne, 'Transcript of the Hon. Tony Abbott MHR Joint Press Conference with the Hon. Barry O'Farrell MP, Premier of New South Wales and the Hon. Christopher Pyne MHR, Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and training' Penrith, New South Wales, August 29 2013, http://images.theage.com.au/file/2013/11/26/4954835/Pyne-presser-schools.pdf?rand=1385431052158.

[960] 'Tony Abbott rejects claims of broken election promise on Gonski school funding', *ABC* News, November 27 2013, http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-11-27/government-denies-breaking-election-promise-on-school-funding/5119204.

[961] Matthew Knott, 'Christopher Pyne Turns Spotlight on Teacher Training', *The Age*, February 19 2014, http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/christopher-pyne-turns-spotlight-on-teacher-training-20140218-32ykx.html.

Offensive media management strategies

Arrivals by boat-people and asylum seekers

Between 2009 and 2013, the opposition's response to the issue of irregular boat arrivals shifted from constructive co-operation with the government to open obstructionism.[962] Early in its first term, the Rudd government moved to dismantle the so-called 'Pacific Solution' with circumspect resistance from the Nelson-led opposition. This saw the final removal of 89 asylum seekers from Nauru by February 2008.[963] This position was confirmed by the work of the joint standing committee on migration, producing a report *Immigration Detention in Australia: A New Beginning,* which was released in December 2008. The committee's report contained no minority report by the opposition and only a joint dissenting report from LPA MPs Petro Georgiou and Alan Eggleston and Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young.[964] As a further demonstration of the Coalition's shift in rhetoric, the shadow spokesperson for immigration, Dr Sharman Stone also called for the resettlement of refugees in rural areas.

However, as boats (and the hysterical media coverage) returned to Australia's north in 2008, the opposition's position under Malcolm Turnbull shifted. The opposition wrote minority reports for both the second and third instalments of *Immigration Detention in Australia: A New Beginning* released over the course of 2009.[965] As the number of boats arriving in 2009 steadily increased, the opposition began to construct their critique, taking advantage of the growing evidence of the Rudd government's policy failure. When on April 15 2009, a boat carrying refugees exploded at Ashmore Reef, the opposition spokesperson, Sharman Stone, was quick to attack the government for its 'soft'

[962] If we were to use Landerer's conception of mediatisation, we would characterise this as a shift from normative political logic to market political logic. Landerer, 'Rethinking the Logics'.
[963] Andra Jackson, 'Last refugees bid farewell to Nauru', *The Age*, February 6 2008; Christopher Pyne, *Sky News Agenda,* July 29 2008, http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;adv=yes;orderBy=customrank;page=0;query=%22pacific%20solution%22%20coalition%20liberal%20party%20Date%3A01%2F01%2F2008%20%3E%3E%2010%2F10%2F2008%20Dataset%3Aemms,radioprm,tvprog,pressrel,pressclp,broadcastOther,historyOfParliamentHouse,jrnart,jrnart88,partypol,lcatalog,hansardr,hansardr80,hansards,hansards80;rec=3;resCount=Default.
[964] Joint Standing Committee on Migration, 'Immigration Detention in Australia: A New Beginning' (Canberra: The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, December 1 2008), http://www.aph.gov.au/binaries/house/committee/mig/detention/report/fullreport.pdf.
[965] Canberra Joint Standing Committee on Migration, 'Inquiry into Immigration Detention in Australia: Community-Based Alternatives to Detention', text (Canberra: Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, May 25 2009), http://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/house_of_representatives_committees?url=mig/detention/report2.htm; Joint Standing Committee on Migration, 'Inquiry into Immigration Detention in Australia: Facilities, Services and Transparency' (Canberra: Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 18 August 2009), http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House_of_representatives_Committees?url=mig/detention/report3.htm.

policy settings and called for the resignation of the Minister, Bob Debus.[966] In the wake of the disaster, Stone's critique of the government's policy settings and its management of the boats intensified.[967] As leader, Turnbull called for the reintroduction of temporary protection visas (TPVs) with no right of residency and an independent inquiry into the disaster, and began to make the case that the government's policy changes in 2008 were directly responsible for the increase in boat arrivals.[968] Although demurring at times, Turnbull repeatedly reminded voters and the media of the success of the Howard government's policy formula and contrasted himself unambiguously against the government, stating 'the policy of the Australian Government should be no boats. That's my policy — no boats.'[969] Six months later, in the final days of the month-long standoff between the government and 78 Sri Lankan asylum seekers on the customs vessel the *Oceanic Viking*, Turnbull confirmed 'safe haven' visas as party policy despite public protests from some moderate Liberals such as Judith Troeth and Petro Georgiou.[970]

From a tactical perspective, the Rudd government's response to asylum seekers presented an opportunity for the opposition to begin to chip away at the government's competence and authority. Turnbull's approach to boat arrivals was interpreted by sections of the press as a means of shoring up his position internally and as an opportunity to build up public support against the

[966] Sharman Stone, 'Enforced secrecy could mean more lost at sea', Press release, May 1 2009, http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/media/pressrel/YBHT6/upload_binary/ybht60.pdf;fileType=application/pdf#search=%222000s%202009%2005%20stone,%20sharman,%20mp%2001%22.

[967] For the progression in the opposition's response see the following: Sharman Stone, 'People smugglers must be stopped', April 2 2009, http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/media/pressrel/MQUT6/upload_binary/mqut60.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%222000s%202009%2004%20stone,%20sharman,%20mp%22; Sharman Stone, 'Labor passes the buck for people smuggling' April 15 2009,; Sharman Stone, '14th Boat and still no response from Rudd', April 22 2009, http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/media/pressrel/0CCT6/upload_binary/0cct60.pdf;fileType=application/pdf#search=%222000s%202009%2004%20stone,%20sharman,%20mp%22; Sharman Stone, 'Debus admits Labor's policy change sends soft message to smugglers', April 23 2009; Sharman Stone, 'How much proof does Rudd need before action is taken to reverse soft policy message?', April 24 2009, http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/media/pressrel/DCPT6/upload_binary/dcpt60.pdf;fileType=application/pdf#search=%222000s%202009%2004%20stone,%20sharman,%20mp%22 ; For bungling see; http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/media/pressrel/1FPT6/upload_binary/1fpt60.pdf;fileType=application/pdf#search=%222000s%202009%2004%20stone,%20sharman,%20mp%22.

[968] Malcolm Turnbull, quoted in Alexandra Kirk, 'Government dismisses calls for reintroducing TPVs', *PM,* Radio National, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, April 20 2009, http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2008/s2547800.htm; Malcolm Turnbull, 'Turnbull doorstop - visit to Cobham Australia; Coalition's call for an independent inquiry into the people smuggling surge, Australian economy...', press conference, April 28 2009, http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/media/pressrel/BUET6/upload_binary/buet60.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%222000s%202009%2004%20turnbull,%20malcolm,%20mp%20visas%22.

[969] Ibid.

[970] Emma Rodgers, 'Safe Haven' visa for boat arrivals', *ABC News*, November 13 2009, http://www.abc.net.au/news/2009-11-13/safe-haven-visa-for-boat-arrivals/1140678.

government.[971] Evidently, Turnbull and the leadership team judged that the inevitable criticism of using asylum seekers as a political issue was a worthwhile trade-off, particularly given that voters who support refugees are less likely to vote for the Coalition and internal party criticism was limited.[972] The Rudd government's dramatic standoff with the asylum seekers rescued by the *Oceanic Viking* revealed the government's weaknesses and state of panic. As one of the government's first major missteps, it provided a potent opportunity for the opposition to begin the process of crafting a narrative about government mismanagement and to build on the Coalition's perceived areas of strength: national security and border protection. Significantly, a key element of Turnbull's early rhetoric was his call to sit down with the government to work together (or rather to reintroduce the Howard government's polices) to find a solution.[973] The call to sit down and work cooperatively with the government would be in marked contrast to his successor Tony Abbott.

However, Turnbull was not able to manage internal differences within his own party over climate policy and his image as a small 'l' liberal jarred with his tough rhetoric on asylum seekers. Despite the inroads the Coalition made on the boats issue, it was simply too early in the political cycle for voters to seriously consider throwing out a newly elected government — for voters to switch their vote so soon, is in effect to admit that they had made a poor judgment at the last election. It is this hurdle which all new oppositions must face and why most do not succeed in throwing out first-term governments.

Following the change of leadership on December 1 2009, Abbott and his shadow immigration spokesman, Scott Morrison, continued to use high numbers of boat arrivals to build on the Coalition's dual narratives of government incompetence and their tough and proven record on boarder protection. Given the weakened position of the minority Gillard government in a hung parliament, the opposition was also able to exercise greater influence over the passage of bills in the House of Representatives, particularly if the crossbenchers were divided. As unauthorised boats continued to appear in Australian waters, the opposition used the government's inability to stem the flow to great effect in a relentless attack on the government's competence and policy choices.

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[971] Jennifer Hewitt, 'Rough Landing', *The Australian,* April 18 2009; 'Turnbull talks tough', *The Australian* , April 21 2009; Lenore Taylor, 'Coalition chief plays the issues, but to deaf ears - Boatpeople Crisis', *The Australian*, April 21 2009; Geoff Kitney, 'Sudden sharp edges as passion returns', Australian Financial *Review,* September 17 2009; Michelle Grattan, 'Steering through rough seas', *The Age*, October 2 2009; Paul Maley and Amanda O' Brien, 'Ruddock predicts flood of 10, 000 boatpeople', *The* Australian, October 13 2009; 'Rudd slams Tuckey's "terrorist" asylum seeker comments', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 22 2009.

[972] James Massola, 'Coalition cracks over asylum Bill', *The Canberra Times*, June 25 2009. Turnbull was previously criticised by Bronwyn Bishop for being too 'soft' on the issue, see Greg Kelton, '50 more asylum seekers', *The Advertiser* May 6 2009.

[973] Tony Eastley, 'Let's take a bipartisan approach to immigration: Turnbull', *AM*, Radio National, April 17 2009.

The opposition's approach to the 'Malaysian Solution' is illustrative of both the discipline and effectiveness of the opposition's uncompromising strategy. The 'Malaysia Solution', first announced in May 2011, and signed on July 25 2011, would see 800 people who had arrived by boat in Australia sent immediately back to Malaysia in exchange for up to 4000 refugees nominated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) over four years.[974] The policy was designed to deter asylum seekers who paid a people smuggler to come to Australia. Instead, they would find themselves on a plane back to Asia.

The opposition's response to the 'Malaysia Solution', reinforced the existing themes of their political narrative. First, they linked the policy announcement to the opposition's well developed themes of Labor incompetence versus Coalition competence, typified by Morrison's declaration that the deal vindicated 'the Coalition's claims that Labor's weaker policies started the boats'.[975] Second, the opposition linked the government's approach to the boats to the open wound that was the Prime Minister's trustworthiness by arguing that sending asylum seekers to a country that had not signed the refugee convention was another 'broken promise'.[976] Third, the opposition argued that the 'Malaysia Solution' was unlikely to work in any case, given that eleven boats had arrived in the period between the time that the policy was announced and when the agreement was signed less than two months later.[977] Finally, and perhaps most extraordinarily given the history of the Coalition's approach to asylum seekers, the opposition attacked the policy on humanitarian grounds, arguing that it was immoral to send unaccompanied children to Malaysia without supervision.[978] The

[974] Julia Gillard, Prime Minister of Australia, 'Joint statements by the Prime Ministers of Australia and Malaysia on a regional cooperation framework', media release, May 7 2011, http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/media/pressrel/2548154/upload_binary/2548154.pdf;fileType=application/pdf#search=%22The%20regional%20cooperation%20framework%20%202010s%202011%2005%22.

[975] Scott Morrison, '$292M Malaysia people swap an admission of policy failure and gross hypocrisy', Press Release, July 25 2011, http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/media/pressrel/952350/upload_binary/952350.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%222010s%202011%2007%20malaysia%2025%22.

[976] Tony Abbott, Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, June 14 2011, 5850; Bob Baldwin, Commonwealth parliamentary debates, September 20, 2011, 10 727; Scott Morrison, Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, September 20 2011, 11 022.

[977] Tony Abbott, 'Transcript of the Hon. Tony Abbott MHR, interview with Paul Murray, radio 2UE, Sydney', July 25 2011, http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/media/pressrel/954666/upload_binary/954666.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%222010s%202011%2007%20malaysia%2025%20leader%20of%20the%20opposition%22.

[978] Joe Hockey, Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, June 27 2012, 8286.

Coalition's position was described by Paul Kelly as 'irresponsible' and many of their arguments were condemned as hypocritical by the press.[979]

The surprise decision by the High Court in August 2011 to declare the 'Malaysia solution' unlawful because the deal could not guarantee protections for refugees plunged the government into crisis.[980] Yet, it also called into question the Coalition's proposed policy to revive the 'Pacific Solution' and reopen facilities on Nauru. The ruling by the court placed the government in a difficult position: it could either attempt to legislate around the High Court in a hostile parliament, or capitulate to the opposition and implement their policy. As the government tried to legislate around its policy difficulties, the opposition refused to support the ALP, arguing: 'it is not the opposition's job to support bad policy from a bad government. It is not the opposition's job to save the government from a mess of its own making when there is an alternative.'[981] Sensing the government's weakness, Abbott also opposed the policy on humanitarian grounds, arguing 'what decent government would send boat people to a country where they could be exposed to caning?' and, 'it is very wrong of Australia to send people who have come into our care, however briefly, to a country whose standards are so different from ours.'[982] In this way the opposition was able to attack the government from two fronts.

A week later, the opposition introduced amendments to the government's bill, which ruled out offshore processing on Malaysia, but would allow it on Nauru. It then invited the government to adopt the Coalition's policy.[983] The government responded by attacking the opposition for failing to act in the national interest. Abbott, Gillard argued, had 'slammed the door on the national interest and pulled it wide open to his view of his own political interest', because they are 'terrified that Malaysia will work.'[984] Gillard admitted that the government brought on the vote, despite its slim chances of success, in the attempt to shame the opposition into acting in the national interest, or in a manner that would at least give future governments the power to make decisions of this order.[985] Abbott capitalised on the government's misfortunes to build his own momentum. He rubbed salt

[979] Paul Kelly, 'Battle to stem the tide', *The Australian*, December 10 2011; Shaun Carney, 'The boat policy humiliation deepens the Gillard tragedy', *The Age*, October 15 2011; Greg Sheridan, 'Asylum policy a failure on all fronts', *The Australian,* October 15 2011.
[980] Plaintiff M70/2001 v Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, HCA 32, (High Court of Australia 2011).
[981] Abbott, Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, September 13 2011, 9896.
[982] Ibid.
[983] Jeremy Thompson, 'Gillard leaves door open to Abbott asylum deal', *ABC News*, June 23 2011, http://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-09-05/abbott-steps-up-nauru-pressure/2870610
[984] Julia Gillard, 'Transcript of interview with Sabra Lane, ABC AM', September 20 2011, http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/media/pressrel/1211724/upload_binary/1211724.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%222010s%202011%2009%2020%20prime%20minister%22;
[985] Ibid.

into the government's wounds by repeating his damaging arguments and by refusing to work with the government to find a compromise. The result was that Abbott ensured that the issue would continue unresolved.

After a boat sank in December 2011 in Indonesian waters, killing 200 people, the government offered to open centres on Nauru in exchange for the Coalition's support for the 'Malaysia Solution'. The Coalition stuck to its successful policy and communications strategy and refused the government's offer, stating 'if you've got Nauru, you don't need Malaysia' and again repeated their opposition on the basis that Malaysia had not signed up to the refugee convention.[986] Abbott then increased the policy contrast between the government and the opposition further still in January 2012, adding turning back boats on the high seas to the Coalition's policy response. Abbott calculated that the cost of appearing negative was worth the price of sowing the seeds of doubt in the public's mind, which he could cultivate into an eventual electoral victory for the Coalition.

The opposition's faith in this strategy was demonstrated six months later, when boats once again reached crisis levels in June 2012. The government, once again, attempted to pass its Malaysia people swap policy. This led to a series of emotional debates in the House of Representatives, with Liberal MP, Dr Mal Washer, almost crossing the floor and voting with the government. Yet, while the bells were still ringing he was cajoled at the last moment into return to the Coalition fold by the Deputy Liberal leader, Julie Bishop.[987] The public's low regard for the conduct of these debates was reflected by an Essential poll in which 78 per cent of respondents agreed with the second part of this question: *'Do you think the current debate over handling of asylum seekers shows that Australian politicians are genuinely concerned about the welfare of asylum seekers or are they just playing politics over the issue?'*[988]

In response to the bill's failure to pass the lower house, Gillard established an expert panel of eminent persons to advise the government. Abbott declared that the Coalition would not change their policy and nor would they participate in the parliamentary committee set up to respond to the report. In his letter refusing to participate, Abbott referenced the make-up of the panel's initial reference committee, which included the Greens and the independents. Abbott linked this alliance to the carbon tax, noting 'given this is the same alliance, together with Mr [Rob] Oakeshott, that

[986] Matthew Franklin, 'Tony Abbott Not Budging on Malaysia Solution for Asylum-Seekers', *The Australian*, December 23 2011, http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/immigration/tony-abbott-not-budging-on-malaysia-solution-for-asylum-seekers/story-fn9hm1gu-1226228925732.
[987] Judith Ireland, '"I've had better days": Washer', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, June 28 2012, http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/ive-had-better-days-washer-20120628-2147o.html
[988] Lewis and Woods, 'Asylum seeker tears don't wash with public', *The Drum,* July 10 2012, http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-07-10/lewiswoods-asylum-seeker-debate/4120916

enabled the passage of the Carbon Tax, any agreement by this group on these issues would therefore have the support necessary to secure passage of any legislation'.[989] The effect was to deny the Gillard government a workable and permanent solution to a pressing problem that was undermining their vote in western Sydney. For Labor, asylum seekers had become an issue which, was 'killing the government' as early as July 2010, according to Labor Immigration Minister, Chris Evans. This sentiment was repeated many times in the lead up to the 2013 election.[990]

The unedifying political battle over who could win the rhetorical war on boats came to its logical conclusion just weeks after Rudd returned to the prime ministership. Rudd announced the 'PNG Solution' — a series of measures harsher than the formula proposed by the Coalition.[991] A stunned Coalition was wrong-footed at first but soon regrouped. During the election it announced 'operation sovereign borders', which transformed border protection into a military exercise.[992] In doing so, the Coalition kept the issue of boats salient in the upcoming electoral contest and as they had since 2009, they *created* and maintained a sense of significant political difference between the two major parties that favoured the conservatives.

The unintended cost of 'issues management'

However, there was an unintended cost to this approach to political communication. This cost was understood by LPA actors themselves. Most notably, Abbott was branded as 'the negative opposition leader' and an obstructionist. Yet, Abbott's political success was ultimately its own justification. Andrew Robb, a key architect of the Liberal's policy strategy, defended Abbott, arguing that 'Abbott is just so damn good at holding them to account and they [Labor] hate it.' Grahame Morris, the long-time Liberal party warhorse, put the point starkly when he responded to Abbott's critics: 'stiff shit, he's winning'. Morris further added, 'how can you criticise somebody for doing their job? His title is Opposition Leader, it's not king of the pansy society or something.'[993] Despite

[989] Phillip Coorey, 'Indonesia will bend to boats policy, says Abbott', *The Sydney Morning Herald,* July 10 2012 http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/indonesia-will-bend-to-boats-policy-says-abbott-20120709-21rrd.html

[990] Nick Harmsen, 'Boat arrivals kept in front of the electorate', *Lateline*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, July 14 2010, http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/content/2010/s2953895.htm; Philip Coorey, 'Spooked Labor MPs warn Gillard over boat people', *Australian Financial Review*, June 5 2013, http://www.afr.com/news/spooked-labor-mps-warn-gillard-over-boat-people-20130604-jhqg2.

[991] David Crowe, 'Kevin Rudd unveils 'hard-line" PNG solution for asylum seekers', *The Australian*, July 19 2013, http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/immigration/kevin-rudd-to-unveil-manus-island-expansion-plan-in-bid-to-stop-boats/story-fn9hm1gu-1226681830019.

[992] The Liberal Party of Australia, 'The Coalition's Policy for a regional deterrence framework to combat people smuggling', August 23 2013, http://lpaweb-static.s3.amazonaws.com/13-08 23%20The%20Coalition%E2%80%99s%20Policy%20for%20a%20Regional%20Deterrence%20Framework%20to%20Combat%20People%20Smuggling.pdf.

[993] Melissa Fyfe and Michael Bachelard, 'The positives of being negative', *The Sydney Morning Herald,* May 22 2011, http://www.smh.com.au/national/the-positives-of-being-negative-20110521-1exzk.html.

the criticism his tactics attracted, Abbott was successfully able to define the Labor party on the Liberal party's terms, and at the same time, frame the Coalition as the party capable of responsible and effective government. It was a deliberate and disciplined strategy as a senior figure within the leadership group explained:

> We've gone very hard and people have criticized us, and even amongst our own people, for just talking about overwhelmingly the carbon tax and boat people. … Politics is about symbols and in our view they are two symbols of the primary weaknesses of this government.[994]

Abbott's approach was not only validated by its success, but in the interviews that inform this study, his colleagues argued that the opposition has to meet a significantly lower bar than that generally set by the media or the government. They argued that the opposition needs to 'give an *impression* of what you stand for, without necessarily coming out with it — because you can never come out with policies that are detailed enough for the Canberra press gallery or the government.'[995] Another Liberal observed: 'people need to know how we're going to govern. They need to be sure that they can switch their vote'.[996] The purpose of political communication was to communicate disciplined and specific messages to voters that would reassure them in their decision to switch their vote to the Coalition. It was not, as the Coalition in the 1980s believed, to educate voters, outline the opposition's policy credentials or convince voters that they were a responsible alternative government.

Perhaps what explains this reductionist attitude to political communication is the reality of who the LPA's target audience is:

> Everyone who reads *The Australian*, watches the ABC, knows how they're going to vote. You don't run election campaigns for them. You run it for young families in the suburbs who don't care about politics and they don't really focus until halfway through an election campaign.[997]

It is this cool calculation which drove the LPA's political communications strategy, an approach which for good or ill was vindicated in one of the largest electoral victories in Australian history.

However, while this approach suited the times and produced short term dividends, the Liberal party has struggled to transition successfully into government after the 2013 election. The party lost its prime minister after only two years and at the time of writing is undertaking a federal election

[994] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on August 20 2012.
[995] ibid.
[996] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on November 28 2012.
[997] Personal communication with the author, interviewed on March 5 2013.

campaign with an underdeveloped policy agenda given it had six years to prepare for government in opposition and three years as a government. The record of the LPA in government calls into question whether the overwhelming emphasis on communication discipline has consequences for democracy. An emphasis on issues management as opposed to policy thinking inculcates MPs to think shallowly about policy. The conception of policy as 'our issues' and 'their issues' can only encourage zero-sum and even circular thinking, and ultimately, retard party's capacity to think outside the box and search for creative solutions to emerging problems. Authors such as Jennings might over-emphasis the normative aspects of opposition, however, the troubled transitions of Liberal party and the Labor party before them demonstrate the difficulties facing parties in a mediatised age.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that political actors' assumptions about political communication and its purpose have changed since the 1980s. In the post-2007 era, political actors were highly attuned to the needs of the media and understood that the media was their main communication vehicle. The chapter also argued that leader's preferences are important for shaping political communication narratives because parties continue to rely on their judgment. In the case of the Liberal party, its heavy investment in leaders only exaggerates this reality. Through the lens of the NDIS and the Gonksi education reforms, the chapter argued that the Coalition used defensive media strategies to minimise the amount of differentiation between the Liberal and Labor parties on issues it considered threatening to their electoral prospects. However, in the case of the Gonksi education reforms, the tactic proved to be a major impediment later in government because the Abbott government did not have a strong alternative policy to replace Labor's approach. Last, the chapter explored how the opposition used offensive issue management strategies through an exploration of asylum seeker policy to build up favourable narratives about itself, while simultaneously undermining the government's credibility. The chapter demonstrated the evolution in the opposition's approach from Turnbull to Abbott, and from a more co-operative mode of opposition to all out obstruction. Parties engage in arguably damaging behaviour in public debate because they believe it helps win elections.

Conclusion

The Liberal party spent the majority of the 1980s and early 1990s overwhelmed by policy agendas and responding to the demands of political imperatives, including the reformist Hawke-Keating Labor governments, the national media, aggressive interest groups (especially on its own side of politics) and internal dissidents critical of the drift to the new right. For most of its time in opposition it *aspired* to be a credible alternative government and a constructive opposition with thought-out policy proposals. But its inability to gain the upper hand meant that it was most often a reactive force. A similar fate seemed to have befallen the party between 2007 and 2009. However, with the rise of the pugnacious Tony Abbott, the opposition pursued an overwhelmingly negative campaign designed to destroy the Gillard government's credibility rather than build up its own. The opposition invested only minimally in policy development from 2010 and put the vast majority of its efforts into attempting to influence and dominate the daily media cycle. It was a negative approach to opposition and a formula that proved to be remarkably successful at capturing office.

Although they are neglected, oppositions are worthy of study because they are a laboratory for political apprenticeship. Opposition is often where political actors learn the craft of politics, where colleagues form opinions on the capabilities of others and of their leadership group. Opposition is a 'garden of opportunity' where kites can be flown — whether they are policy kites or tactical kites, or kites simply to attract attention and distract from government.

Political opposition

This study has argued and demonstrated that the practice of opposition is intensely political. Yet, political scientists most commonly conceive of opposition as a set of institutional functions related to their formal roles in the legislature, and often overlook the impact of opposition on political parties' development and capacities. The implication is that the major parties in opposition have inherited the duties and roles of the legislature largely established before the party system was entrenched. But these legislative roles are not totally set in stone, rather they are a toolkit of domains and opportunities that parties may choose to exploit while pursuing their political ambitions. The roles of opposition and the behaviour of oppositions in those roles should be understood within the *political* context rather than solely within an institutional context.

Thus, while the opposition remains an important institution and is granted an important role in the practice of parliamentary democracy, it is the party-political dimensions that should be understood as dominant. This thesis has argued, and through empirical analysis demonstrated, that party

dynamics govern the operation of parliamentary institutions and the approach of parties in opposition.

Within the parliamentary arena, the role of opposition is structured by a relatively loose set of conventions and understandings about how the opposition ought to conduct itself, but these can be adapted, pushed or pulled, emphasised or de-emphasised according to the calculations of the opposition leadership at any point in time. Importantly, these calculations also have limits, as the opposition has to operate within bounds set by community expectations, notions of appropriate behaviour, their standing and credibility in the political marketplace and particularly the assessments of influential commentators and critics. The way parties in opposition seek to use parliament is driven by the interests of the party and its leadership cohort. Often, parties in opposition do not seek to act as the handmaidens of good government, even though this could be considered one of their main institutional roles.

Opposition behaviour in the party and media arenas are also shaped by institutional constraints. In the case of the party arena, these are self-imposed and self-constructed by the party itself through its formal rules and structures and its informal norms and culture. In the case of the media, the opposition's behaviour is in large part imposed by the media's (fast eroding) gatekeeper function and the reality of its news production processes — though in recent times political actors have increasingly gained the skills to help shape media institutions in their favour. The behaviour of political actors is also shaped by the realities of their political context and the opportunities that specific temporal junctures offer oppositions.

As this thesis has argued and demonstrated, opposition behaviour in the party and media arenas is, arguably, even more driven by political considerations than in the parliamentary arena. In the party, and particularly in the media domains, oppositions are broadly expected to promote their own interests according to what they believe will be most effective for achieving their political goals. Significantly, as this thesis has demonstrated, ideas about what constituted political success and how it should be achieved changed dramatically between 1983 and 2013. Yet, there remains a tension and when oppositions are seen to act too much in their own self-interest, they attract criticism.

Continuities and changes over time

The comparative approach of this study has revealed several significant changes between 1983 and 2013. However, there have also been a few important continuities.

Continuities in the role of leaders and key actors

The party leader remains the key actor within the LPA. I have argued for a more complex understanding of leadership within the LPA than is often presented in public debate and even in the

literature. Ideology is an important factor in the success of party leaders; however, the thesis has argued that it is interpersonal management skills and a subtle understanding of the party's processes that are more important. This is because leadership in the Liberal party is conditional on electoral success and despite the emphasis the party places on its 'strong-men' there are implicit reciprocal relationships. Leaders have to manage the party in terms of motivation and morale; they have to work to get the best out of the talent available to them in the parliament; and they have to nurture the strong belief among their colleagues and wider party organs that they can win the next election. If they do not, their leadership is most often expendable. In opposition, given the party's weaker discipline, it is easier to observe the limits of the leader's authority. Arguably, because the party's internal management structures are so underdeveloped, the leader is given significant authority and, consequently, the management of interpersonal relationships and internal party management becomes critical to the success of leaders.

The same lack of internal management structures that drive the party's reliance on leaders have also seen the party's management of factions remain largely *ad hoc.* This has some benefits. The lack of structures at the centre means that the entrenched factionalism that exists in some states are not readily transferred to the federal level. MPs arrive in Canberra and have to find fellow-travellers without the aid of readymade structures that they can easily slot into. However, neither is the party able to effectively manage conflict when it erupts. The all too frequent resort to removing the party leader remains the key mechanism for resolving factional disputes within the party.

In addition, this study has demonstrated the importance of key actors, both in terms of setting agendas and as key facilitators and enablers. Although the importance of the shadow cabinet has declined since the 1980s, group leadership remains important. Historically, actors who were effective communicators, fixers, facilitators or thinkers were vital to the party's success. Advocates and ideas synthesizers such as Fred Chaney were regularly deployed into areas (industrial relations, industry, or the environment) to find compromises and to neutralise problems. Many of the fixers were to be found in the party organisation, such as Grahame Morris or Nick Minchin, who could quickly pull together ideas or manage difficult situations. Others such as Andrew Robb and Jim Carlton were facilitators for ideas to flow more broadly throughout the party. Also important were the thinkers such as Chris Puplick and David Kemp from the pre-1996 period and George Brandis in more recent times, who were capable of connecting policy ideas to the broad liberal tradition. Despite the importance of leaders and changes to processes of policy formulation and communication, opposition by party remains a collective effort. A combination of skills is vital for an opposition to return to power.

Despite the dramatic events surrounding the 1987 'Joh for PM' debacle, this study has demonstrated that the Coalition relationship during this period was principally one of continuity. The reason for this is that senior party figures in both the Liberal and National parties valued the relationship and worked hard between themselves to manage and maintain it. The split in the Coalition in 1987 was an externally driven process imposed upon the federal parliamentary parties. While ordinary party members and even members in parliament could often be openly hostile to their Coalition partners, elites in both parties recognised the relationship's value. If anything, defeat in the 1987 election only underlined the importance of maintaining the Coalition for senior party leaders. In addition, as the thesis has demonstrated, patterns of renewal were not uniform across the party. Indeed, the LPA's weak central powers often meant that the federal party remained reliant on state branches to ensure fresh political talent was sent to Canberra — a process which, as chapter three demonstrates, was, and remains, *ad hoc*.

Changes since 1983

Despite continuities in the significance attached by the Liberal party both to its leadership and its relationship with its Coalition partner, there have also been important changes since 1983.

Changing attitudes to policy and the media

As noted, attitudes to policy-making and development have altered significantly. This thesis has shown how the party entered opposition in 1983 with rudimentary policy-making infrastructure and had to learn and institutionalise its policy-making processes over the course of the 1980s and 1990s. It has demonstrated that policy has become significantly *less important* to Coalition actors over time. Actors in the 1980s invested heavily in policy because they believed it was an important way to build political momentum. In strategy documents, presenting the party as a credible alternative government was a core priority, even if in practice the party struggled to live up to its own high standards. Moreover, establishing the party's credentials as an alternative government was an important goal of party leaders, particularly in the case of John Howard, Dr John Hewson, and the federal secretariat until the 1993 election. This is a factor that is often overlooked in contemporary analysis of political behaviour today.

While the purposes of policy-making have remained the same between the two time periods, their relative importance has changed. As argued in chapters five and six, the thesis argued that there are five main purposes to policy-making: to help define the opposition's beliefs and future direction; to establish credibility as an alternative government; to codify policies, thus helping parties maintain discipline; to generate third party support; and, to further develop the leader's image. The importance of using policy to establish credibility has declined significantly since the 1980s. Today policy is increasingly used to codify the party's positions in order to help maintain discipline. The

decline in policy thinking and cabinet government has also seen an increase in an emphasis on leaders' symbolising the party's values. Policy is still an important tool to generate third party support, but further research into how the LPA interacts with third parties and interest groups is needed to fully understand this dynamic.

Changes in attitudes to policy also went hand in hand with the party's increasingly professional approach to the media. Chapter four demonstrated that Coalition actors significantly changed the way they used the media between 1983 and 2013. Their engagement with the media as a site for advocacy shifted dramatically from 1983, when key party spokespeople were largely writing to the letters pages of the newspapers, often to complain about reporting. By 1995, politicians were increasingly writing persuasive opinion pieces as exercises of advocacy. How much this is due to changes in the media itself remains unclear and a subject for future research.

In the post-2007 period, the thesis has argued that changes in media production processes created a new environment that was much more favourable to oppositions. The media's emphasis on constantly refreshing news content by reporting updates and 'reactions' to events made it significantly easier for the opposition to have a presence in mainstream news reporting. However, while the Liberals in opposition proved adept at using traditional media, the party, and particularly its parliamentarians, remained cautious of social media throughout their six years in opposition.

Moreover, while the Liberals had long been distrustful and cautious about the media, the approach to the media from the leadership group also became more professional and engaging. Chapters four, seven and eight demonstrate how LPA actors become more attuned to the media's needs and more adapt at managing and manipulating its processes. Moreover, chapters seven and eight go some way to demonstrating why parties (or at least the Liberal party) become 'mediatised'. They also demonstrate how a growing recognition of the importance of the media by political actors in conjunction with parties' dependency on media to communicate with voters drives mediatisation further. As political actors increasingly internalise media logics, they are able to justify their decisions to pursue aggressive and negative political strategies. They are also able to justify their failure to communicate honestly with voters about their intensions for government.

In addition, changing attitudes to both policy development and political communication are another factor contributing to the increasing centralisation of power and decision making within the leaders' offices. However, it is important to note that it is not the only factor. Technological change and changes in the nature of cabinet government have also driven this process and this thesis has canvassed the phenomenon only briefly. The need for disciplined political communications, implying

the obedience of politicians lower down the pecking order who must "stick to the script", raises significant questions about the role of policy-making and party discipline.

If we have seen some trends towards the presidentialisation of politics and a concentration of power in the leader's office, does this then call into question the value of parties as representative aggregators of interests and ideas? Individuals considering a political career might question whether there is much point given the limitations put on their capacity to influence policy even once they arrive in parliament. On the other hand, have we passed the zenith of creeping centralisation in the offices of leaders? Both Kevin Rudd and Tony Abbott were deposed by disgruntled backbenchers angry at having been shut out of the government's internal deliberative processes. Given the questions this thesis raises, the relationship between policy and party discipline is an important area for future research.

The critical turning point driving changes in the LPA's behaviour — and arguably that of subsequent Labor oppositions at the federal level — occurred after *Fightback!* failed. The policy's very complexity and sophistication convinced parties that more information and better policy was not the automatic pathway to success. Policy can be scary just as it can be attractive. For example, *Fightback!* as a policy package was too overwhelming and needed to be sold over a longer period of time — a point Howard seemed to have recognised both in opposition and in government. This thesis has also argued that the continued presence of key actors that witnessed the collapse of *Fightback!* proved to be highly influential in the post-2007 period of opposition. They carried forward the lessons learnt from the early 1990s. However, the thesis has raised the issue that in doing so, parties have misunderstood the lesson from *Fightback!* and have misconstrued the nature of Howard's campaign in 1996. Howard, by virtue of his long policy advocacy over many decades was never as 'small' a target as critics claimed.

The implication that remains unexplored by this thesis is whether the Liberal party was effectively or inadequately preparing for government. Tony Abbott (like his counterpart Kevin Rudd) successfully deployed a small-target strategy on his way to power. He invested heavily in 'issues management' as opposed to policy development. And Abbott like Rudd before him were both replaced before completing their first term. Was this the direct result of poor policy planning and a lack of deep policy thinking before attaining power, or are Rudd and Abbott, alongside Julia Gillard, the victims of major structural changes that are underway within Australia and the globe? The degree to which preparation in opposition is essential for a successful transition to government remains an open question. It is a crucial area for future research.

Finally, it is important to understand how much of the LPA's experience is attributable to its particular quirks and structures and how much of its experience reflects broader trends in Australia and internationally. A parallel study of the Labor party would be an important first step in answering this question. In addition, a study of state level oppositions would extend our understanding of how ideas and practices are cross-fertilised across jurisdictions. Finally, a comparative study across Westminster or even Western-style democracies would shed further light on these questions.

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