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This paper provides an outline of some of the main electoral and political changes in Victoria since the 1850s. It combines historical sources with computational data analysis and visualisation techniques to illustrate patterns in Victoria's electoral and party systems. More detail is provided for the years after 1982 due to greater availability of data and the period's relevance.

Visualising Victoria's electoral history

Dr. Ben Reid and Caleb Triscari

Victoria's long electoral history encompasses institutions and political parties that have changed gradually over the years. Victoria's bicameral parliamentary system emerged early in the colony's history.[1] The Legislative Assembly (lower house) and Legislative Council (upper house) continued after Victoria became a state within the Australian federation in 1901. However, their functions and operation have often faced pressure for reform and change. There have been issues of electoral malapportionment, voter inclusion and the franchise, voting systems and forms of representation, and the relationship between the two houses of Parliament. Accordingly, while Victorian politics (as with most polities in Australia) is often viewed as a 'two-party system', it has altered at times, through legislation, new entrants and an ever-changing electoral landscape.

The two major parties – the Liberal Party and the Australian Labor Party (Labor) – arguably trace their origins to the late nineteenth century. While the modern Liberal Party originated in the Menzies era, the original 'Deakinite' Liberal party operated between 1909 and 1917, and similar 'right of centre' entities existed during the inter-war period. While these parties predominated in Victorian politics, a rural-based political party – the Country (and later National) Party – also featured. Other smaller entities have come and gone, and more recent reforms to the Legislative Council also resulted in a flowering of minor party representation.

1: See Grant (2018) for more discussion of bicameralism.

This paper provides an outline of some of the main electoral and political changes in Victoria using two types of sources. First, it draws on secondary sources to explore the history and context of changes over time. The text and Table 1 outline the main legislative and institutional changes. While some analyses exist examining facets of the state's political history, there is no single overview of those changes over 170 years.

Second, the paper combines computational data analysis and visualisation techniques to illustrate patterns in Victoria's electoral and party systems. There is no single reliable electronic source of the state's entire electoral history. This paper collates data from three main sources: the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) (2022) for the period after 2010; the University of Western Australia's (2022) historical archive of election results; and Adam Carr's (2022) meticulous online collection. There will invariably be minor errors, inaccuracies, and missing records. The raw data can be accessed and downloaded here.

These visualisation techniques illustrate important facets of the state's political history. As well as showing the changing levels of support for various parties and groups, it also highlights the ways that the electoral system has tended to favour the representation of a comparatively small number of stable political parties. The most recent reforms to the upper house have, however, changed the electoral landscape.

Apart from Table 1, the most important visualisations in this paper are Figures 1–4, which chart changes to party representations in Victoria's lower and upper houses. Figures 1 and 2 cover the period since 1890 for the Legislative Assembly, as party identification was previously undeveloped. Figures 3 and 4 present data for the Legislative Council, with the latter limited to the years after 1943. (The reader can either view these as static images or click on them to access web versions of the graphics and zoom in on different years).

More detail is provided for the period after 1982 due to greater availability of data and to the period's relevance. This paper contains additional commentary on the main changes taking place. Maps 1–5 detail the changes in the primary votes for parties for key years in the era. Figures 5 and 6 are hexagonal cartograms of the state's seats according to party control (Langton and Solymosi, 2019). These cartograms are approximate representations of the electoral map, and the reader can switch layers on and off to observe changes.

Both the text and visualisations in this paper present summary information, so the various parties and organisations are grouped under broad party categories: Liberals, Labor, Nationals (Country Party), Greens, Democrats and 'Other'. Liberal refers to a range of organisations that preceded and eventually constituted the original Deakinite Liberal Party, the successor Nationalist and United Australia parties and, finally, the modern Menzies-era Liberal Party (Liberal and Country Party in Victoria between 1948 and 1962). The abbreviation 'DLP' denotes the Democratic Labor Party. The main party categories to achieve representation are summarised in Table 2 (which functions as a look-up table).

Party labels in this paper vary in the scope of political representation they cover within the Victorian Parliament. Various political parties have emerged and disappeared over time. Some titles rebrand existing parties, and others are breakaway groups that may or may not return to their original organisations. For instance, some short-lived breakaway groups – such as the Country Progressives or National Labor – remain categorised by their generic party origin and destination. This is despite their apparent conflict with the mainstream Country and Labor parties. Other tables dealing with the duration and details of parliaments and premierships are available on the Parliament of Victoria's (2022) webpage.

Table 1: Victoria Parliament Timeline

Year	Act	Details
1842	New South Wales Constitution Act 1842	Formal legislation recognises separate colony of Victoria
1843	Electoral Act	First Legislative Council election
1851		Victoria separated from NSW as a distinct colony
1854	An Act to establish a Constitution in and for the Colony of Victoria	Victoria's Constitution established
1856	An Act to provide for the Election of Members to Serve in the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly of Victoria respectively	Main initial Act governing elections with 66 Legislative Assembly Members
1857	An Act to Abolish the Property Qualifications required by Members of the Legislative Assembly	Property restrictions in the Legislative Assembly abolished and secret ballot introduced
1857	An Act to extend the right of Voting and to provide for the registration of Parliamentary Electors	Electoral registration introduced
1858	An Act to alter the Electoral Districts of Victoria and to increase the number of Members of the Legislative Assembly thereof	Legislative Assembly expanded to 78 Members
1859	An Act to shorten the duration of the Legislative Assembly	Three-year terms introduced
1863	Electoral Act	Franchise extended to all rate payers
1891	Purification of Rolls Act	Chief Electoral Inspector created
1901		Federation takes place
1903	An Act to provide for the Reform of the Constitution of Victoria	Kyabram Movement reforms: Legislative Council reduced from 48 to 35 and Legislative Assembly from 95 to 68 Members (65 Districts) First attempt to prevent block of supply
1907	An Act to abolish the Separate Representation in Parliament of Public Officers and Railway Officers	Removal of separate representation of public servants. 65 Members in Legislative Assembly and 34 in Legislative Council
1909	An Act to provide for Adult Suffrage	Votes for women
1910	An Act to amend the Law relating to Parliamentary Elections and for other purposes	Appointment of Chief Electoral Officer
1911	An Act to provide for Compulsory Preferential Voting in the Legislative Assembly	Compulsory preferential voting in Legislative Assembly
1921	An Act relating to Elections for the Legislative Council	Compulsory preferential voting in Legislative Council

Year	Act	Details
1923	Electoral Act	Compulsory enrolment
1926	Electoral Districts Act	Zonal system adopted
1938	Act to make Provision with respect to the Relations between the two Houses of Parliament and for other purposes	Reforms to the upper house's power to block supply adopted. Abolition of plural voting
1950	Legislative Council Reform Act	Abolition of property qualification for both voters and electors in the upper house
1953	Electoral Districts Act	Boundaries linked to federal electorates with 66 Legislative Assembly Members
1961	Constitution Act Amendment (Electoral) Act	Concurrent elections for both houses
1965	Electoral Provinces and Districts Act	Increase from 66 to 73 Legislative Assembly Members. Removal of linkage to federal electorates
1974	The Electoral Provinces and Districts Act	Redistribution increases number of Legislative Assembly Members from 73 to 81
1975	Constitution Act	Removal of UK Parliamentary Power
1982	Electoral Boundaries Commission Act	Established Electoral Boundaries Commission
1983	Constitution (Electoral Provinces and Districts) Act	Increase from 81 to 88 Legislative Assembly Members
1984	Constitution (Duration of Parliament) Act	Minimum three and maximum four-year terms
1984	Constitution Act Amendment (Electoral Legislation) Act	Modernisation
1986	Redistribution	First redistribution takes place under the new system
1988	Constitution Act Amendment (Electoral Reform) Act	Independent Electoral Commissioner established, and Electoral Commission renamed Electoral Boundaries Commission
1995	Constitution Act Amendment (Amendment) Act	State Electoral Office renamed the Victorian Electoral Commission
2002	Electoral Act	Fixed four-year terms
2003	Constitution (Parliamentary Reform) Act 2003	Changes to Legislative Council (reconstituted the size, terms and voting practices)

Click here to view on web.

Source: PoV (2022), Wright (1992).

Table 2: Political Parties and Categories

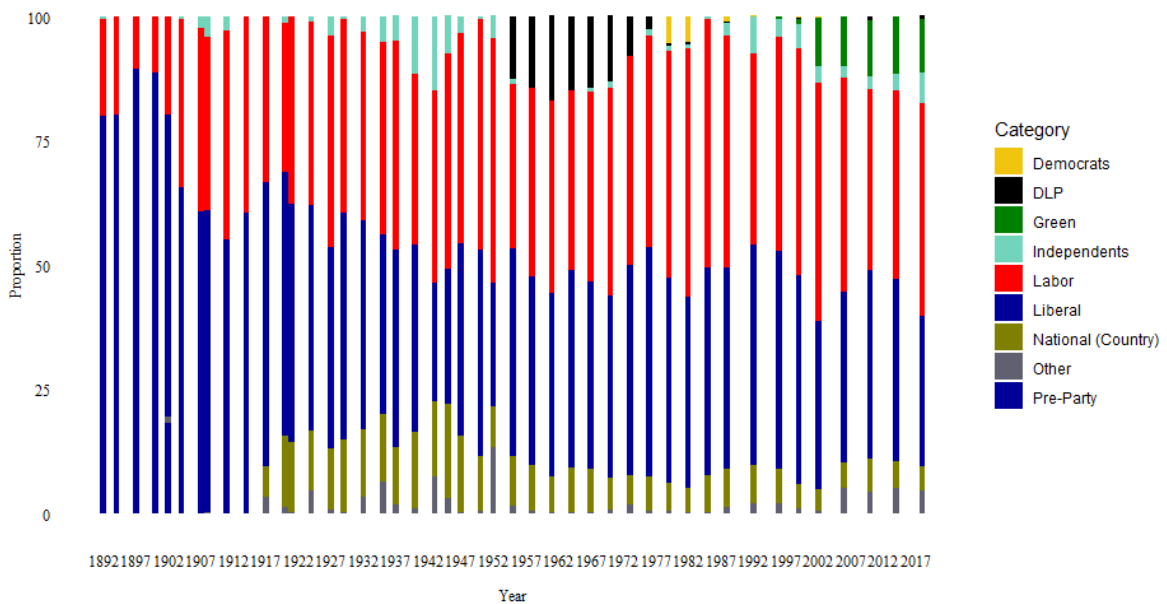|	Party	Category
	All	All
1	Independents (no disciplined party groupings)	Pre-Party
2	Opposition (Liberal)	Pre-Party
3	Opposition (Conservative)	Pre-Party
4	Opposition	Pre-Party
5	Hope Party	Other
6	Abolish Child Support and Family Court	Other
7	Animal Justice Party	Other
8	Aussie Battler Party	Other

Showing 1 to 10 of 103 entries   Previous 1 2 3 4 5 … 11 Next

Click to view on web.
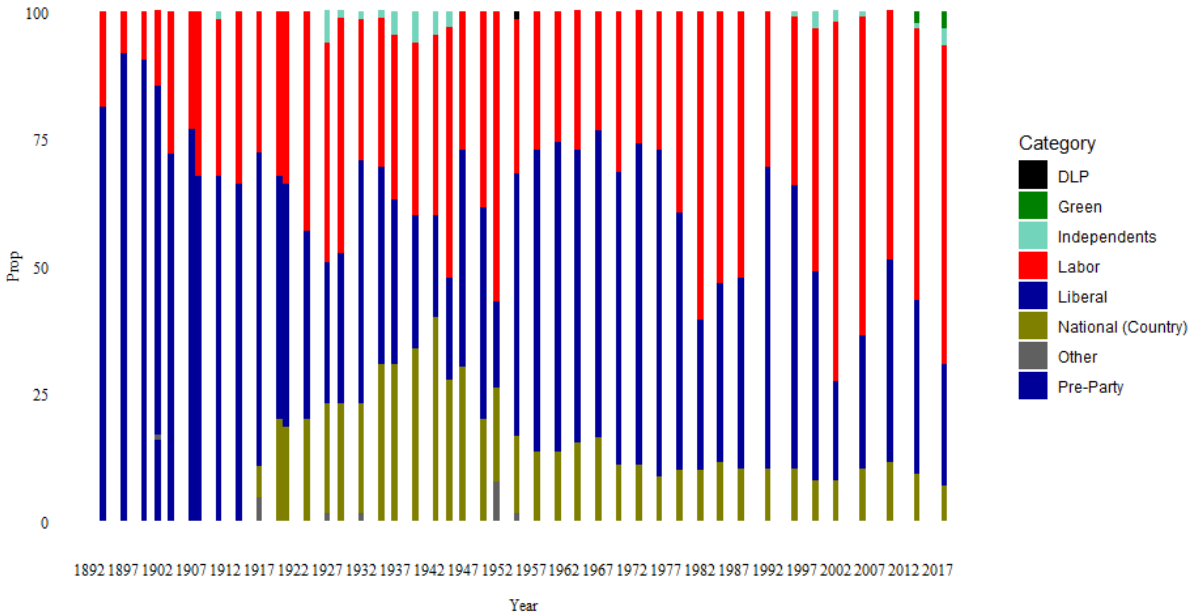
Source: Carr (2022), VEC (2022) and UWA (2022).

Figure 1: Proportion of Legislative Assembly Vote by Party Category

Click to view on web.

Source: Carr (2022), VEC (2022) and UWA (2022).

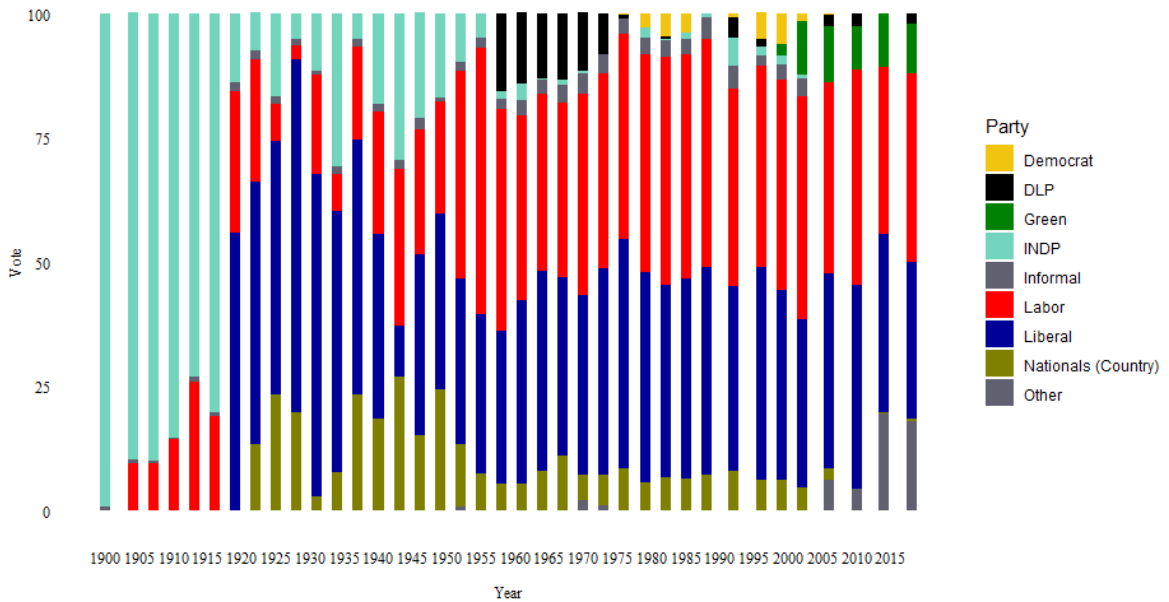## Figure 2: Proportion of Legislative Assembly Seats by Party Category

Click to view on web.
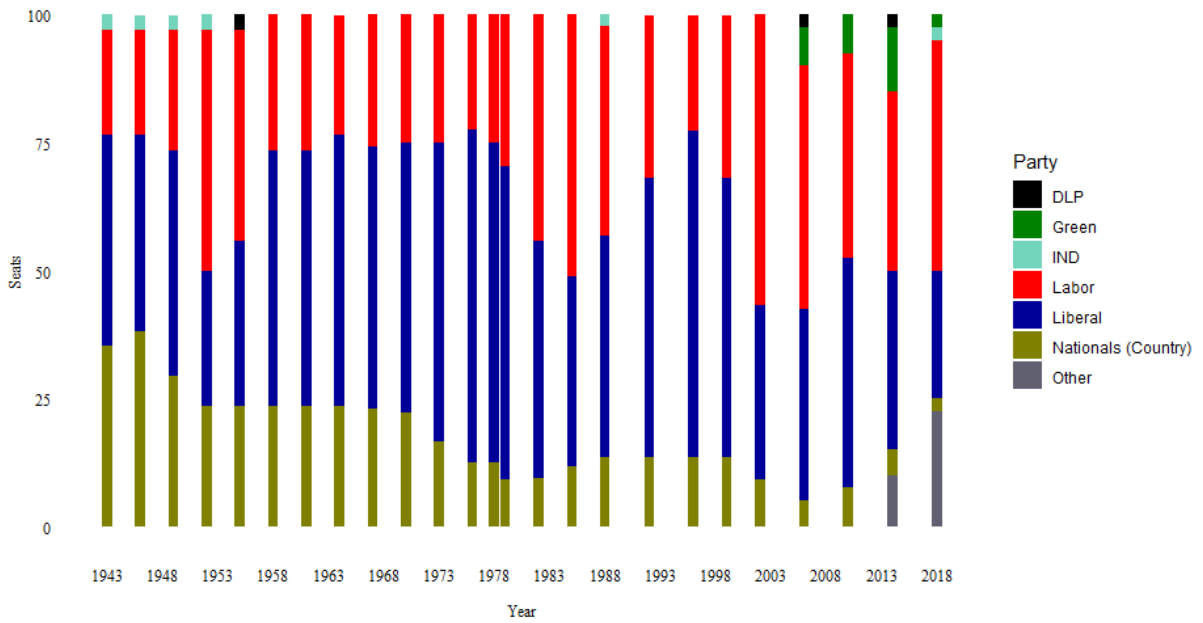Source: Carr (2022), VEC (2022) and UWA (2022).

Figure 3: Proportion of Legislative Council Votes by Party Category

Click to view on web.
Source: Carr (2022), VEC (2022).

Figure 4: Proportion of Legislative Council Seats by Party Category, 1943–2018

Click to view on web.

Source: Carr (2022), VEC (2022).

Foundations

Representative government was established early in Victoria's history. The colony was also the first place to implement a secret ballot and one of the few that extended the franchise to all adult males. Table 1 lists the main legislative, constitutional and administrative changes over time.

There is little evidence of attempts to incorporate or consult with Indigenous populations. The early settler John Batman's attempted 'treaty' and sale of land in 1835 was promptly declared invalid by the Proclamation of Governor Bourke of New South Wales. Nevertheless, Bourke affirmed that the British Crown owned the 'entire Australian landmass' (Ergo, no date). The lack of a treaty and the Crown's assertion of sovereignty helped justify Indigenous exclusion from governance.

The settler population established representation as a sub-jurisdiction of the New South Wales Legislative Council in 1843 and then as a self-governing colony after 1850. The Legislative Council predated the Legislative Assembly, being established in 1851 with 20 elected Members and ten Members appointed by Governor Charles Latrobe.

Charged with delivering 'responsible and representative government', the Council designed the colony's first Constitution (PoV, no date a; Wright, 1992, p. 17). The 1854 Constitution *(An Act to Establish a Constitution in and for the Colony of Victoria)* was passed in March 1854 and granted royal assent by the British Parliament in 1855. The new Victorian Parliament met for the first time in November 1856.

The Constitution Act created a bicameral system of 30 elected Legislative Council Members split evenly across six provinces and 60 Legislative Assembly Members from 37 districts. Recurrent controversy would surround the relationship between the houses, with the Legislative Council having extensive powers to reject legislation (Serle, 1954; Waugh, 2002).

Both houses initially operated with a restricted franchise. Only men over 30 years old with at least £5,000 of property or a professional background were eligible to vote or stand as Legislative Council candidates. Voting in the Legislative Assembly was extended to all men over 21 years of age with £50 of property or annual salaries of £100. Candidates were still required to hold property valued at least £2,000.

These restrictions in the Legislative Assembly did not last long. Victoria was the first Australian colony (and the first legislature anywhere in the world) to adopt the practice of the secret ballot through the *Electoral Act* of 1856 (M of AD, 2022). The voting franchise was extended to all men aged over 21 in 1857.

In contrast, the Legislative Council retained a limited franchise. The Select Committee that drafted the Constitution Act explicitly stated that the upper house should 'represent the Education, Wealth, and more especially the settled Interests of the Country … that portion of the community naturally indisposed to rash and hasty measures' (cited in Strangio, 2004, p. 34). It maintained a restricted franchise until 1950.

Other developments in the nineteenth century included establishing the number of Legislative Assembly seats in 1858, and the maximum duration of any Parliament was reduced from five to three years. In 1863 Parliament extended voting rights to all ratepayers in the colony (accidentally including women) before restricting it to men the next year. As the colony's population grew, so did the number of Legislative Assembly seats, although electoral malapportionment dogged the electoral system.

Like other polities, the colony exhibited a 'pre-party' electoral system until the 1890s. Victoria's formal system of political parties developed gradually. Party systems vary considerably in how they have operated (Enyedi and Casal Bértoa, 2020). A general trend exists for looser factional entities to precede modern political parties, with the former often more overtly formed by competing interests among more powerful members of society.

In Victoria, factional alignments tended to reflect differences between 'conservatives' (representing larger and established landholders) and 'liberals'. The latter tended to be urban based, more professional, and pro-industry protection (Strangio, 2006, p. 52; Melleuish, 2015). Various loose factions emerged, with labels such as 'Ministerial' (holding power) or 'Opposition'. One high point occurred in 1889, with ten different factional affiliations existing amongst Legislative Assembly candidates.

The notable parliamentary leaders of the period reflected these factional dispositions. The first Premier – 'honest farmer' William Haines – was a well-to-do landowner and generally considered 'conservative'. However, he was also seen as a populist, having resigned from the Legislative Council in 1852 in response to attempts to give squatters secure leases (Waugh, 2006, p. 14). Similar conflicts over land and pastoral rights recurred throughout the era. Parliament House was even occupied in 1860 by 3,000 protestors over the Legislative Assembly's failure to pass a new Land Act opening areas to settlement (Wright, 1992, p. 45). The same issues preoccupied the influential Graham Berry (Premier 1875 and 1877–1881), a contemporary of the leading Victorian federal politician Alfred Deakin (Strangio, 2006, pp. 58–59). He represented the most 'radical' wing of the liberals.

The main institutional conflict of the period reflected similar differences: the Legislative Council's rejection of protective customs duties stemmed from the predominance of large land holders with a stake in export production rather than domestic industry. In 1877–78, opposition to payment of Members of Parliament also reflected the upper house's politically and socially conservative character (Waugh, 2002, pp. 241–242).

Figures 1–4 do not feature these years, as party affiliations were inconsistent and informal.

Reforms

The foundational period eventually led to a long phase of reforms from around 1900 until the 1950s. The period of reform both reflected and impacted the evolution of the electoral and party systems.

The farmer-based 'Kyabram movement' of 1901 gained considerable backing for its proposals to decrease the size of the Victorian Parliament. Politically and socially conservative rural voters and interests favoured smaller government. The *Electoral Districts Boundaries Act* of 1903 eventually reduced the Legislative Assembly from 80 to 68 Members and the Legislative Council from 48 to 35.[2] (Wright, 1992, pp. 118–120; Strangio, 2012, p. 64).

There were important extensions of the franchise, along with alterations in voting forms and the conduct of elections:

- The separate representation for public servants was abolished in 1907 with *An Act to Abolish the Separate Representation in Parliament of Public Officers and Railway Officers*.

- After a long political campaign, women obtained the right to vote through *An Act to provide for Adult Suffrage* of 1909.

- Preferential voting was introduced in the Legislative Assembly (replacing 'first past the post') through the *Act to provide for Compulsory Preferential Voting in the Legislative Assembly* of 1911.

- Voting in the Legislative Assembly became compulsory through the *Electoral Districts Act* of 1923, with elections now held on weekends.

- Women were permitted to become Members of Parliament after the passage of the *Parliamentary Elections (Women Candidates) Act 1923*, although it was ten years before a woman was elected to either house.

2: There were 65 Districts and three representatives for Railway and Public Service employees.

The most substantial changes occurred with the *Electoral Districts Act* of 1953. Discontent over the malapportionment favouring rural and regional seats peaked in the early 1950s, especially on the Labor side of politics. Victoria's first stable Labor government introduced reforms ensuring Legislative Assembly districts were allocated in way that corresponded with Commonwealth Electoral Divisions, with no more than a 10% deviation in the numbers of electors.

Three major rounds of changes occurred to the Legislative Council. The 1921 Act relating to Elections for the Legislative Council extended compulsory preferential voting to the upper house. As mentioned in section 2, there were recurrent tensions between the two houses, with an 'unusual frequency' of disputes over supply (Waugh, 2002, p. 2).

The *Act to make Provision with respect to the Relations between the two Houses of Parliament, and for other purposes* of 1937 established a cumbersome mechanism for breaking deadlocks over legislation (Costar, 1992). While short of establishing 'double dissolution', it eventually allowed for the elections and a joint sitting to occur over contentious legislation.

These changes reflected a series of social and institutional changes, consolidating the state's party-based system.

While the colonial era of Victoria's Parliament coincided with an economic and social 'golden age', industrialisation and the onset of severe economic depression and conflict after 1890 changed the situation considerably (Blainey, 2013).

The growing labour movement eventually sponsored a political party, adopting the American spelling 'Labor'. The origins of the Victorian branch of the Australian Labor Party (Labor) date to a series of subsequent efforts to establish a party (with various names and coalition partners) over the 1890s (Strangio, 2012, pp. 10–18).

Once established, Labor quickly and progressively gained electoral support. Its vote share in the Legislative Assembly increased from 10.4% to over 42% between 1897 and 1911 (Figure 1). The previously dominant and squabbling non-Labor factions began to cooperate more, resulting in a 'fusion' Liberal Party by 1907. By 1911 the main electoral contest was between the now unified Liberals and Labor (along with some independents and 'Independent Liberals') (Wright, 1992, pp. 125–132).

However, unlike in other Australian jurisdictions, the growth of Labor's vote did not result in the party winning government (except for 13 days under George Elmslie in 1913, when disagreements erupted within the Liberals). Eventually, divisions in the party over participation in World War One and the issue of conscription resulted in the first major split in Labor (DVA, 2016). Those expelled from Labor joined the Liberals to form the Nationalist Party in 1917.

In Victoria, the unified Nationalist Party obtained 56% of the votes in the 1917 state poll. Labor's support – having already fallen to 39.6% in 1914 – now fell to just 32% of the electorate.

However, the unity of the non-Labor forces did not last long. The emergence of the Country Party in the 1920s – the predecessor of today's National Party – again changed the electoral landscape, leading to three-and-a-half decades of instability in premierships and parliamentary terms. The Victorian Country Party had formed originally as the Victorian Farmers Union in 1917, winning its first seat in 1918, before establishing itself as a branch of the newly established Country Party in 1920. The Victorian Country Party contrasted with its counterparts in other states by forming alliances with Labor and often restricting the Liberals to an opposition role (Lamb, 2009).

The Country Party also benefited from electoral malapportionment. Despite averaging just over 13% of the vote between 1920 and 1955, the party's hold of seats rarely fell below 20% of the Legislative Assembly, reaching its highest point in 1947 (30% of seats) (Figures 1 and 2). The main consequence was that the Country Party could semi-regularly obtain government, giving rise to the era's so-called 'bullock wagon parliaments' (Wright, 1992, pp. 150–177). These were a series of unstable parliaments where the Country Party swapped between coalitions with the Nationalists and Labor.

Yet just two premiers led governments between 1932 and 1943. First, the Nationalists (now the United Australia Party) governed in coalition with an again unified Country Party. While the United Australia Party again won a comfortable majority in the Legislative Assembly in the 1935 elections, the Country Party opted to govern with Labor's support and continued to do so until 1943 (Wright, 1992, pp. 162–165). One result was long-term animosity between the two non-Labor parties. Eight different premiers came and went in the 12 years between 1943 and 1955, with terms ranging from three to 950 days.

Despite winning only 31 of 66 seats in the Legislative Assembly, Labor established a government under John Cain's (Snr) leadership in 1945. With a majority in neither House, however, it was unable to pass much legislation. In 1947 the Legislative Council blocked the government's budget. Cain was forced to resign and call an election at which Labor was heavily defeated.

The experience impacted Labor deeply. The Legislative Council's restricted franchise had long been a source of considerable friction with Labor, who traditionally objected to the dominance of property-holding interests in the chamber (Strangio, 2004, pp. 36–37). Nationally, the party had been committed to abolishing state upper houses since 1918 (only successful in Queensland, in 1922). Yet governments of all kinds – not just Labor – often experienced the Legislative Council blocking or threatening to block supply.

However, the political divisions between and within the non-Labor parties also deepened, in part over the issues of electoral malapportionment and the Legislative Council. Property-owning restrictions were finally abolished for voting in the Legislative Council in 1950 with the passage of the *Legislative Council Reform Act*. The divisions – including a split from the Liberals in the form of the Electoral Reform League– eventually allowed John Cain (Snr) to lead the first long-term Labor government between 1952 and 1955 with a Legislative Assembly majority (37 of 65 seats), having achieved an unprecedented 49% primary vote in the 1952 poll. Its reforms to Legislative Assembly electoral districts (see above) further reduced the representative disparities between rural and urban electorates.

Gradual change

However, Labor's changes did not substantially benefit the party over the next decades. The 'great schism' in the party was consummated in 1955. Disagreement on a range of issues, which this paper will come back to, triggered the emergence of a breakaway party, helping the Liberals retain office for an unprecedented 27 years. These Liberal governments, in turn, only made modest changes to the electoral system.

The *Electoral Provinces and Districts Act* of 1965 reversed the changes Labor had introduced in 1953. The Liberals returned to a 'zonal system' of allocating numbers of electors, with a total of 73 Districts (44 in the greater metropolitan area with a quota of 25,000 voters and 29 in the rest of the state). The subsequent *Electoral Provinces and Districts Act* (1974) also retained a high level of malapportionment (Wright, 1992, p. 199).

Meanwhile, the Legislative Council was subject to limited reforms. The Bolte government introduced conjoint (simultaneous) elections for both houses while expanding the number of provinces from nine to ten through the *Constitution Act Amendment (Electoral) Act* of 1961. Each general election would subsequently see half the Legislative Council's 34 Members contesting their seats. Both houses, however, remained weighted towards rural voters.

Finally, the Hamer government passed *An Act to re-enact the Law relating to the Constitution of the State of Victoria and for other purposes* in 1975. It modernised the Constitution, removing the ultimate power of the British Parliament (Wright, 1992, p. 213). The main impetus for the change came from the latter as it was eager to rationalise matters over which it presided.

The comparatively small number of changes reflected other facets of the political situation: these were long-running governments composed solely of Liberal majorities in the Legislative Assembly. The main opposition they faced was often from the Legislative Council, and the combined Labor and Country Party vote could sometimes defeat legislation.

As noted above, the main reason for the Liberals' predominance was Labor's so-called 'great schism'. Victoria was, in many ways, the maelstrom of the party split. Growing differences over religion (Catholicism) and anti-communism within the labour movement eventually led to the formation of the rival Australian Labor (anti-Communist) Party in 1955, renamed the Democratic Labor Party (DLP) in 1957 (Wright, 1992, p. 192; Strangio, 2005).

The electoral impact of the split was immediately evident in that year's election: the DLP directed preferences toward the Liberals, helping to reduce Labor from 37 to just 20 Members (Figures 1 and 2) in the Legislative Assembly. Labor's share of the Legislative Assembly primary vote also fell to just 33%. The DLP continued to play a 'spoiler' role, allocating preferences to the Liberals for the next two decades.

Consequently, Labor's vote share averaged under 38% and the DLP's under 14% until the 1970s. Although the Liberal Party's average vote (38.6%) was not much higher than Labor's, DLP preferences meant the former could govern. Labor averaged only 14 Members per Parliament across the period, compared to the Liberals' 34 (of 67 seats in total) in the Legislative Assembly (Figures 1 and 2).

By the 1970s, however, the DLP was a declining electoral force. Its caucus had originally consisted of 12 Legislative Assembly Members who had left Labor (in 1955), but the party had only achieved electoral representation on one occasion (Frank Scully, District of Richmond, 1955–58) (Simons, 2012) while Labor and the Liberals' proportional vote share increased across the 1970s, with the latter commanding the lion's share of seats (an average of 46).

The period was also remarkable for the existence of two long-running premierships (along with a shorter third). Henry Bolte's 17-year term was the longest premiership in Victorian political history (1955-1972) (Dunstan, 2007). Rupert Hamer was then Premier from 1972 until 1981 before being succeeded by Lindsay Thompson. He was Premier for less than a year before Labor returned to government at the April 1982 election (Wright, 1992, pp. 200–201).

While the Labor opposition was weak, the Legislative Council did prove to be a continuing adversary for the Liberal governments. The longstanding animosity between the Liberals and the Country Party ensured the latter's exclusion from governing as part of a coalition, with the Liberals continuing to call themselves the 'Liberal and Country Party' until 1964.

The Country Party retained just under a quarter of the seats in the Legislative Council throughout this period (Figure 4) and, acting with Labor, could block legislation and, on one occasion, even supply (in 1965) ('Victoria', 1965; 'Victoria', 1966; Wright, 1992, p. 211). The Liberals' eventual name change back to the Liberal Party was part of an agreement to pass legislation.

Overall, the predominance of the Liberals reduced the amount and depth of changes to the electoral system.

Modernising elections and representation

Two major waves of electoral reform have occurred since 1982. Having governed in Victoria for 27 of the ensuing 40 years, reversing the post-war dominance of the Liberal Party, Labor has been able to initiate major reforms of both the electoral system and parliamentary institutions. These reforms occurred under two different premierships: under the early Cain Labor governments in the 1980s, and under the Bracks Labor government in the early 2000s.

Cain government reforms

Five substantive legislative changes occurred to electoral boundary-making and oversight during the first raft of changes (Wright, 1992, pp. 221–224):

The *Electoral Boundaries Commission Act* of 1982 and the *Electoral Commission (Amendment) Act* of 1983 established independent Electoral and Electoral Boundaries Commissions. The latter set a 10% upper limit to variation in the number of voters in each electorate.

- The *Constitution (Electoral Provinces and Districts) Act* of 1983 also increased the number of Legislative Assembly seats from 73 to 88.

- In 1984, the *Constitution (Duration of Parliament) Act* set the minimum term of three years and increased the maximum length of any parliament to four years. The *Constitution Act Amendment (Electoral Legislation) Act* also modernised various aspects of electoral administration and conduct.

By the 1980s, Labor's longstanding policy to abolish the Legislative Council had softened to reforming the house. It still needed, however, the find a way of preventing a repeat of the 1947 experience where the upper house blocked supply and forced an election. The Cain Labor government's *Constitution (Duration of Parliament) Act* of 1984 (see above and Table 1) heavily restricted the reasons why the Legislative Council could force an election within the first three years of any government (Ward, 1985; Costar, 1992, pp. 204–206). The Liberals agreed to this eventually, in part because they too could face such a challenge from a Labor-controlled Legislative Council in the future.

Bracks government reforms

A second wave of electoral and parliamentary reforms were introduced by the Bracks Labor government in the early 2000s. The first and less ambitious of these were the introduction of fixed four-year parliamentary terms and the further modernisation of aspects of electoral conduct and administration through the *Electoral Act* of 2002 (Table 1).

The second and more far-reaching changes focused on the Legislative Council (Costar, 2003). Having already established a Constitutional Commission (2002) to investigate reforming the upper house, the Bracks Labor government introduced the *Constitution (Parliamentary Reform) Act* of 2003 and other associated legislation. This Act established a new system based on eight regions, each with five representatives elected via proportional representation; five regions were metropolitan and three were non-metropolitan. Although the Commission suggested a threshold of 12% support for representatives, Labor opted for a higher figure of 16.6% (Economou, 2008, p. 641). The reform also largely ended the ability of the upper house to block supply. While the Legislative Council may debate the annual budget Bills, the budget is presented for the Governor's assent one month after being passed in the Legislative Assembly (with or without upper house approval).

Electoral impact

These electoral reforms and modest changes to the Legislative Council reflected Labor's newfound ability to win a majority of Members in the Legislative Assembly. After long years of Liberal control, Labor's primary vote share reached an unprecedented peak of over 50% in the 1982 election. Under Premier John Cain's (Jnr) leadership, the party won 49 of 81 seats in the lower house (Figures 1 and 2). Map 1 and Figure 5 further demonstrate the extent of the surge in Labor support. The party also made significant advances in the Legislative Council, obtaining 19 of 44 seats (Figures 3 and 4), although it still faced considerable obstacles to implementing its reforms (Harkness, 2012).

The party won elections again in 1985 and 1988 before becoming consumed by several crises after 1988. Joan Kirner became the first woman to be Victorian Premier in 1991 after Cain resigned. However, the change in leadership did not help the party's fortunes. Labor's primary vote collapsed at the 1992 election to just over 38% (Figure 1 and Map 2).

The result was the election of the Liberals under the leadership of Premier Jeff Kennett. The Liberals' primary vote share recovered from its low of 38% in 1982 to over 44%, and the Nationals increased from 5% to 8% support. The Liberals and Nationals also won 70% of Legislative Assembly seats and a similar proportion in the Legislative Council (Figures 1–4). Although the Liberals could have governed alone, they broke with tradition, inviting the Nationals to form a Coalition government. The Nationals' leader, Patrick McNamara, was named Deputy Premier, and the party assumed four ministerial positions over the government's first term.

The Liberals won a second term in 1996 with only a minor decline in their primary vote (although the Nationals' share of the Legislative Assembly vote fell further). Labor's primary vote rebounded from 38% to over 43% (Figure 1).

Labor was returned to government in 1999 under the leadership of Premier Steve Bracks (Woodward and Costar, 2000), winning several Legislative Assembly seats in Victoria's regional centres (Bennett and Newman, 2000, pp. 17–18). Its primary vote almost reached 46%, while the Liberals fell slightly to 42% and the Nationals to 4.8% (Figures 1, 2 and 5, Map 3). While the latter two parties won 43 seats in the Legislative Assembly, Labor (with 42 seats) was able to secure an agreement with three independent Members of Parliament to form a minority government (Davies, 1999).

Labor's agreement to governing in coalition with the independent crossbenchers included implementing the latter's demands 'for stable, open and accountable government'. A key component of their 'charter' was upper house reform, including proportional representation (Strangio, 2004, pp. 46–47). The Legislative Council remained dominated by the non-Labor parties, holding 30 of 44 seats (Figures 3 and 4, Figure 6), and effectively blocked any reform legislation.

Labor won decisive majorities for the first time in both houses of the Parliament in the 2002 election (having only obtained a majority in both houses briefly in 1985) (Roberts, 2003). While Labor's primary vote rose to 47.9%, the Greens also arrived as a considerable electoral force, winning 9.7% of the lower house vote (Figure 5 and Map 4). However, they did not win any Legislative Assembly seats.

The combined preferences of the Greens and Labor resulted in the latter obtaining 62 of 88 seats in the Legislative Assembly and 23 of 44 members of the Legislative Council. This historic result surpassed Labor's performance in the 1982 election (despite a higher primary vote that year) (Economou and Costar, 2002). The stage was, therefore, set for Labor to implement the far-reaching changes mentioned earlier.

Labor again achieved a comfortable victory in the 2006 election (Figures 1 and 2). Although Labor's primary vote shrank from almost 48% to 43%, it still won 55 of 88 Legislative Assembly seats. The Liberals' and Nationals' share of the primary vote improved slightly. The Greens won 10% of the primary vote but did not secure any Legislative Assembly seats.

The most notable differences in comparison to earlier elections were in the Legislative Council. Figure 6 features a selection of election results across the years. Starting in 1992, the Liberals and Nationals had dominated the earlier upper house province-based system. The 2006 layer shows the impact of the changes introduced by the Labor government in 2004. Now, other parties, such as the Greens (three seats) and the re-founded DLP (one seat), also won upper house seats. Labor, with 19 of 40 seats, still required the cooperation of the crossbenchers to pass legislation (Gardiner, 2006; Macdonald and Gardiner, 2006).

The Liberals returned to office after the 2010 election. Labor's primary vote declined to just over 36%. The Greens' vote increased to over 11% again without winning a seat. The Liberals' 38% and the Nationals' 6.7% were enough to obtain 35 and ten seats respectively, giving them a one-seat majority in the Legislative Assembly. They also received a combined seat count of 21 in the Legislative Council (Rodan, 2012). However, Premier Ted Baillieu's leadership did not last the full term, being replaced by Dr Denis Napthine in 2013.

The subsequent 2014 and 2018 elections featured two main trends. The first was a further shift towards Labor's predominance in Victorian state politics, with the party returning to govern under the leadership of Premier Daniel Andrews in 2014. The party's primary vote recovered to just over 38%, and there was a slight decline of the Liberals to 36.5% and the Nationals to 5.5%. It was enough, however, for Labor to win 47 seats in the Legislative Assembly (Figures 1, 2 and 5). In 2018, Labor further increased its primary vote share to almost 43%. The Liberal primary vote slumped to 30.4% and the Nationals to 4.8% (Figures 1, 2 and 5, Maps 4 and 5). Combined with preferences from the Greens (over 10% support, winning three seats) and other minor parties, Labor obtained a two-party preferred vote of 57.5%. The so-called 'Danslide' meant the party won 55 of 88 Legislative Assembly Seats (Ilanbey, 2022).

The second was a re-emergence of larger votes for parties other than the traditional three (Figures 1–4 and 6). In 2014, the Greens obtained two seats in the lower house for the first time and other parties and independents received 8.3% of the primary vote. In the Legislative Council, there was a flowering of minor party representation, with the Greens obtaining five seats, the DLP obtaining one and other parties (Shooters and Fishers, Vote 1 Local Jobs, and the Australian Sex Party) emerging with four between them (Figures 3, 4 and 6). More significantly, these and other minor parties' combined vote share rose to over 19% (up from just 4.3% in 2010). Labor obtained 14 seats in the Legislative Council.

At the 2018 election, the Legislative Council saw further diversification in party representation (Figures 4 and 6). Labor initially obtained 18 seats, the Liberals ten and the Nationals and Greens one each. The number of Labor Members would eventually reduce by three. Ten seats went to other parties comprising: Derryn Hinch's Justice Party (3); Liberal Democrats (2); Animal Justice Party (1); Shooters, Fishers, and Farmers (1); Fiona Patten's Reason Party (1); Sustainable Australia (1); and Transport Matters (1). The combined primary vote of the 'other party' categories was just under 18%. While these parties' combined support hovered around 5–6% in the lower house, they were more successful in the Legislative Council. Whether this proliferation has allowed the upper house to function better as a house of review remains a matter of debate (Redenbach, 2014, p. 115). There is also ongoing controversy over the group ticket system.

As well as being the first time Labor governments have been dominant in Victoria for an extended period, this has also been a time of substantial electoral and constitutional reforms. The first wave of legislation has reduced the problem of malapportionment, while the reforms of the early 2000s substantially changed the character of the Legislative Council. Originally conceived as a 'block' on excessive democratic impulses of the Legislative Assembly, the introduction of proportional representation (as well as earlier removal of the property-based franchise) changed many aspects of the Legislative Council.
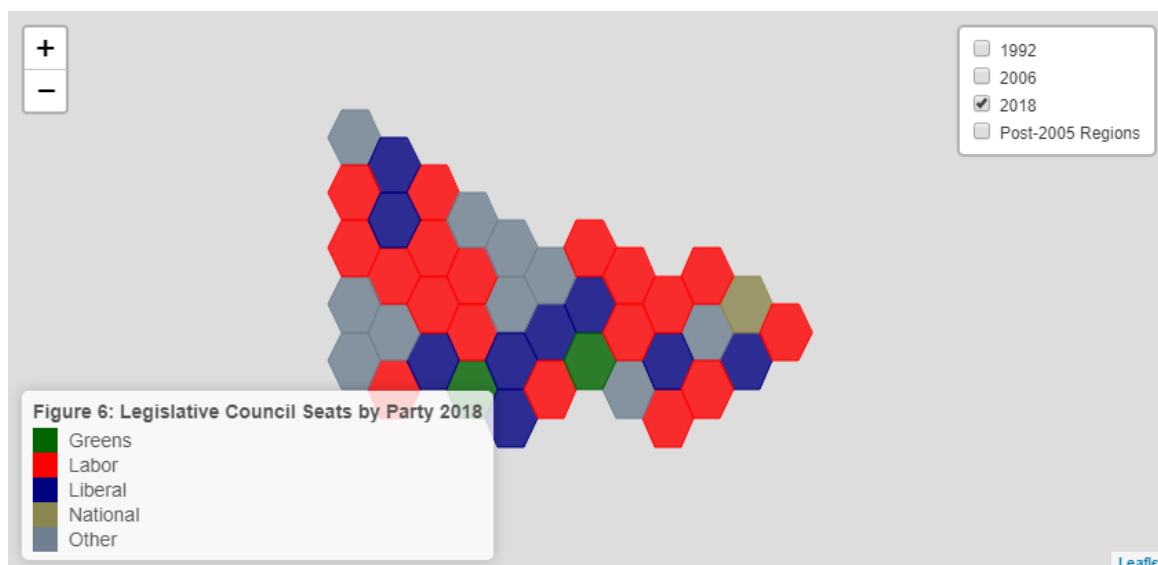
Figure 5: Legislative Assembly Seats by Party, 1982–2018 (Select Years)
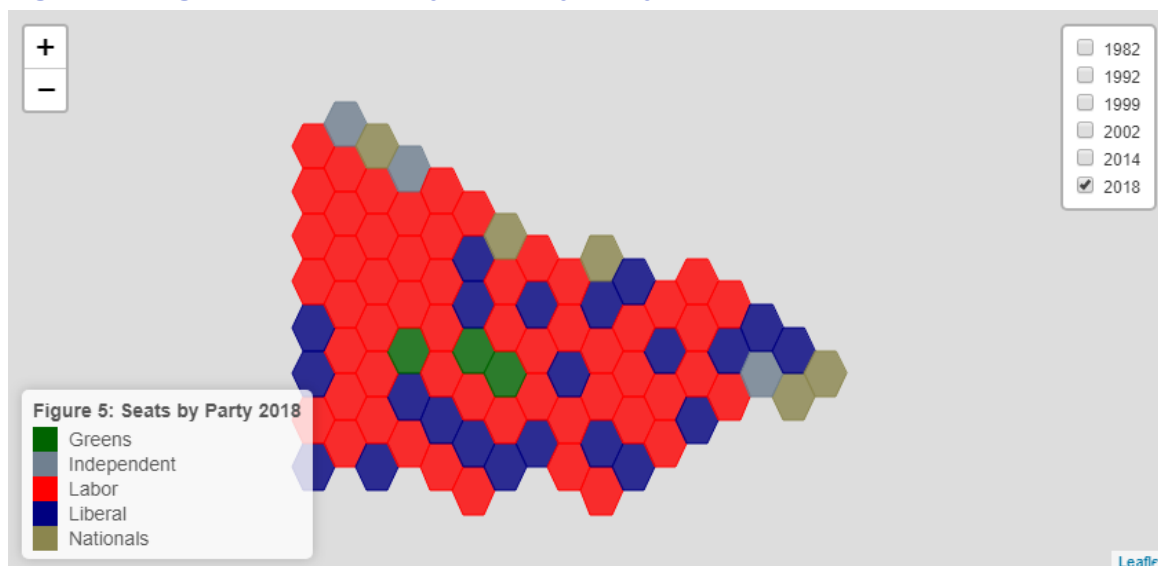
Click to view on web.

Source: PoV (2022), VEC (2022).
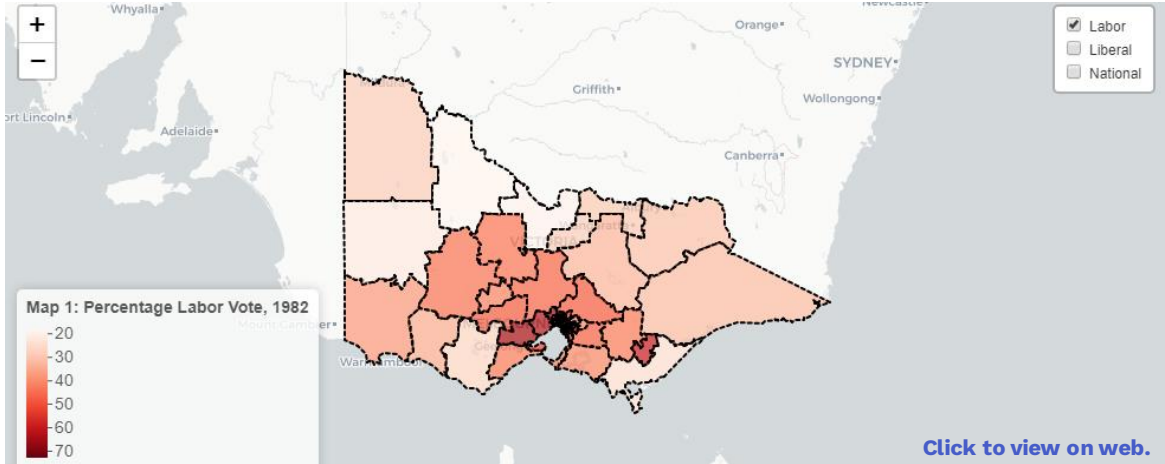
Figure 6: Legislative Council Seats by Party

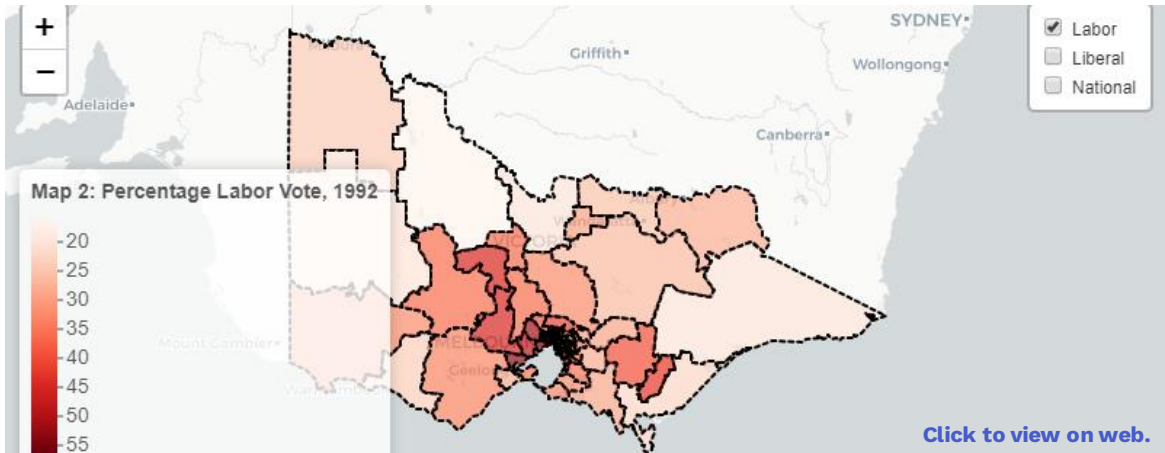**Click to view on web.**

Source: PoV (2022), VEC (2022).
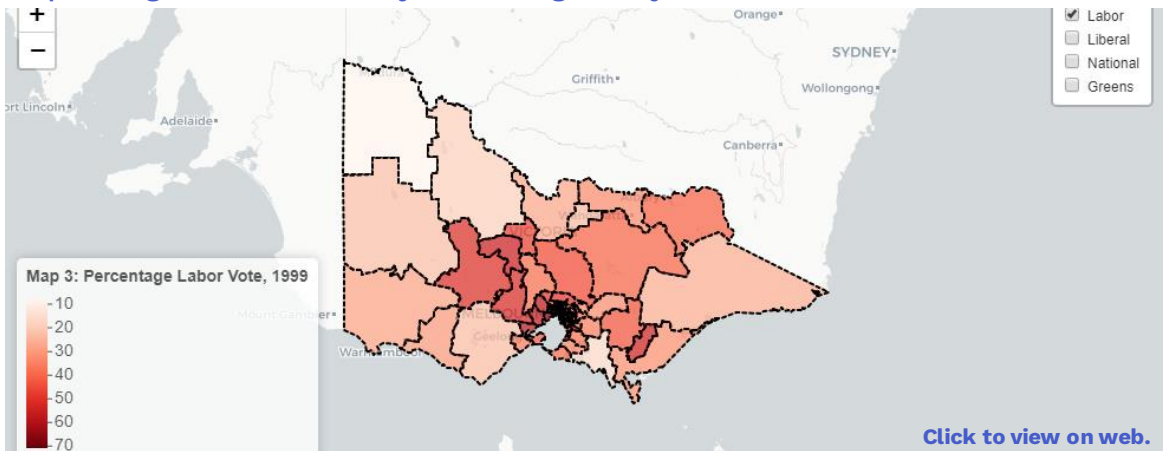
Map 1: Legislative Assembly Percentage Party Vote 1982

Source: Carr (2022).
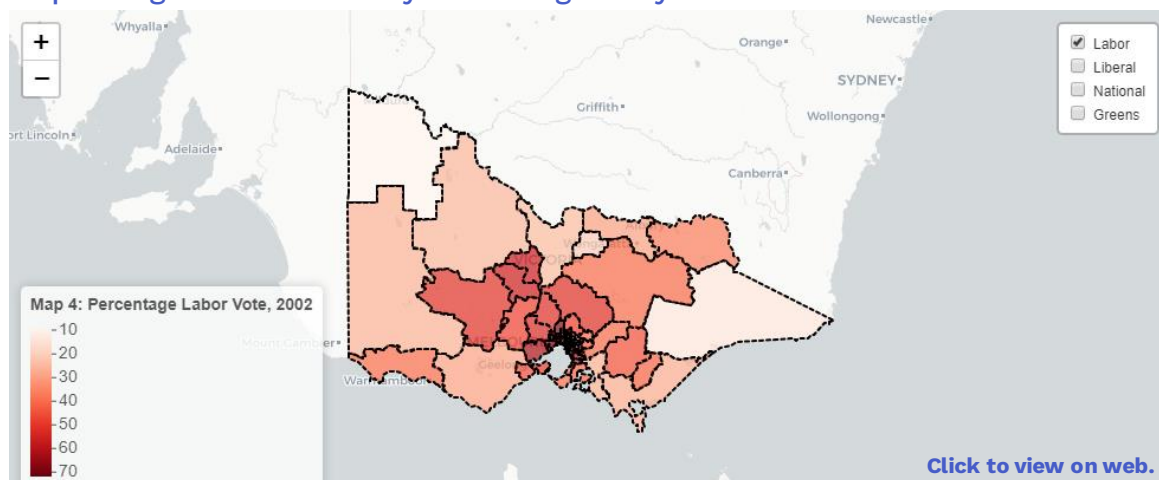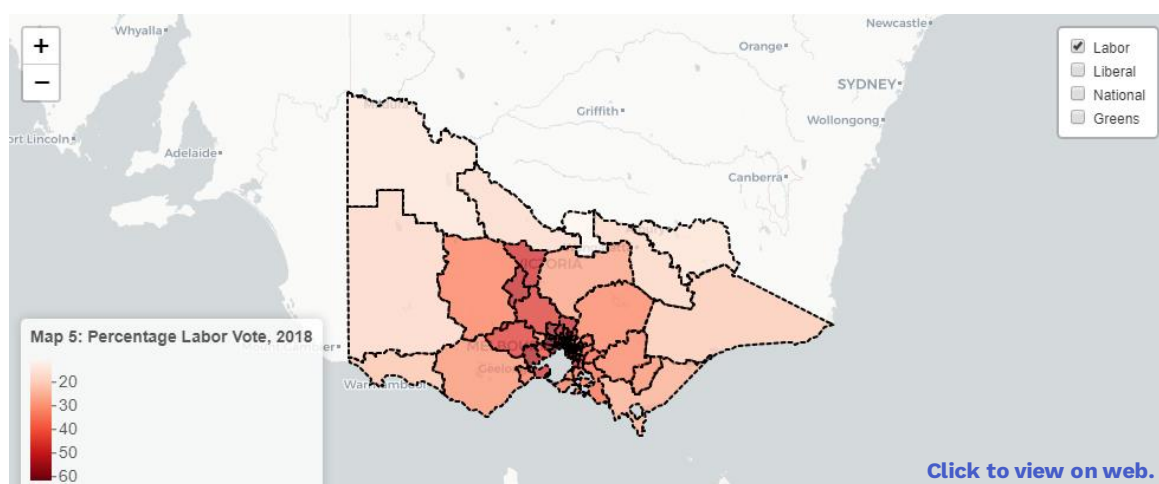
Map 2: Legislative Assembly Percentage Party Vote 1992

Source: Carr (2022).

Map 3: Legislative Assembly Percentage Party Vote 1999

Source: DELWP (2022), Carr (2022).

Map 4: Legislative Assembly Percentage Party Vote 2002

Source: DELWP (2022), VEC (2022).

Map 5: Legislative Assembly Percentage Party Vote 2018

Source: DELWP (2022), VEC (2022).

Continuity and change in Victorian electoral politics

In summary, the past 170 years of electoral representation, competition, and party politics in Victoria have displayed both continuity and change. The above overview surveys the main legislative and administrative changes and uses computational and visualisation methods to illustrate this history.

On the one hand, the party and parliamentary systems have remained similar, although undergoing progressive stages of reform. The colonial-era bicameral parliamentary organisation has endured, with the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council constituting the two houses of Parliament. A (mostly) two-party system of electoral competition eventually consolidated and continues to operate.

On the other hand, there were notable changes. Legislation ended property-based restrictions on the franchise in 1856 for the state's Legislative Assembly and (finally) in 1950 for the Legislative Council. Women obtained the vote in 1909, and compulsory preferencing and participation were later introduced.

The most recent period, from 1982 to the present, has exhibited three major trends. Labor eventually ended its protracted period in opposition and has governed for 70% of the subsequent years. It introduced two rounds of electoral reform, greatly reducing electoral malapportionment in the early 1980s and, after winning control of both houses in 2002, further reformed the Legislative Council by introducing proportional representation. The proportionate vote share and the number of representatives elected from minor parties have grown.

Many areas of the electoral system may benefit from further research, such as a more thorough assessment of the nature and impacts of reforms to the Legislative Council, and a more detailed evaluation of the extent of malapportionment in Victoria's history.

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Enquiries

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