Parliament of Victoria

Election candidate proliferation in Victoria

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Research Note

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Executive summary

In recent years, the state of Victoria has witnessed a proliferation of candidates and registered parties contesting elections, amid falling support for the major parties. This paper surveys some possible reasons for this phenomenon.

There were 459 candidates for the 88 seats in the Legislative Assembly (LA) and 248 for the 40 seats in the Legislative Council (LC) at the 2006 election (the first election after the extensive reform of the state's upper house). In 2022, 740 candidates contested seats in the LA and 454 candidates in the LC.

Both the Parliament of Victoria's Electoral Matters Committee (EMC) and the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) have observed this trend. Some evidence links the increase in the number of candidates to the presence of Group Voting Tickets (GVTs) in the LC. While the paper takes a long-term view from the 1950s onwards, its main focus is on more recent elections and the surge in the number of candidates and parties.

This paper examines how candidate numbers have changed in Victoria and other Australian jurisdictions, with the following findings:

- Very few studies exist on candidate proliferation, both historically and in recent years.
- More dated research focuses upon the motivations of so-called 'sacrificial lamb' candidates in North American jurisdictions, while recent studies emphasise particular traits of national polities (often in developing countries). Candidate and party numbers frequently vary by electoral system, though proliferation occurs across different types of systems.
- No substantial material is apparent that links candidate proliferation to contemporary trends of political dissatisfaction or populism.
- The numbers of both candidates and parties in Victoria remained somewhat static for much of the 20th century. There was even a slight decline in the number of parties from the mid-1980s into the 1990s, corresponding with formal party registration and stricter regulations.
- Both candidate and party numbers began to increase in Victoria after 2000. No geographical trends are evident.
- Candidate and party proliferation corresponds with a falling share of the vote for major parties, although the numbers successfully obtaining representation are modest in most lower house chambers, and more successful in upper houses with proportional representation.
- A mix of trends exists in other Australian and international jurisdictions:
    - The Australian House of Representatives, Queensland's LA and the United Kingdom's House of Commons all show increases, although none have a recent spike on the scale in Victoria's two houses of parliament.
    - The number of candidates jumped between 1995 and 1999 in New South Wales and subsequently largely plateaued with a trend of modest increase in the state's LC. The Australian Senate is similar.
- The use of GVTs appears to amplify the trend towards party and candidate proliferation. On the one hand, their abolition has reduced the number of parties in NSW and Western Australia. On the other hand, candidate numbers for the lower house continue to grow in Queensland, despite the state having no upper house, and GVT preference negotiations not being a factor there.

Introduction

In recent years, the number of candidates contesting elections for both the Victorian Legislative Assembly (LA) and the Legislative Council (LC) has increased.

Both the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) (which administers elections in the state) and the Electoral Matters Committee (EMC) (a joint parliamentary committee that reviews matters relating to elections) have noted the trend.[1] Yet, there is little research on the phenomenon. The EMC has placed some emphasis on how Group Voting Tickets (GVTs)—preference agreements that allow 'above-the-line' voting for upper houses—may have amplified the trend towards proliferation.

This paper reviews recent trends in the number of candidates and summarises the findings of initial studies. The question of why a proliferation of candidates and parties has occurred remains open. Correspondingly, section one details aspects of the few existing studies. Section two presents the evidence of candidate proliferation in Victoria and makes some initial comparisons with other jurisdictions.

1 | Sacrificial lambs and *laranjas*?

A proliferation of election candidates and parties has occurred in Victorian state elections and other Australian jurisdictions over recent years. These trends are also evident in different international contexts. While there is little contemporary research on the issue, a few international and local examples are outlined below. They suggest local conditions tend to promote different forms of proliferation.

International cases

Electoral systems vary considerably in the way they operate. There is, however, some evidence that, whatever system is in place, there are periods when the number of parties and candidates increases considerably. The two main 'categories' of electoral system—proportional representation (PR) and single-member constituencies (SMC)—tend to display different initial trends. Considerable variation also exists within these categories and among their combinations. PR systems tend to encourage more parties and candidates, whereas SMC systems (whether preferential or 'first past the post') are more likely to produce two main parties.[2]

The main issue of interest here, though, is not comparisons between systems but how changes can occur in either system over time. PR and SMC systems can differ initially, but candidate and party proliferation can occur in either.

For instance, some proliferation is evident in the United States, with its heavily entrenched, 'first-past-the-post' SMC-based system. American political scientist D. T. Canon's 1993 investigation of congressional contests in the United States questioned the motivations of so-called 'amateur' candidates (having little chance of success), who were previously often understood as naïve or 'sacrificial lambs'.[3] Canon categorised 'amateur' candidates into two groups: 'experience seekers' and 'strategic'. The former usually focus on raising issues and understand that they have little chance of success. The latter tend to focus on more

[1] Electoral Matters Committee (2024a) *Inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election,* Volume 1: Key reforms, final report, July, Melbourne, The Committee; Electoral Matters Committee (2023b) *Inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, Volume 2: Detailed Analysis, final report, July, Melbourne, The Committee; Victorian Electoral Commission (2024b) *Report to Parliament 2022 Victorian State election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election*, October, Melbourne, VEC.

[2] M. Gallagher & P. Mitchell (2005) 'Introduction to Electoral Systems', in M. Gallagher and P. Mitchell (eds) *The Politics of Electoral Systems*, Oxford, Oxford Academic, pp. 3-24.

[3] D. T. Canon (1993) 'Sacrificial Lambs or Strategic Politicians? Political Amateurs in U.S. House Elections', *American Journal of Political Science*, 37(4), pp. 1119-1141.

competitive contests and are more likely to be elected.[4] His study is quite old, though, and it would appear the number of willing 'sacrificial lambs' has proliferated in the years since (at least in Australia and the UK [see below]).

More recent research focuses on the increase in parties in 'developing' democracies, both longer-running and 'third wave' or post-authoritarian, that emerged from the 1970s onwards.[5] The electoral and party systems of these countries are likely less stable than those of Australian jurisdictions. One of the most comprehensive recent studies focuses on Senegal and sub-Saharan Africa (Senegal is one of the region's longest-running electoral democracies, with a mixed PR-based system). Swiss-based political scientist Catherine Lena Kelly concludes that the proliferation of parties can be attributed to candidates wanting to 'access the state' rather than contest and win elections.[6] In other words, party proliferation does not always mean an increase in the number of candidates. It reflects one strategy by interest groups and individuals to secure resources and policy outcomes within the Senegalese context.

In contrast, observations from recent elections in Brazil, where democratisation began in the late 1980s, illustrate a proliferation of both candidates and parties. The phenomenon of *laranjas* ('oranges': suspicious behaviour) has emerged in the context of Brazil's mixed, PR-state-based congressional elections.[7] Parties nominate 'sacrificial lambs', with 5,876 candidates competing in 2014 for the Brazilian lower house (Chamber of Deputies), which has only 513 seats (representing 27 statewide multimember districts).[8] The average number of candidates per seat across the country increased from 7 to 11, a 57 per cent net increase since 1986. A record 30 parties won seats in the 2018 elections to the Chamber of Deputies.[9] Despite the expense and administrative burden, the primary reason appears to be quota manipulation, particularly regarding gender. These subvert legislated gender requirements for quotas of candidates by relegating women to unelectable positions on party lists.[10]

The brief interlude of democratisation in Egypt in 2011 witnessed a proliferation of new entrants into the political and electoral scene before the return of military rule in 2013.[11] India has also experienced both candidate and party proliferation. It appears to be linked to varying levels of organisational coherence amongst the parties—candidates 'trade' party affiliations in response to a perceived lack of support from existing organisations.[12] The India study is from 2014 and does not cover recent changes in Indian electoral politics, such as the fragmentation of the once-hegemonic Congress party and the rise of Narendra Modi's populist Bharatiya Janata Party.[13]

The rise of electoral 'populism' is evident across the generally less stable developing countries and the developed world. A significant amount of contemporary political science analysis focuses on broader issues of electoral disenchantment and populism.[14] Yet these studies do not focus specifically on the relationship between these trends and candidate or

[4] Canon (1993) op. cit., p. 1119.
[5] S. P. Huntington (1991) 'Democracy's Third Wave', *Journal of Democracy*, 2(2), pp. 12-34.
[6] C. L. Kelly (2020) *Party Proliferation and Political Contestation in Africa: Senegal in comparative perspective*, Switzerland, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 21.
[7] K. Wylie et al. (2019) 'Extreme Non-Viable Candidates and Quota Manoeuvring in Brazilian Legislative Elections', *Opinião Pública*, 25(1), pp. 1-28. They explain 'Portuguese dictionaries define *laranja*, beyond its more common definition of orange, as a person who is naïve and meek, and as a person used as an intermediary in fraudulent and other suspicious businesses'.
[8] Wylie et al. (2019) op. cit.
[9] ibid.
[10] ibid., p. 24.
[11] D. L. Tavana (2013) 'Party Proliferation and Electoral Transition in post-Mubarak Egypt', in Joffe (ed) *North Africa's Arab Spring*, London, Routledge, pp. 51-67.
[12] P. Chibber et al. (2014) 'Party Organization and Party Proliferation in India', *Party Politics*, 20(4), pp. 489-505.
[13] R. Diwakar (2024) 'The Party System', in Sridharan and Ganguly (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Politics*, Oxford, OUP, p. 249.
[14] J. Agnew and M. E. Shin (2020) *Mapping Populism: Taking politics to the people*, Maryland, Rowman & Littlefield; C. Hay (2007) *Why We Hate Politics*, Cambridge, Polity; B. Moffitt (2020) *Populism*, Cambridge, Polity Press.

party proliferation across electoral systems. There is, therefore, a gap in research on tracking more recent changes in candidate and party proliferation.

Commentary in Australia

The research gap in this area is also evident in Australian jurisdictions. Outside of some minor mentions in electoral reports, there is no apparent published research beyond media commentary and speculation. The proportion of people voting for non-major parties is increasing, though.[15] News articles suggest a mix of personal motivations for candidates, including extending activism into policy, the ease of political engagement through social media and other technologies, and a desire to be part of cultural and generational change. The prospect of holding the balance of power in the Victorian LC also incentivises raising particular reform issues.[16]

These materials emphasise various factors, including the preferential voting system and increasing disenchantment with the main political parties.[17] They are less focused on why the modest opening in electoral representation these trends suggest leads to such a proliferation of candidates and parties. The number of entrants far exceeds the relatively small number of available spots. Others utilise electoral contests to promote issues that they see as neglected by the political mainstream.[18]

In Victoria, the VEC's report on the 2022 state election includes a discussion of candidate numbers. In addition to providing data, the VEC focuses on the relationship between the number of candidates and levels of informal voting. In addition to categorising the different forms of informality (blank papers, spoiled ballots, ticks instead of numbering and so on), the VEC found 'a fairly strong positive correlation of 0.66 between the number of candidates and the informal voting rate'.[19] The informal vote in districts such as Werribee (9.72 per cent, 15 candidates) or Melton (11.14 per cent, 14 candidates) indicates the effect of a high number of candidates. In other words, informal voting increased in seats with more candidates. The VEC noted that while it:

> … cannot limit legitimate nomination of candidates, knowledge of districts that have a high number of candidates after the close of nomination may allow for changing prioritisation of information and education campaigns aimed at reducing informality.[20]

As part of the VEC's formal reporting following state elections (reports to Parliament), focus has largely been on the relationship between candidate numbers and informal voting.

Elsewhere, the VEC notes some problems associated with the proliferation and administration of the election. These include the tight deadlines for registration and nomination processes, as well as the lodgement of key documents (such as 'how-to-vote' cards). Under the current procedure, the LA expires, and the writ for an election is issued 25 days before the state election, which falls on the last Saturday in November.[21] Nominations for party and independent candidates close 16 and 15 days before polling day, respectively. How-to-vote cards need to be registered eight days before (after pre-poll voting

[15] B. Brown & M H. Le (2024) *The Steady Decline of Voters Choosing the Major Parties is Reshaping Australian Politics*, The Australia Institute.
[16] C. Douglas (2022) 'Check our searchable list of young candidates who have thrown their hat in the ring in your electorate', *Herald Sun*, 22 October; C. Kelly (2022) 'Legalise Cannabis and other Progressive Parties Could Hold Balance of Power in Victorian Upper House', *The Guardian*, 28 November.
[17] Australian Associated Press (2022) 'New study shows 'large-scale abandonment' of Australia's major parties', *SBS News*, 5 December; A. Diaz (2025) 'Australian democracy under threat from 'powder keg of disenchanted voters', *ANU Reporter*, 16 April.
[18] A. Crabb (2025) 'Episode 3 People Power, Annabel Crabb's Civic Duty,' ABC iview, 10 November.
[19] Victorian Electoral Commission (2023b) op. cit., p. 161.
[20] ibid.
[21] The Victorian Parliament passed the *Electoral Amendment Act 2026* on 31 March 2026. It makes several reforms including tightening restrictions on the party names and logos that can be registered, and altering some of the timings and requirements for electoral processes. The Act comes into force on 1 July 2026 unless otherwise proclaimed.

has commenced), but need to be registered earlier to be included in all mobile voting.[22] In 2022, the VEC received and assessed 2,097 lodgements in five working days.[23]

The return of writs must occur within 21 days after polling day. In 2022, the vote count for both houses ran from 26 November to 14 December, making Victoria the Australian jurisdiction with the shortest available count timeline.[24]

An increasing number of candidates also tends to increase the number of canvassers present at polling centres, which can discourage some voters from voting in person.[25] Although efforts to make elections more 'voter-centred' are featured in the literature on electoral administration, there is little attention to how candidate proliferation has impacted in-person voting numbers.[26]

Finally, the Parliament of Victoria's EMC argued in its 2024 report on the 2022 election that there was some evidence linking the proliferation of candidates and parties to the voting process, especially in the LC. The current system of GVTs and the associated problem of 'preference whispering':

> … puts pressure on parties to run candidates in both Upper and Lower Houses that have little chance of winning. This increases the number of candidates on ballot papers, which tends to increase the number of informal votes. Similarly, group voting tickets may lead to more parties competing in elections, thereby increasing the size of ballot papers.[27]

That suggests that distinctly local factors underpin (at least in part) the proliferation. Victoria remains the only jurisdiction in Australia that still utilises GVTs for upper house electoral contests, although the EMC recommended their abolition in its 2024 and 2025 reports.[28] The VEC has agreed in principle with this recommendation.[29] Not all upper house candidates had GVT agreements, though and may still be incentivised to run after seeing low-voting parties win seats (though this is also generally a product of the operation of GVTs).

In sum, there is a lack of research on candidate and party proliferation. As the above discussion and the next section suggest, however, it is not a phenomenon unique to Victoria, and other factors seem to be contributing to its growth.

[22] Victorian Electoral Commission (2023b) op. cit., p. 6.
[23] ibid., p. 36.
[24] ibid. pp. 13 & 70.
[25] ibid. p. 90.
[26] M. Brown et al. (2019) *The Future of Election Administration: Cases and Conversations*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan.
[27] Electoral Matters Committee (2024a) *Inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, Volume 1: Key reforms, final report, July, Melbourne, The Committee. p. 52
[28] B. Reid (2023) *Group Voting Tickets and Victoria*, Parliamentary Library & Information Service, Melbourne, Parliament of Victoria; Electoral Matters Committee (2024a) op. cit. p. 50, Electoral Matters Committee (2025) *Inquiry into Victoria's Upper House electoral system*, final report, December, Melbourne, The Committee.
[29] Victorian Electoral Commission (2024) 'Response To Electoral Matters Committee Report on its Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2022 Victorian State Election (November 2024)', Melbourne, VEC, p. 19.

2 | Victoria and other jurisdictions

What is the state of party and candidate proliferation in Victoria, across the upper and lower houses? The following analysis takes a long-term view from the 1970s onwards, with a focus on recent years. The data comes from both the VEC and psephologist Adam Carr's archive.[30]

Trends in Victoria

Figure 1 details the actual and trend numbers of candidates for the LA since 1945. As in many jurisdictions, the number of candidates was stable for much of the 20th century (with Federation in 1901 and the legislating of single-member districts in Victoria in 1904). Before the 1960s, moreover, some seats had just one candidate on the ballot.

Modest increases in the number of candidates in Victoria in the 1950s corresponded with the fragmentation of the Liberal and Country parties and, later, the Labor Party (with the formation of the Democratic Labour Party in 1955). The number of electoral seats only expanded gradually after 1964 (from a base of 65), reaching its current count of 88 by 1985. The recent increase in candidate numbers is not simply a consequence of an increase in the number of districts.

The periods between 1985 and the early 1990s and from 2000 onwards have seen the most rapid increase in election candidate numbers. Table 1 gives more insight into the increase since 2004. The median number of LA candidates per district increased from five to eight, with a slight decrease in 2018. The most candidates in any district reached 15 in both 2014 and 2022. In its 2023 submission to the EMC inquiry, the VEC noted the trend of steadily increasing candidate numbers at each election and indicated an upward linear forecast.[31]

[30] A. Carr (2025) 'Victoria', Adam Carr's Election Archive website; Victorian Electoral Commission (various) 'State election results', VEC website.
[31] Victorian Electoral Commission (2023c) 'Submission to the Electoral Matters Committee inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian State election', Inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election, June, Melbourne, Electoral Matters Committee, p. 28.

Figure 1: Count of Victorian Legislative Assembly election candidates (general elections), 1950–2022[32]

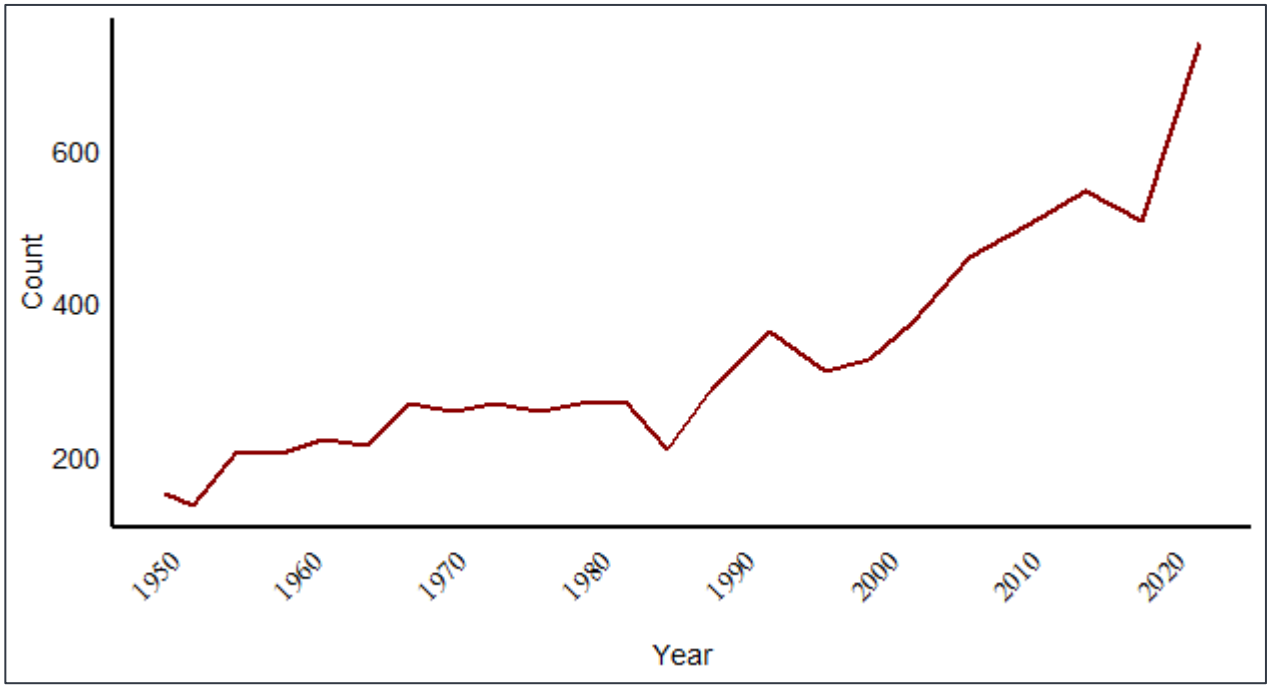

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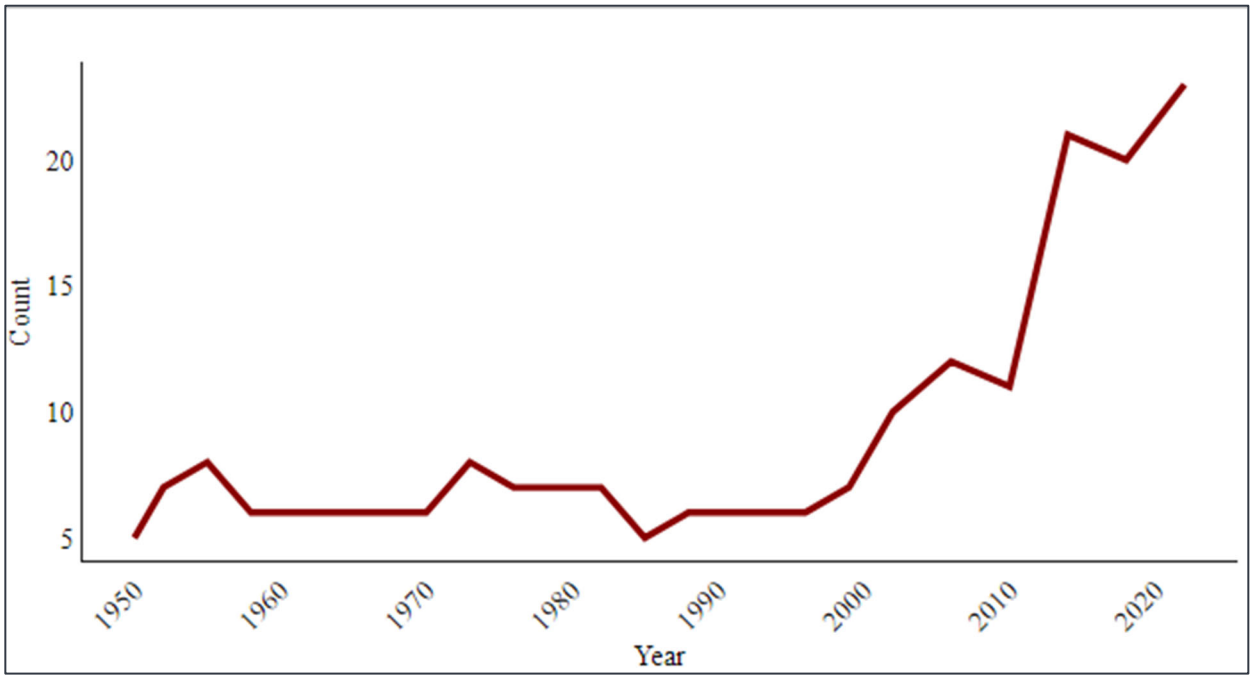
Table 1: Summary of candidate numbers per district for the Victorian Legislative Assembly, 2002–2022[33]

Year	Minimum	Median	Maximum
2002	4	5	9
2006	5	6	9
2010	4	6	11
2014	4	7	15
2018	4	6	13
2022	6	8	15

The trend of increasing the number of registered parties is slightly different. Figure 2 shows that the number of parties initially increased somewhat until the 1980s, then declined. Political parties have a long history in Australia.[34] Although perhaps surprisingly, they had an ambiguous constitutional and legal status in Australia, having first appeared in legislation that changed the rules governing casual vacancies for Senators in 1977.[35] In Victoria, rules governing the registration, roles, and functions of political parties (including listing party affiliations on ballot papers) were not included in legislation until 1984.[36]

[32] VEC (various) op. cit; Carr (2025) op. cit.
[33] VEC (various) op. cit.
[34] F. Bongiorno (2025) 'People and power: how Australia's political parties took hold', in Dunn (ed) *How Australian Democracy Works*, Cremorne, Thames & Hudson Australia Pty, Limited, pp. 47–58.
[35] *Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act (Cth)*, s 15.
[36] *The Constitution Act Amendment (Electoral Legislation) Act 1984*, Division 1A—Registration of Political Parties; J. Simpson (1984) 'Second reading speech: The Constitution Act Amendment (Electoral Legislation)', *Debates,* Victoria, Legislative Assembly, 20 September, pp. 667–670.

Figure 2: Counts of parties contesting elections, 1950–2022[37]



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Moreover, in the early 1990s, the criteria for registering political parties tightened across various jurisdictions in Australia.[38] In Victoria, the *Constitution Act Amendment (Electoral Procedures) Act 1991* tightened party registration requirements (requiring 500 members), with the explicit reasoning being the need to be 'consistent with Commonwealth provisions'.[39] Correspondingly, Figure 2 suggests modest fluctuations in the number of parties until they accelerate after 2000.

Public funding

Eligibility for public funding for elections in Victoria only commenced in 2002, possibly adding to the increase in party or candidate registrations.[40]

Nevertheless, public funding did have an impact. Victoria was a latecomer in introducing 'public funding' for election campaigns (with NSW implementing election funding in 1981 and the Commonwealth in 1984). The Cain government presented a Bill on the subject to Parliament in 1989, but it did not progress.[41] The rationale offered for the proposed change at that time was that media advertising had become expensive and that increased disclosure requirements might lead to funding reductions.[42]

As in other jurisdictions, the level of public funding available depended on the support candidates received at the ballot box. Eligibility for obtaining public funding required 'the total number of first preference votes given for the candidate is at least four per cent of the total number of first preference votes given in the election'.[43] The *Electoral Act 2002* (s 211)

[37] Carr (2025) op. cit; VEC (various) op. cit. Counts of parties before 2002 may vary from official data. Not all registered parties ran in elections and there were no registered parties until 1988.
[38] *Electoral and Referendum Amendment Act 1989* (Cth)
[39] *Constitution Act Amendment (Electoral Procedures) Act 1991*; D. R. White (1991) 'Second reading speech: The Constitution Act Amendment (Electoral Procedures) Bill', *Debates,* Victoria, Legislative Council, 23 April, p. 1066.
[40] *Electoral Act 2002*
[41] Election Donations Disclosure and Public Funding Bill 1990
[42] R. Dixon (1989) 'Cain seeks public funding for poll campaigns', *The Age*, 14 November, p. 3.
[43] *Electoral Act 2002*, s 211.

initially stipulated that $1.20 was payable for each first-preference vote cast for a candidate. Accordingly, the VEC reported that 373 eligible candidates (including 18 non-party aligned) received a total of $6,743,150 in 'funding for parliamentary election expenditure 2002–2003'. The ten registered political parties received the lion's share of the funds (around $6.6 million).[44]

Changes introduced by legislation in 2018 led to additional funding streams for administrative expenditure and policy development.[45] There were different legislative obligations for each funding stream regarding the application process, reporting requirements, and payment schedules.[46]

The amounts payable under s 211 of the Electoral Act rose to $6 per first-preference vote for LA candidates, and $3 became payable for each first-preference vote cast for an LC candidate in elections held after 2018. These numbers became higher, with certain amounts being indexed over time in line with s 217Q of the Act.

The amounts received totalled $30.4 million in public funding paid for the 2022 election. Annual payments for administrative expenditure funding ($6.3 million) and policy development funding ($29,180) occurred in 2023–24.[47] By the 2022 election, 14 parties had an entitlement to funding. Thirty-one independent candidates obtained eligibility.[48]

Overall, there was a modest increase in the number of candidates receiving funding, but hardly a surge. The amount dispersed, however, had grown considerably.

A recent challenge to political donation laws in the High Court by two independent candidates largely rendered these public funding processes as unconstitutional, as a decision on 15 April effectively 'struck down' Part 12 of the *Electoral Act 2002*.[49]

Electoral success

Proliferation of nominations notwithstanding, minor candidate success in elections has been uneven at best. The vote for parties other than Labor or the Coalition indeed increased, rising from 10.9 per cent in 2002 to 29.4 per cent in 2022 in the LA. In the LC, the non-major parties' vote rose from 19.6 per cent in 2006 to 37.6 per cent in 2022.[50]

The different voting systems in each house affect the number of seats won by major parties, minor parties, and independents. Major parties control the lion's share of seats in the LA, with only zero to three independent representatives between 2002 and 2014. The Greens won two seats and steadily increased their number to four in 2022. Minor party representation is larger in the LC, rising from four seats in 2006 (with the introduction of proportional representation) to 11 in 2018 and 2022.[51]

The party or coalition that has the support of the majority of Members in the LA forms the government, so the number of seats changing hands is important. Electoral contests have become less volatile overall, with the number of seats changing hands falling from highs of 14 in 1999 and 21 in 2002 to seven in 2014 (enough to change the government) and ten seats in the 2022 election.[52]

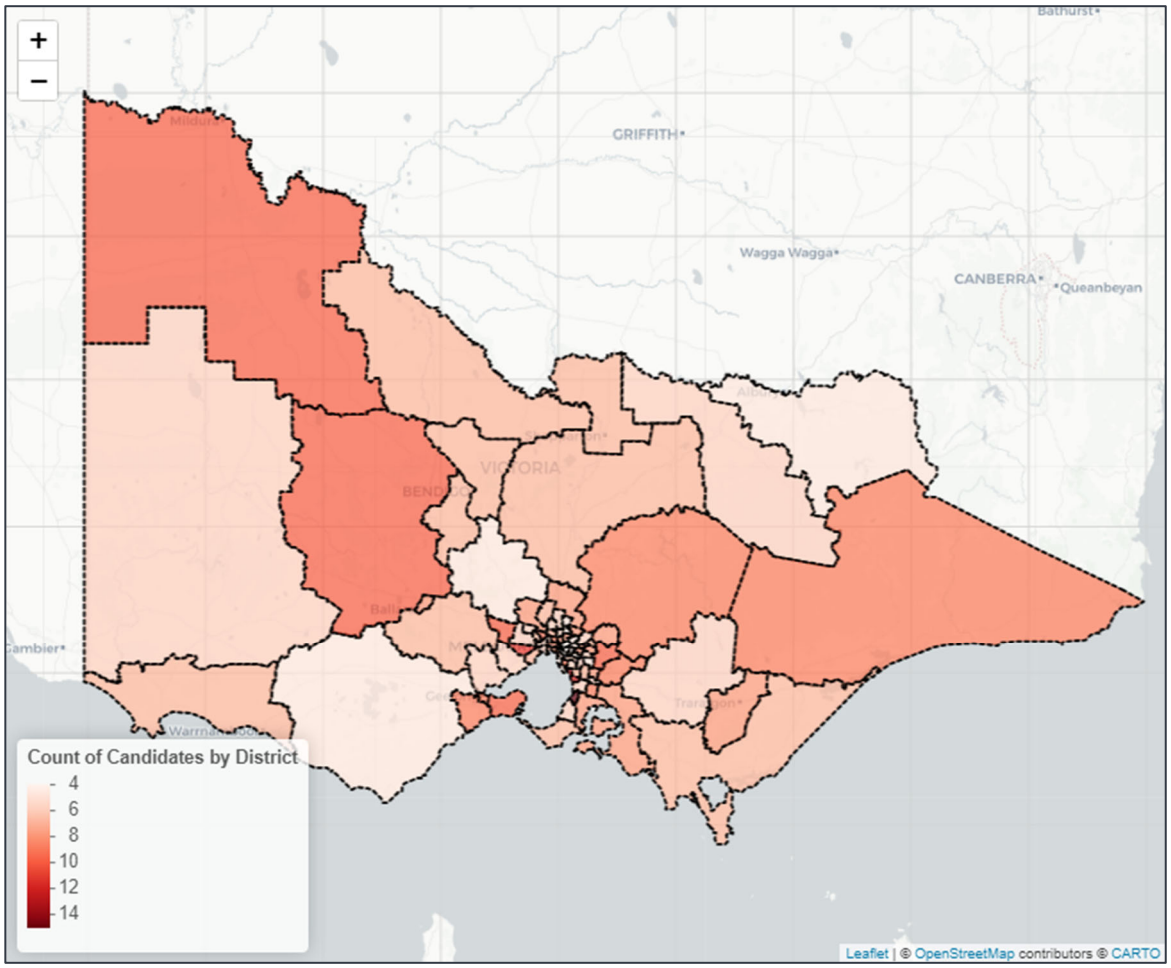
[44] Victorian Electoral Commission (2003) *Annual report 2002-03*, Melbourne, VEC, p. 93.
[45] *Electoral Legislation Amendment Act 2018*
[46] Victorian Electoral Commission (2023b) op. cit., p. 38.
[47] ibid., p. 156; Victorian Electoral Commission (2024) *Annual report 2023-24*, Melbourne, VEC, p. 60.
[48] Victorian Electoral Commission (2023a) 'Public funding entitlements and payments for the 2022 State general election', Victorian Electoral Commission.
[49] A. Twomey (2026) 'High Court takes an axe to Victoria's political donations laws - and it will make federal MPs nervous', *The Conversation*, April 15; Hopper v Victoria [2026] HCA 11.
[50] VEC (various) op. cit.
[51] ibid.
[52] ibid.

Most candidates, therefore, are 'sacrificial lambs' to use Canon's term, given the low proportion of seats actually changing hands.[53] For instance, only ten of the 740 candidates (1.3 per cent) in the LA in 2022 dislodged the incumbent Member.

No formal research exists on these candidates' motivations. Media reports suggest they focus on particular policy issues, such as the Animal Justice Party, which 'wants to ban duck shooting, stop funding animal product industries and inspire the public to take up a plant-based diet'. In contrast, the Health Australia Party wanted 'to boost funding for natural medicine and opposed fluoride in water systems'. [54]

Maps 1–3 show the geographical variation in candidate numbers for LA districts in 2022. There appear to be no significant patterns, such as between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas, but there is minor variation across districts when grouped by LC region.

Map 1: Count of candidates by Victorian Legislative Assembly district in the 2014 election[55]



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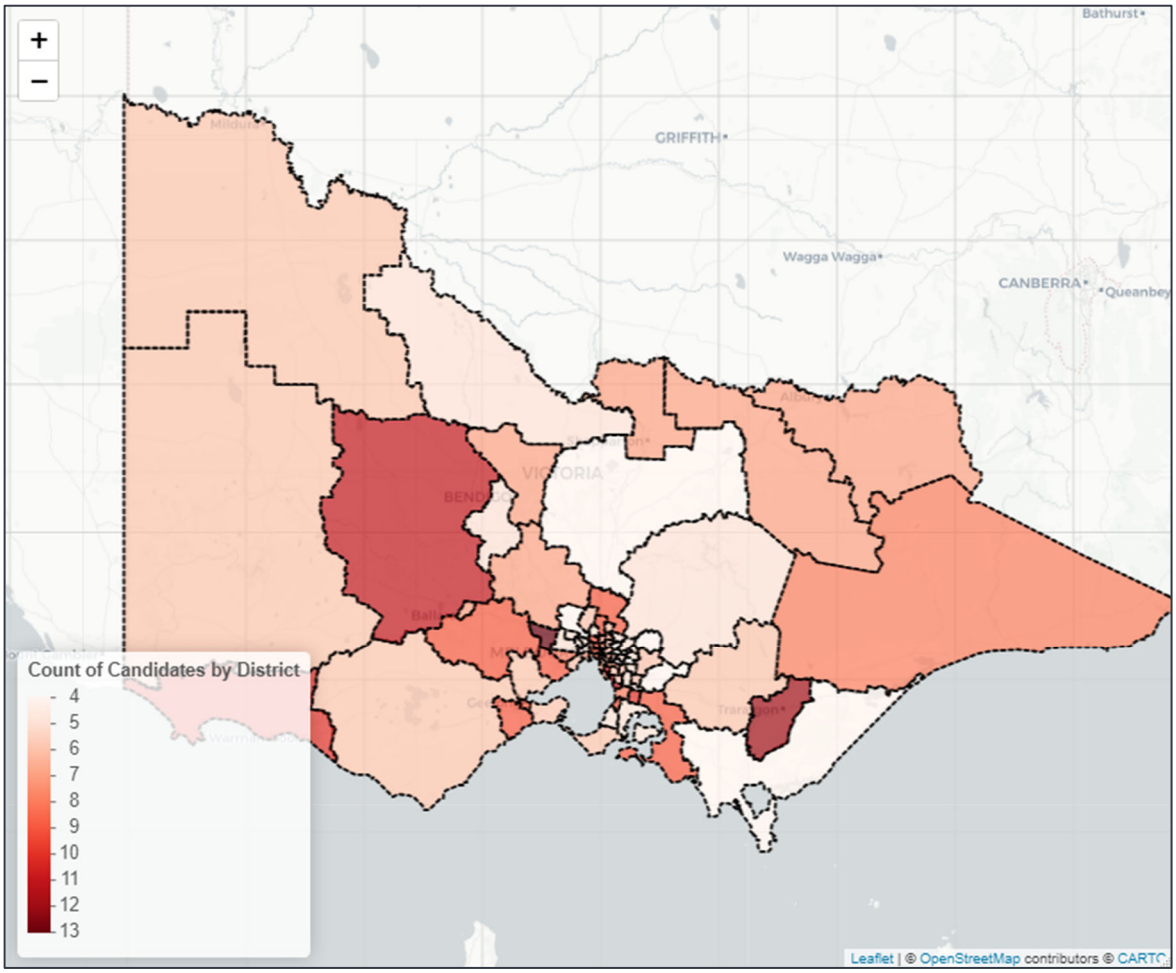
[53] Canon (1993) op. cit.
[54] S. Anderson (2018) 'What do the minor parties in the Victorian election stand for?', *ABC News*, 22 November.
[55] VEC (various) op. cit.

Map 2: Count of candidates by Victorian Legislative Assembly district in the 2018 election[56]



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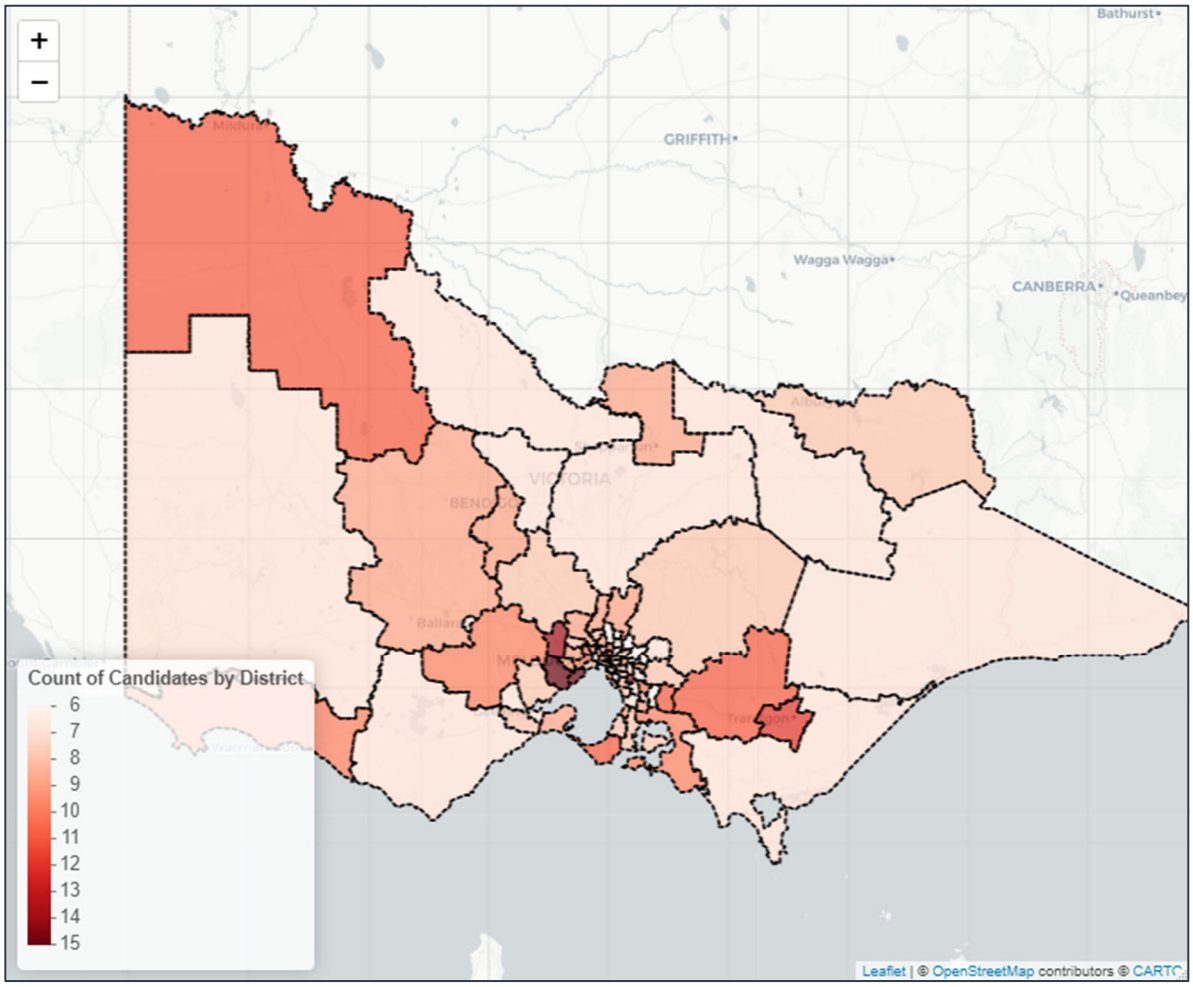
[56] VEC (various) op. cit.

Map 3: Count of candidates by Victorian Legislative Assembly district in the 2022 election[57]



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Some variations are evident within the LC. The significant changes to LC regions at the 2006 election make longer-run historical comparisons problematic. A proportional representation-based regional system with four-year terms replaced the province-based two-member system, electing one Member at a time in staggered eight-year terms.[58]

Figure 3 and Table 2 summarise the main trends with LC candidate numbers. The number of candidates initially declined between 2006 and 2010. It then reverted to an upward trend in candidate numbers, reaching a high of 454 in 2022. Table 2 suggests the trend is similar across all regions. Parties have also tended to run candidates in all areas, even if explicitly focused on issues or campaigning in one or two regions.[59]

[57] VEC (various) op. cit.
[58] *Constitution (Parliamentary Reform) Act 2003*
[59] Antony Green – elections (@AntonyGreenElec) (2018) 'You have to love how a party...', X, 7 May.

Figure 3: Count of candidates for the Victorian Legislative Council, 2006–2022[60]

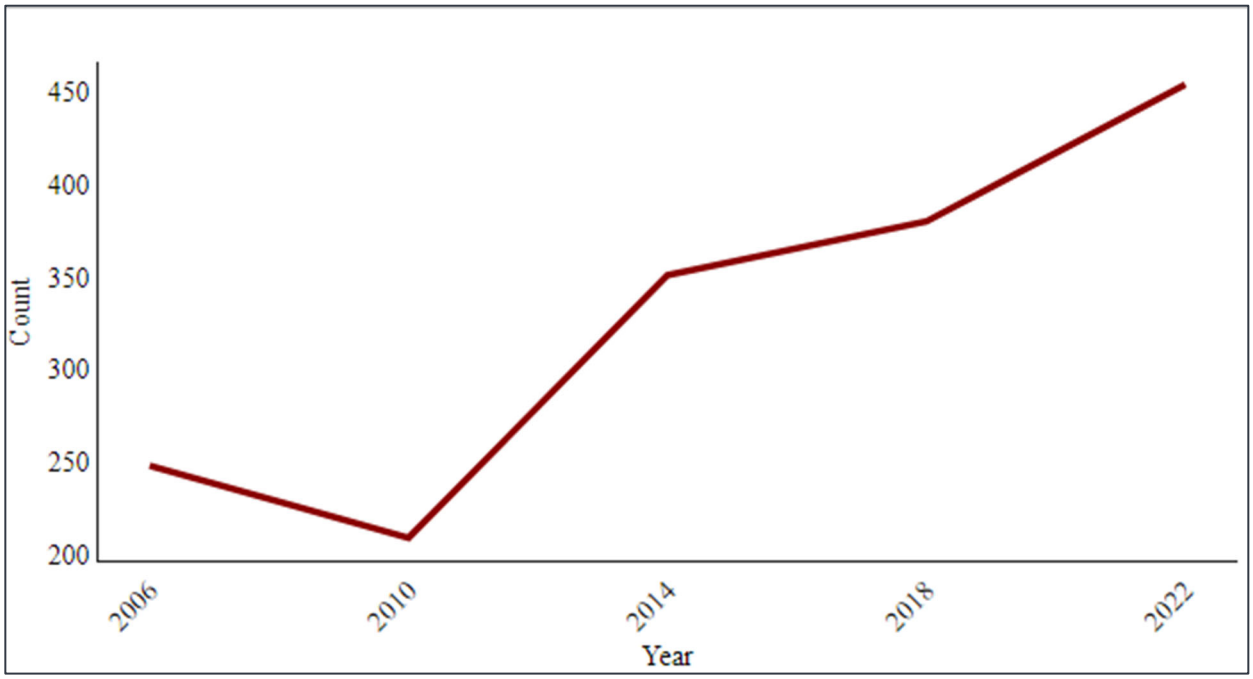

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Table 2: Changes in Victorian Legislative Council candidate numbers by region, 2006–2022[61]

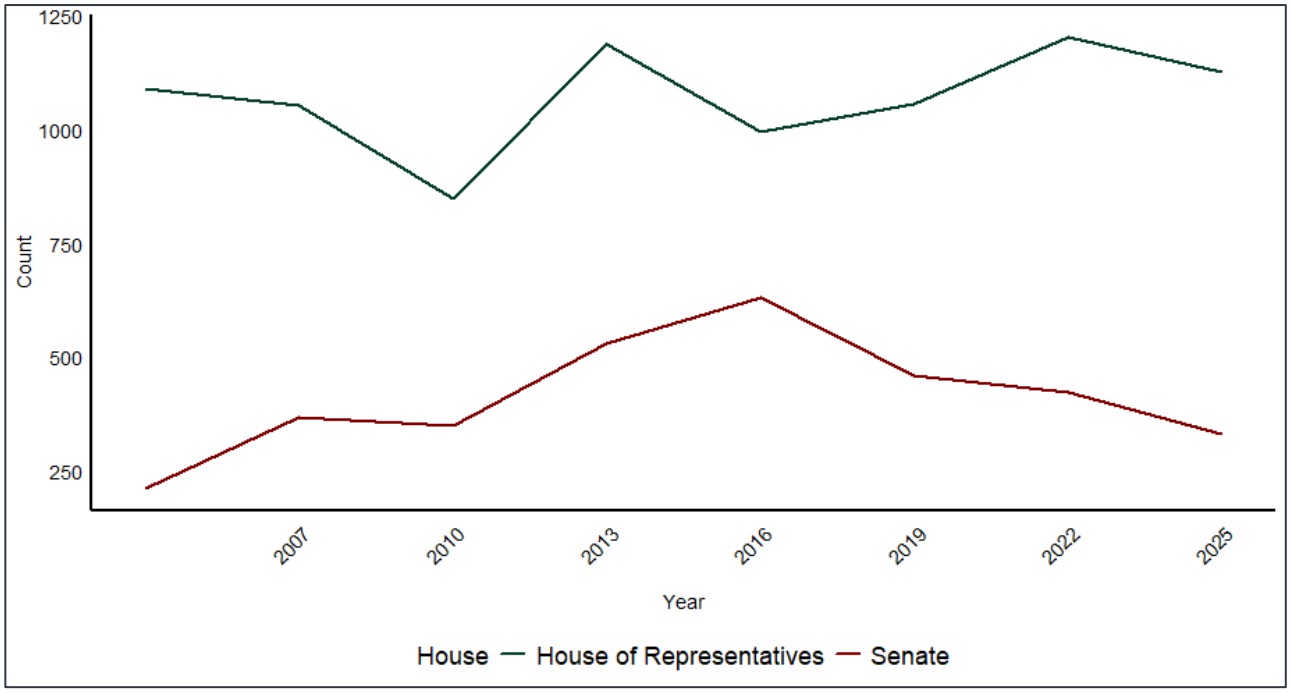
Region	2006	2010	2014	2018	2022
North-Eastern Metropolitan	27	24	40	45	56
Eastern Victoria	35	21	46	46	56
Northern Metropolitan	24	29	52	52	58
Northern Victoria	31	25	37	45	55
South-Eastern Metropolitan	26	24	41	76	56
Southern Metropolitan	26	23	48	45	54
Western Metropolitan	26	24	42	48	62
Western Victoria	33	27	45	46	62

[60] VEC (various) op. cit.
[61] ibid. Each of the eight regions elects five Members. Note that Eastern Metropolitan Region was renamed North-Eastern Metropolitan Region, applicable from the 2022 state election.

Other jurisdictions

How does Victoria compare to other jurisdictions in Australia and internationally? Figure 4 presents the number of candidates for both the House of Representatives (150 seats) and the Senate (76 seats) between 2004 and 2025.[62] The overall number of lower-house candidates varied, ranging from 1,091 in 2004 to 849 in 2010. Numbers then increased again to a peak of 1,203 in 2022, before falling slightly in 2025. The primary trend for the lower house is a slight upward trend over time.

Figure 4: Counts of Federal House of Representatives and Senate candidates, 2007–25[63]



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The Senate is more complicated. While in a standard election, only half the Senate is up for election—with Senators elected for six-year terms—the 2016 double-dissolution election meant that all Senate seats were up for election. The number of Senate candidates had already increased from 212 in 2004 to 529 in 2013. The 2016 double-dissolution election resulted in another surge in the number of candidates, reaching 631. The number of candidates, however, then fell back to 458 in 2019 and further to 330 in 2025. The Senate's experience is therefore different to that of Victoria's upper house. One likely contributing element was the Senate's abolition of GVTs in 2016.[64]

New South Wales and Queensland both have similarities and differences with Victoria. NSW is also a large-population state with a bicameral parliament, although its upper house uses a different voting system (a statewide electorate with eight-year terms). Table 3 details changes in candidate numbers for both the NSW LA and LC between 1995 and 2023.[65] The primary trend was a considerable jump between 1995 and 1999 (with the famous 'tablecloth-sized' ballot paper for the NSW LC of that year).[66]

[62] Australian Electoral Commission (various) 'Results: Tally room archive', AEC website.
[63] ibid.
[64] A. Green (2025) 'FED2025 – Party and Voter Reactions to the Senate's Electoral Changes', *Antony Green's Election Blog*, 3 November.
[65] NSW Electoral Commission (various) 'NSW Electoral Commission', State election reports.
[66] A. Green (2025) 'Why does NSW have a 12-month Delay on Registered Parties being granted the Benefits of Registration?', Antony Green's Election Blog, 28 August.

The abolition of GVTs in 2000—effective at the NSW state election in 2003—had contradictory effects in NSW. On the one hand, it reduced the number of parties seeking election to the LC from 80 in 1999 to 13 in 2023.[67] There were still 21 'Groups' (including the 13 parties) in the LC election, though. Paradoxically, the number of candidates remained high, though this may partly be due to the administration system. Eligibility to run as a group in the NSW LC requires nominating 15 candidates.[68] However, the number of NSW LA candidates decreased after 1999. The numbers of candidates for both houses have remained relatively stable since then, unlike the situation in Victoria.

Table 3: Number of candidates in NSW (both houses), 1995–2023[69]

Year	LA	LC	Total
1995	456	99	555
1999	732	264	996
2003	660	284	944
2007	537	333	870
2011	498	311	809
2015	540	394	934
2019	568	346	914
2023	562	290	864

Western Australia is another significant case, having abolished GVTs and enacted other reforms to the LC in 2021.[70] Table 4 shows that the number of LC candidates increased until 2021, peaking at 325. It then fell sharply to 146 in 2025 following the abolition of GVTs. The number of LA candidates also decreased, but not as sharply. Significantly, the number of parties increased from a base of seven in 2001 to a peak of 19 in 2021 (with some fluctuations over the years). It fell to 12 in 2025, in part due to 'tougher rules for party registration'.[71]

[67] A. Green (2000) *New South Wales Legislative Council Elections 1999*, Background Paper No 2/2000, New South Wales Parliamentary Library, Sydney, Parliament of NSW, pp. 5-6; NSW Electoral Commission (2023) *Report on the administration of the 2023 NSW State election*, Sydney, NSWEC, p. 31.
[68] NSW Electoral Commission (date unknown) 'Groups and group voting squares', NSWEC website.
[69] NSW Electoral Commission (various) op. cit.
[70] *Constitutional and Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Equality) Act 2021* (WA)
[71] A. Green (2025) *Western Australian State Election 2025: Analysis of Results*, Election Paper Series No. 1/2025, Perth, Parliament of Western Australia; Western Australian Electoral Commission (2001) *Election Report 2001 State General Election*, Perth, WAEC.

Table 4: Number of candidates in WA (both houses), 2001–23[72]

Year	LA	LC	Total
2001	366	159	525
2005	373	185	558
2008	302	170	472
2013	291	165	456
2017	415	302	717
2021	463	325	788
2025	398	146	544

In contrast, Queensland is a medium-sized population state with a unicameral parliament, but the trend is similar between 2015 and 2024. Table 5 shows that the number of candidates increased from 433 in 2015 to a record 597 in 2020, then declined to 525 in 2024. The number of seats was 89 between 1986 and 2017. It subsequently only increased marginally to 93.[73] Without an upper house, GVTs cannot explain the increase.

Table 5: Number of candidates for the Queensland Legislative Assembly, 2015–24[74]

Year	Count
2015	433
2017	453
2020	597
2024	525

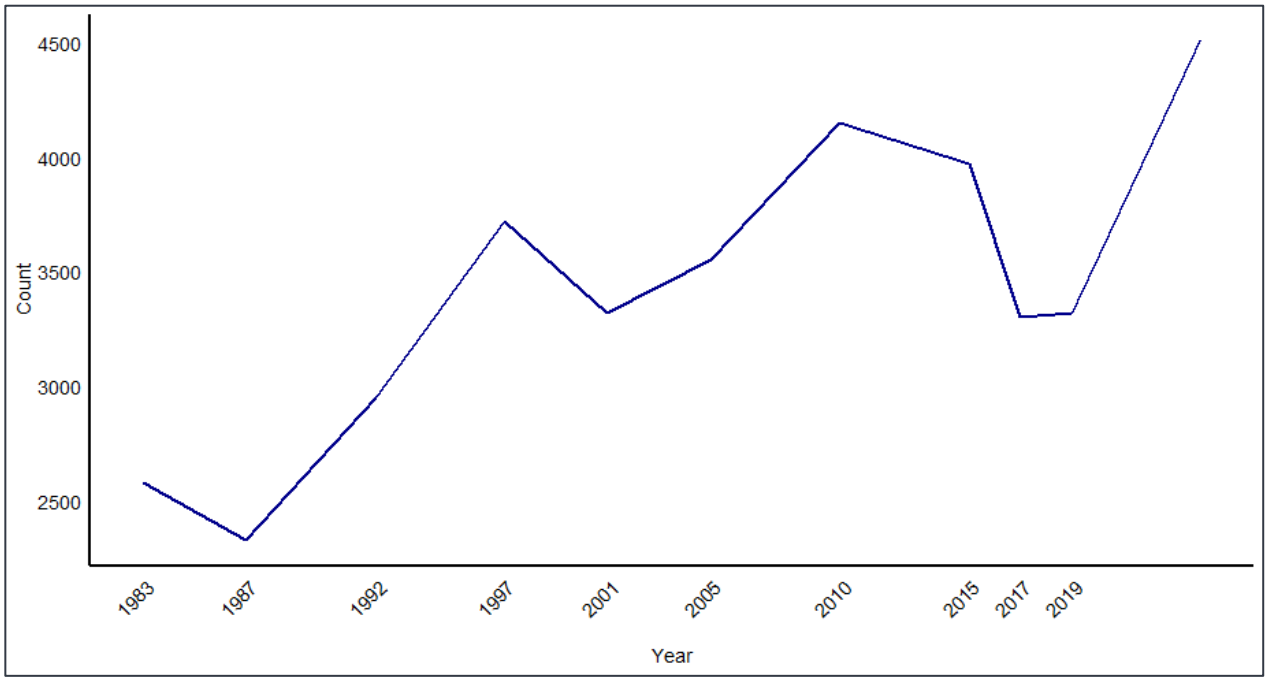
Finally, data on candidate numbers at the sub-national level are often difficult to obtain for comparable countries. As outlined above, there are few recent studies of the number of candidates and/or parties.

National-level data is available for the United Kingdom. Figure 5 displays the number of candidates for the House of Commons for the years 1983–2024. There is a similar trend, with the number of candidates rising from 2,578 in 1983 to 4,515 in 2024.[75] The House of Lords remains an appointed body, so there are no elections to influence lower-house contests.

The trend towards an increasing number of candidates is therefore quite prevalent in Victoria and has also been apparent in other states and international contexts, but whether a parliament is bicameral or unicameral does not appear to be an influential factor. In Australia, the removal of GVTs certainly reduced the number of parties and candidates in Western Australia (more so in the upper house) and in the Senate, and parties in NSW.

[72] WA Electoral Commission (various) *WA State Election Post Election Report, Perth,* WAEC.
[73] C. Sharman (date unknown) *Australian Politics and Elections Archive 1856-2018*, Australian Politics and Elections Archive 1856-2018 website.
[74] Electoral Commission Queensland (various) 'Election Information and Results', ECQ website.
[75] R. Cracknell and C. Baker (2024) *General election 2024: Results and analysis*, House of Commons Library, London, House of Commons; R. Cracknell et al. (2023) *UK Election Statistics: 1918-2023: A century of elections*, House of Commons Library, London, House of Commons.

Figure 5: Counts of UK House of Commons general election candidates, 2007–2025[76]



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[76] Cracknell & Baker (2024) op. cit; Cracknell et al. (2023) op. cit. The number of seats only varied marginally from 650 to 659.

3 | Summary and conclusions

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of candidates and parties contesting state elections in Victoria. There have at times been some similarities with other Australian jurisdictions and internationally, although evidence suggests that the ongoing existence of GVTs has contributed to proliferation in Victoria. Readers and other researchers may wish to further consider the political and administrative implications.

Surprisingly, little research has focused on the phenomenon, its impacts, or the reasons for candidate proliferation. Limited past studies focused on why so-called 'sacrificial lambs' are still nominated in elections. Despite incumbents winning an overwhelming proportion of seats, many people still nominate for seemingly hopeless contests.

Other, more recent studies focus on developing country democracies, where candidate proliferation appears linked to particularly localised features, such as sudden democratisation and political crises (Egypt), subverting gender quotas (Brazil), accessing state resources (Senegal), and competition for access to resources (India). The broader literature on political dissatisfaction and the recent rise of so-called populism has not yet focused much on candidate proliferation. There appear to be few parallels between these existing case studies and Victoria.

The VEC has observed and documented the relationship between the number of candidates and informal voting. The EMC has focused on the role of preference negotiations and GVTs.

Section 2 outlined evidence of proliferation, noting that Victoria has experienced a considerable increase in the number of candidates and parties in recent years (see Figures 1, 2 and 3). There do not immediately appear to be any geographical trends or other indicators of variation across districts and regions in the state. Candidate and party proliferation corresponds with a falling share of the vote for major parties. Although the number of candidates successfully obtaining representation in the LA is modest, there has been significant growth in the number of non-major-party candidates elected to the LC.

Moreover, when comparing Victoria's situation with other states and jurisdictions, there are similarities but also differences. Candidate proliferation is evident in the lower house electoral results at the federal level and in Victoria and other states. The use of GVTs does appear to amplify the trend towards party and candidate proliferation. Their abolition has reduced the number of parties in NSW and WA. Candidate numbers continue to grow in Queensland despite the state having no upper house.

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