

SENIOR EDITION

# Australian Politics and Policy

Edited by  
Peter J. Chen, Nicholas Barry,  
John R. Butcher, David Clune,  
Ian Cook, Adele Garnier,  
Yvonne Haigh, Sara C. Motta  
and Marija Taflaga



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# South Australia

Rob Manwaring, Mark Dean and Josh Holloway

## Key terms/names

Australian Labor Party, bicameralism, Cabinet, *Constitution Act 1934 (SA)*, deliberative democracy, Don Dunstan, Liberal Party of South Australia, malapportionment, marginal seats, political parties, privatisation, Thomas Playford

South Australia (SA) is something of a curious paradox within Australia's federation. With a population of 1.67 million, it often remains peripheral to wider political debates in Australia. In 2018, due to lack of population growth in proportion to the rest of the country, it had its overall number of federal MPs in the House of Representatives reduced from 11 to 10, thus further diminishing its voice on the national stage. Federal elections tend not to be decided by outcomes in SA. Economically, SA has been perceived to be a 'rust-bucket' state – economically backward with a critical skills shortage, and an ageing population. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, it comprises just over 6 per cent of the nation's economy. In 1991, the collapse of the State Bank was a significant blow to the state's economy. It has often taken SA longer to recover from national economic downturns and usually ranks just above Tasmania in terms of many economic metrics. More recently, with the closure of the Holden car plant in 2017 – and the de facto end of car manufacturing in Australia – there remain ongoing concerns about the future and vitality of the state. There is a lingering perception that SA is, to quote a former premier of Victoria, a 'backwater'.

Manwaring, Rob, Mark Dean and Josh Holloway (2019). South Australia. In Peter J. Chen, Nicholas Barry, John R. Butcher, David Clune, Ian Cook, Adele Garnier, Yvonne Haigh, Sara C. Motta and Marija Taflaga, eds. *Australian politics and policy: senior edition*. Sydney: Sydney University Press. DOI: 10.30722/sup.9781743326671

Yet, paradoxically, these perceptions and economic realities tend to mask a more complex and rich political history. SA has a stable political system, strongly influenced by the Westminster parliamentary system. Aside from the State Bank collapse, it has lacked the scandals and corruption that have blighted other states and territories like New South Wales and Western Australia. Its political system and workings can appear, on first glance, quite mundane. However, SA has a unique and radical history. It was established as a planned ‘free settlement’ on terms quite different to the other Australian colonies. It was, and continues to be for some, a ‘social laboratory’ with a rich history of political and social innovation.<sup>1</sup> It has pioneered legislation and political innovations, particularly throughout the 1970s.<sup>2</sup> While SA, like the rest of the nation, has been dominated by the Labor/non-Labor axis, it is the birthplace of a range of political movements and parties, including the Australian Democrats, the Family First party and, most recently, the Centre Alliance (which was the creation of key SA political figure and former state and federal MP Nick Xenophon). While an Australian prime minister has never represented a SA constituency, the state continues to influence and shape Australian political debates, especially most recently in the areas of water and energy policy. In 2018, Adelaide became the home of the new Australian Space Agency – perhaps reflecting a state that can often ‘punch above its weight’ in the federation.

#### Governing South Australia

*The Constitution Act 1934* (SA) is the foundation of SA’s political system, setting out the main framework and its core constitutional features. This is a system strongly modelled on the Westminster system of government, and clearly influenced by the colonial imprint of the UK. In 1856, SA became a self-governing colony, and the original 1856 Constitution was, for its time, one of the most radical in the world. Underpinning the Westminster system is the doctrine of responsible government. This is the model of how political accountability *should* work in SA. As we highlight below, there are ongoing issues with political accountability. The doctrine of responsible government entails the executive branch (the premier and the government) being held accountable to the legislative branch, and in turn, through free and fair regular elections, to the voters of SA.

SA, like many of the other states and territories, has a bicameral system with power enshrined in two houses of parliament: the lower house (the House of Assembly) and an upper house (the Legislative Council). In the Westminster system, government is formed by the group winning a majority of seats in the lower house. The leader of the winning party becomes Premier of SA. Since 1970, the

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1 Rann 2012.

2 Parliament of South Australia n.d.

House of Assembly has 47 members, and 24 votes are required to gain a majority in the lower house. It is worth noting that the lower house in SA has far fewer MPs than the same chambers in either New South Wales (93 MPs) or Victoria (88 MPs), which has arguably had an impact on election results (see below). The Legislative Council has 22 members (MLCs), each serving eight-year terms, with half the upper house facing election on alternate cycles.

In the *SA Constitution Act 1934*, where there is a breakdown between the two houses, section 41 of the Act provides for a ‘deadlock’ provision. In effect, if a government Bill is consistently blocked then it can trigger the government to seek permission to dissolve the parliament and cause new elections. From time to time, there have been calls to abolish the upper house in SA, and in 2015 then Labor Premier Mike Rann backed away from holding a referendum on the issue. There appears, however, to be limited appetite for a unicameral system, such as in Queensland.

While the SA political system is broadly grouped within the Westminster tradition across Australia, there are some distinct features, not least the issue of electoral boundaries and boundary redistribution. SA has had a long history of ‘malapportionment’ or what was termed the ‘Playmander’ – with highly disproportionate electorate sizes.<sup>3</sup> Election apportionment is the idea that each electoral district, division or constituency should have broadly the same number of voters. This is a key principle that underpins liberal democracy – the idea of ‘one vote, one value’. Electoral malapportionment occurs when electorate sizes vary for geographic, demographic, or political reasons. The effect of the Playmander in SA was to give substantial and disproportionate voice to rural constituencies, violating the principle of ‘one vote, one value’. It should be noted that malapportionment is not the same as ‘gerrymandering’, which in the latter case is a systematic attempt to manipulate the electoral boundaries for partisan advantage. While the Playmander ended in the 1970s, the issue of electoral boundaries remains contentious in SA politics for several reasons. First, SA has a very distinct geography with a highly concentrated population with most people living in or near Adelaide or the other major urban centres (approximately 75 per cent of a total state population of 1.67 million). This means that most elections are decided by marginal seats in metropolitan or outer suburban areas.

Second, and relatedly, there tends to be a rough distinction between where the voters and supporters of the major parties reside. An issue for the Liberal Party, especially during the Rann/Weatherill years, was that its voters were concentrated in rural areas, which had the effect of concentrating the liberal vote in ‘safe’ seats. The upshot is that, on a number of occasions, they ‘won’ the popular vote but did not secure the most seats. The Liberals ‘won’ the two-party preferred vote at the 2002, 2010 and 2014 elections but did not win office.

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3 Orr and Levy 2009. The term ‘Playmander’ is derived from Thomas Playford (SA premier 1938–65, and leader of the Liberal and Country League) and gerrymander.

Third, and unique to SA, one reason electoral boundaries proved to be so problematic was the so-called fairness provision in the *Constitution Act 1934*, overseen by SA's Electoral Division Boundaries Commission. This clause was introduced by Labor in 1991, and was supported by the Liberals. The aim was to ensure that after each election the electoral boundaries must be redrawn to ensure that the winning party or grouping that secured 50 per cent of the two-party preferred vote should be able to be 'elected in sufficient numbers to enable a government to be formed'.<sup>4</sup> Clearly, given the election results during the 2000s this pursuit of 'fairness' proved elusive. The key impact is that marginal seats play a particularly critical role in determining SA election results, and ultimately the type of government that is formed. In one of the final acts of the 2014–18 parliament, the Greens introduced a Bill to remove the 'fairness provision' from the *Constitution Act 1934*, and with the support of Labor and others the Bill was passed in December 2017.<sup>5</sup>

#### The political history of South Australia

Political stability is one of the defining features of SA political history in the 20th and 21st centuries. By as early as 1905, a Labor versus non-Labor two-party contest came to dominate the state's politics, mirroring the dynamics emerging at the national level. Since the 1930s, SA voters have also been prepared to return incumbent governments at successive elections, creating a series of distinct eras of political leadership – several of which we explore below. What these periods of alternating long-term Liberal and Labor government hide, however, are considerable shifts in voting patterns (including for the House of Assembly) and the significant influence of electoral systems. Further, focusing on the Labor versus Liberal contest alone obscures the enduring impact of independent members of parliament, the presence of which has contributed to several minority governments. More recently, as well, minor parties have expanded their influence in the Legislative Council – the powerful upper house of parliament.<sup>6</sup>

#### *The Playford era (1938–65)*

As Figure 1 displays, SA began the postwar period during the Playford era. Sir Thomas Playford was the longest-serving premier in SA history, leading the Liberal Country League (LCL) government from 1938 to 1965 and steering his party through eight election wins. The Playford era is most notable for its 'forced industrialisation' of the SA economy. The Playford governments frequently intervened in markets, established publicly owned utilities and housing, and led a

4 Lynch 2016, 7.

5 Church 2018.

6 Jaensch 2011; Jaensch 1977; Jaensch 1976.

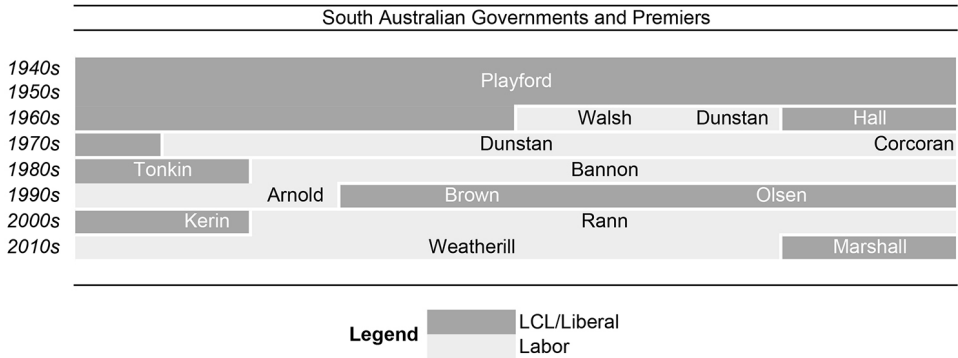


Figure 1 South Australian governments and premiers by party.

transformation of the state’s economy from a rural-agricultural to a predominantly industrial base. Nonetheless, public spending on health and education was often lower than in other states, while the paternalism and conservatism of Playford’s LCL meant that SA also significantly lagged behind in social and cultural policy reform.

Industrial expansion and economic growth underpinned both the LCL’s and Playford’s personal electoral popularity. But they also contributed to Playford’s eventual demise, as economic transformation fostered a changed political geography, with population moving from rural areas and concentrating in the metropolitan region. Indeed, if not for the peculiarities of SA’s electoral system (the way we count votes and translate them into parliamentary seats) at the time, the Playford era likely would have been much shorter.<sup>7</sup> Figure 2 shows the share of the first preference votes of the LCL/Liberal and Labor in House of Assembly elections from 1944 to 2018. For much of the Playford era, the Labor Party secured more popular support. Indeed, in 1944, 1953 and 1962 this led to the Labor Party winning the estimated two-party preferred vote but nonetheless losing the election. This was a product of severe electoral malapportionment, nicknamed the ‘Playmander’ – something we have already explored earlier in the chapter. It was not until the 1970s that SA had a genuinely ‘democratic’ electoral system founded upon a ‘one vote, one value’ principle and a level playing field for parties.

*The Dunstan decade (1970–79)*

Though not the first Labor government of the postwar era, the Dunstan decade of 1970–79 nevertheless represents the clearest break with the long dominance of the LCL through the mid-20th century. Don Dunstan’s governments represented a highly activist brand of social democracy, and a new type of Labor government – ‘electorally

<sup>7</sup> Jaensch 1977, see chapter 3.

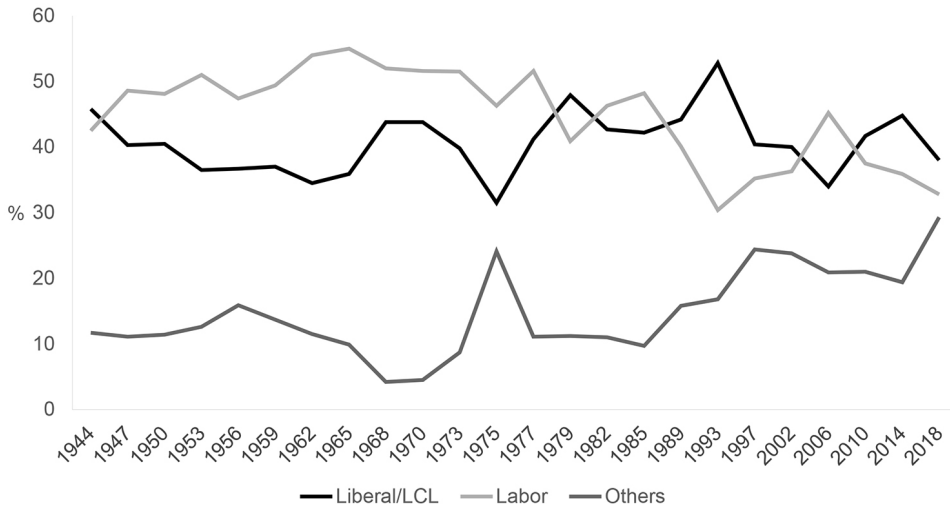


Figure 2 Party shares of the first preference vote in the House of Assembly.

Note: the spike in the vote of ‘others’ in 1975 is due to a split in the Liberal Party.

successful, effectively reformist, and unashamedly appealing to middle-class voters.<sup>8</sup> Dunstan brought about a technocratic shift for Labor, elevating the role of technical expertise and evidence in policy making, but later also increased public participation in some aspects of decision making. The social reforms (e.g. Aboriginal land rights, decriminalisation of homosexuality, first female judge appointed) and expansions to individual liberty (e.g. easing censorship, reforming liquor licensing, establishing a nude beach) were, in many cases, nationally significant, and in some cases world firsts.<sup>9</sup> The Dunstan government, however, occasionally struggled with the challenges of economic management, albeit in the context of a narrow economic base in the state and worsening global economic conditions.

*The Bannon decade (1982–92)*

As Figures 1 and 2 show, the Labor Party quickly bounced back from the loss of government in 1979, returning to power just three years later. But Premier John Bannon was a Labor leader substantially different to Dunstan. Where Dunstan was charismatic, ostentatious and a zealous reformer, Bannon was cautious, mainstream, and sought incremental change. Where social and cultural transformations were the aim of Dunstan’s Cabinets, Bannon’s governments focused more on careful economic management.<sup>10</sup> Labor under Bannon recorded considerable successes,

8 Parkin and Jaensch 1986, 100.  
 9 Macintyre 2005; Manwaring 2016.  
 10 Parkin and Patience 1992.



seeing the opening of the Olympic Dam mining project, expansion of the defence industry, development of the public transportation system, greater environmental protection, and reforms in the school and criminal justice systems. But the collapse of the government-owned State Bank, one of the largest economic crises in SA's history, brought about the end of Bannon's premiership and, soon after, a decade in opposition for the Labor Party. Interpretations differ on Bannon's record in office.<sup>11</sup> Critics see a decade of missed opportunities (especially in contrast to Dunstan's record), while others laud modest reform in much more economically constrained times.

*The Brown/Olsen/Kerin governments (1993–2002)*

The Brown/Olsen/Kerin era is the sole period of prolonged Liberal Party government since Playford (the Tonkin Liberal government of 1979–82 lasting just a single parliamentary term). In 1993 Dean Brown led the Liberal Party to a landslide victory in an election that saw the peak of the Liberal Party's electoral support in the postwar period (see Figure 1). The Brown government, however, was beset by factional infighting, slowing the pace of policy reform. This infighting was a continuation of party leadership rivalries between Dean Brown and John Olsen, who represented, respectively, the moderate and conservative groupings within the SA Liberals.<sup>12</sup> By 1996, opinion poll figures of Liberal and Labor support had narrowed, prompting two Liberal backbenchers to shift their support for party leadership from Brown to Olsen, allowing Olsen to successfully challenge for party leadership.

Under Olsen's leadership, the Liberals narrowly won the 1997 election, forming minority government with the support of independents. The Olsen government successfully broadened SA's economic base, initiated major sporting events (e.g. the Tour Down Under), and further developed the tourism industry. The Olsen government was also marked by several policy controversies, notably the privatisation of electricity assets (Electricity Trust of South Australia, ETSA) and the mass outsourcing of government services. The privatisation of ETSA caused increases in the price of electricity, reducing further Olsen's electoral popularity. Ultimately, however, it was the 'Motorola affair' (Olsen's attempt to lure the technology company to the state with subsidies and preferential treatment) and Olsen's subsequent misleading of parliament that led to his downfall, being replaced as party leader and (until the 2002 election) premier by Rob Kerin.

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11 See concluding chapters in Parkin and Patience 1992 for different views on Bannon's record in office.

12 As such, Brown versus Olsen leadership struggles can be seen as stemming from unresolved factional divides since at least the 1960s.

*The Rann/Weatherill era (2002–18)*

Mike Rann emerged as leader of the Labor Party following its landslide election loss in 1993, where Labor's primary vote was reduced to just 30.4 per cent (see Figure 2). However, Rann benefitted from a Liberal Party in disarray, and after just two terms in opposition, led Labor to victory in 2002, forming a minority government. Through much of the Rann era, SA experienced sustained economic expansion and relatively low unemployment, helping Labor rebuild its economic credibility after the crises of the later Bannon years. Substantial inequality and economic disadvantage remained, however, and Rann often clashed with local trade unions. Nonetheless, the Rann era saw considerable achievements, including increased funding for health and education, the growth of the mining and defence industries, considerable infrastructure and tourism site development, and innovations in participatory democracy and governance.<sup>13</sup> Some view the Rann era as a variant of the emerging 'third way' politics in the renewal of social democracy.<sup>14</sup>

As popular opinion began to shift against Rann, leading union and Labor Party figures moved to replace him. Public fatigue with a third-term government, coupled with the effects of the Global Financial Crisis placed greater constraints on Rann's government. Rann, knowing he lacked the numbers to withstand any leadership challenge, stood down in October 2011, with Jay Weatherill elected unopposed by the party as his successor. Weatherill faced considerable economic challenges in his first term, including the closing of prominent manufacturing sites and aborted plans for mining projects. Early budgets made large cuts to spending and privatised public assets and services. Yet, following a surprise win in the 2014 election, Labor's agenda under Weatherill substantively changed. Weatherill led significant social reform (e.g. removing discriminatory laws against the LGBTIQ+ community), and demonstrated a capacity for policy innovation in economic management. Perhaps most notable is Weatherill's proposed reform of the electricity sector, arguing for the construction of a government-owned gas-fired power station alongside the expansion of renewable energy and grid-connected battery storage.

The influence of independents and minor parties

Examining governments only provides us with part of the story of SA politics. Independent MPs have long been a fixture of the SA parliament, usually elected to the House of Assembly, and often representing rural, regional and outer suburban electorates. In many cases, independent MPs were often elected as members of one of the major parties (or were members of major parties denied preselection). The most significant impact of these independents has been in the process of government formation. Elections in SA regularly produce 'hung parliaments' where

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13 Spoehr 2009; Spoehr 2005.

14 Macintyre 2005.

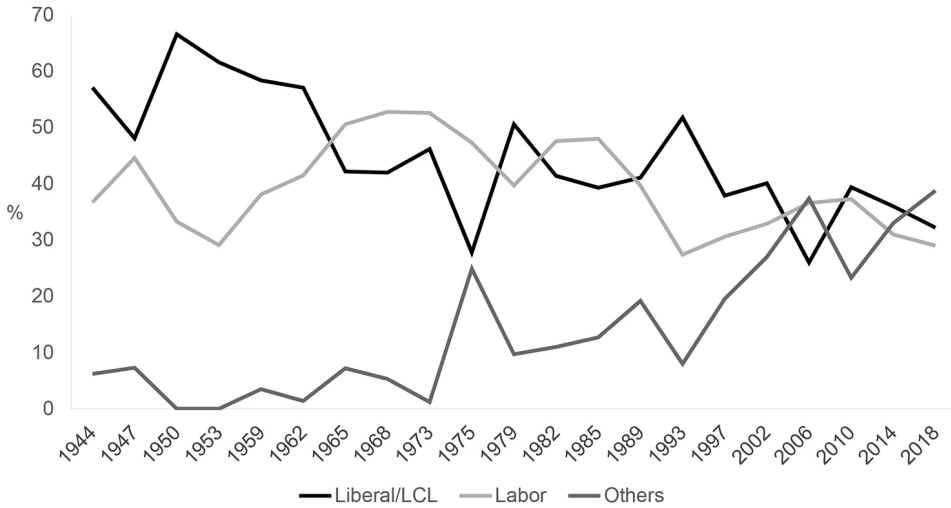


Figure 3 Party first preference votes for the Legislative Council.

Note: the rise in the vote of 'others' in 1975 is due to a split in the Liberal Party.

neither major party commands the majority of lower house seats needed to form a government. In these instances, independents and parties on the crossbench hold considerable sway over which party can form government. Since 1944, independents have played this role seven times, following elections in 1962, 1968, 1975, 1989, 1997, 2002, and 2014.

Minor parties have more often derived influence from their position in the Legislative Council. Until the mid-1970s, the LCL/Liberal Party dominated the Legislative Council due to restrictive voting rights that favoured the wealthy establishment and property owners. Following Dunstan's electoral reforms introducing universal suffrage and a proportional electoral system, Labor and minor parties alike have secured greater representation in the upper house. For minor parties, as well, electoral reform contributed to a growth in their support. Figure 3 graphs the change in electoral trends.

Since 1975, the proportional electoral system has meant that minor parties have secured sufficient seats to play a decisive role in the Legislative Council. Minor parties have consistently occupied a balance of power role, meaning they can side with either the government or the opposition of the day (should they be at odds), and determine the fate of legislation. Thus, while these minor parties tend not to affect the *formation* of governments, they influence the *function* of governments. Since 1997, as well, this balance of power role has been shared among multiple minor parties, as depicted in Figure 4. This means that governments face a complex bargaining environment, needing to negotiate with and manage the interests of diverse, rival parties.



significant political influence, alongside the also powerful Social Inclusion Board.<sup>17</sup> More broadly, we can see a growth of the ‘regulatory state’, with public goods overseen by quasi-independent agencies and boards.

Second, the private sector remains a critical actor in the development of the state, and it is institutionalised through key actors. Pre-eminent among them is the SA Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Trading today as Business SA, this institution represents the interests of businesses in the state, chiefly in terms of managing industrial relations with employees and lobbying for institutional changes favourable to business, such as the removal or changing of regulation. At times it has played a significant political role, developing policy positions, commenting on state budgets, but also running campaigns – most notably leading the charge against a new proposed State Bank levy in 2017.

A third set of institutions are those often categorised as ‘third sector’ or non-governmental organisations (NGOs). SA, like many other parts of Australia, has a vibrant set of institutions that emerge from and seek to represent part of civil society. An important social institution is that made up of the array of organisations that fall within the SA labour movement. In 1876, SA was the first place in the British Empire to legalise trade unions, and they remain key actors in the SA political system. Today, SA Unions is the peak body of the union movement in the state. The key powerful trade unions remain affiliates of the state Labor Party. Outside of the union movement, one of the most prominent social actors is the SA Council of Social Services which is an umbrella organisation for a suite of community sector NGOs and bodies. In common with other parts of Australia, increasingly social services are often contracted out to large-scale third party providers.

How do we best understand the political power and influence of these institutions across the public, private and voluntary/community sectors in SA? This remains a contested set of debates that has preoccupied political scientists for some time. Dye suggests that different ‘models’ of politics might help us understand power in different ways.<sup>18</sup> Arguably, the most common account applied in Australia would be through the prism of pluralism. This model suggests that power is dispersed among different groups, and that government policy is often the result of trade-offs between, say, employer and employee groups. Other models, for example class-based approaches, suggest that, in a capitalist market economy, business groups have a built-in (structural) advantage and yield more influence, certainly more than trade unions. Other models note how, at times, different interests (e.g. business and labour) are institutionalised – in what is sometimes called a corporatist model. In the Rann era when representatives from the Economic Development Board and the

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17 Manning 2005. Under the Marshall government, the Economic Development Board was folded into a new, smaller Economic Development Agency.

18 Dye 2013.

Social Inclusion Commissioner were part of the Executive Committee of Cabinet, this seemed like a clear effort to build a form of corporatism.

Key controversies in South Australia

*Democracy and accountability*

David Beetham argues that democracy is underpinned by two key principles: political equality and popular control.<sup>19</sup> Political equality entails that all groups of people have a voice within a given democratic system. Popular control means that, following Lincoln's famous declaration, government should be 'of the people, by the people, for the people'. Beetham and colleagues have often undertaken democratic 'audits' to see how well a country or polity is faring in this regard. To date, there has never been such an audit of state-level democracy in Australia (although there has been a national one).<sup>20</sup> The health of SA democracy remains in question in at least three key areas: deliberation, accountability and governance.

In recent years, there has been a focus on 'deliberative' democracy.<sup>21</sup> The main claim made here is that voters should have more influence in between elections, and the quality of government decisions can be enhanced by better deliberation or discussion. Labor Premier Jay Weatherill was a noted fan of this movement and instigated a range of 'new' deliberative techniques, including citizens' juries. The effect of this has been mixed, with particular criticism directed at the citizens' jury on the nuclear fuel cycle. Yet, it showed a rare willingness to enhance SA's democratic institutions.

A second area of concern has been the issue of accountability – especially the mechanisms for holding the government to account. In the Cabinet system of government in the Westminster tradition the doctrine of ministerial responsibility is critical.<sup>22</sup> This has two dimensions: collective and individual. In the case of the latter, the convention is that ministers are responsible for the workings of their departments, and, when things go wrong, they should resign (or more commonly be dropped or reshuffled). A number of scandals in SA, notably the Oakden abuse scandal, have drawn repeated attention to the growing ineffectiveness of individual ministerial responsibility.<sup>23</sup>

A third area of concern, and not limited to SA, is the fragmenting nature of governance. Traditionally, the government and public sector (especially the main

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19 Beetham 1994.

20 Sawer, Abjorensen and Larkin 2009.

21 Dryzek 2002.

22 Thompson and Tillotsen 1999.

23 The Oakden nursing home was a state-run mental health centre for older people, which was eventually shut down in 2017 after allegations of abuse and neglect of residents. The Oakden scandal was one of the drivers for the federal government to begin a royal commission into aged care quality and safety in 2018.

departments, e.g. education, health) were the main political and policy actors. The shift from government to governance, however, entails a growth of statutory boards, commissions and councils (and the like) to deliver and oversee the outsourcing of public goods. Yet, there remains a concern about the effectiveness of these boards, their accountability and their relation to democratic institutions. For example, a number of scandals in health and the TAFE sector raise concerns about 'arms-length' institutions and their role.

#### *Energy and nuclear power*

Recent economic developments in SA have focused on debate around securing the state's economic and energy futures as the pressing need to respond to climate change heightens. Following an extreme weather event in October 2016 that left the entire state in blackout for hours, the Weatherill Labor government developed an energy industry policy to ensure energy supply to homes and businesses would be safeguarded in the event of future breakdowns in the existing energy grid. Through public-private partnerships with international energy companies Tesla and Neoen, the government has developed renewable energy infrastructure, further increasing SA's national leadership on renewables and energy innovation. The initiatives under Premier Mike Rann institutionalised a nation-leading renewable energy policy and objective to increase renewable energy as a major source of supply. As at 2018, approximately 50 per cent of the state's energy comes from renewable sources.

Recently governments have sought to enact watershed changes to SA's economic trajectory through attempts to undertake large reforms. Prior to the Labor government's loss to the Liberal Party in 2018, then-Premier Weatherill had sought to explore options to establish a secure dumping site for nuclear waste in SA. The sequence of events relating to this highly contentious issue exemplified the responsible government principles and processes at the core of the state's democratic institutions. There was a two-year royal commission inquiry into SA's participation in the nuclear fuel cycle and subsequent public consultation through a citizens' jury. The final commission report handed down a decision in 2016 not to support nuclear waste dumping.

#### *Privatisation and state ownership*

Privatisation refers to policies ranging from outsourcing of government services to the absolute sale of public assets. Privatisation in Australia, and SA in particular, has a poor record, with questionable economic benefit and considerable social cost.<sup>24</sup> As governments began the process of privatisation in the 1980s, many voters responded with a relatively open mind. After all, there were inefficiencies and poor quality of service provided through some government-owned operations.

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24 Cahill and Toner 2018.

Several decades on, public opinion tends towards scepticism of privatisation, with asset sales and outsourcing electorally risky. In particular, many voters appear unconvinced that privatisation leads to lower costs for consumers, and are cynical about governments' underlying rationale. Indeed, there are often different motivations underpinning calls for privatisation. Aulich and O'Flynn distinguish, for instance, between *pragmatic* privatisation where public assets are divested in a drive for greater efficiency and a means of technical problem solving, and *systemic* privatisation which derives from an ideological commitment to reducing the role and size of government.<sup>25</sup> Privatisations under both Liberal and Labor governments have been propelled by both of these motivations at different times.

Despite the potential electoral costs, successive governments have pushed forward with asset sales and outsourcing. Most recently, the Weatherill Labor government privatised the Land Titles Office, the Motor Accident Commission, SA Lotteries, and forestry services. Further, the Marshall government in 2018 flagged the possibility of privatising some health and criminal justice services, while the Labor opposition claims the Liberals also have SA Water in their sights. The most controversial instance of privatisation in the SA setting, however, is the sale of the Electricity Trust of South Australia (ETSA) in 1999. Arguably, this is the source of the contentious energy politics outlined above. Interestingly, it was the conservative Playford government that first established ETSA by nationalising privately owned electricity assets in 1946. Fifty-three years later, it was Olsen's Liberal government that broke up and sold the state-owned electricity suppliers, despite previous assurances to voters that such a sale would not occur. The ETSA privatisation would not have gone forward, however, without the critical support of two Labor members of the Legislative Council 'crossing the floor' to support the sale.

## Conclusions

SA remains at a political and economic crossroads. After 16 years of Labor, Steven Marshall led the Liberals to government at the 2018 election. Marshall's government faces a range of political and policy dilemmas, including in the crucial areas of health, the TAFE sector, and the wider economic environment. There remain concerns that this populously small but geographically large state could be heading back to how it has often been traditionally viewed – as an economic 'backwater'. The Marshall government is seeking to counter Labor's more interventionist agenda, by focusing on creating a smaller state, scaling back public spending, and focusing on private-sector entrepreneurship. The Liberals have long been out of practice at governing in SA, and only one of the current Cabinet – the Treasurer Rob Lucas – has served in government before. Strikingly, Marshall's government has sought

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25 Aulich and O'Flynn 2007.



to innovate in its own way. Critically the Liberals are seeking to return to Cabinet government and diffusing power across the Cabinet, rather than relying on a strong leader and a small number of trusted lieutenants.

There are a wide range of concerns about the health of SA's democracy, its governance, and its key assets. The Marshall government will need to build a new agenda, with widespread popular appeal, if it is to survive in what has until recently been a state dominated by Labor.

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