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Issue competition and pledges in Indian elections

At elections, parties compete on policy issues as they seek to maximize their votes and win office. Issue competition among parties involves the relative attention devoted to different policy issues, as well as the relative positions taken by the parties on those issues. Mainstream theories of party competition, guided by spatial and valence models, suggest that issue competition can be conflictual or consensual. This paper combines both models to assess issue competition in an established non-Western democracy, India. By using two established comparative frameworks, the Comparative Agendas Project and the Comparative Pledges Project, the paper will assess issue competition between the two major Indian parties, the Bharatiya Janata Party and Indian National Congress by focusing on their election pledges in five parliamentary elections over twenty years (1999-2019). By comparing the extent of policy attention and interparty agreement on the various policy issues in the election pledges, and comparing the narratives of selected pledges, the paper will test the traditional logic that the two Indian parties largely agree on socio-economic issues and starkly differ on identity issues.

Sofia Ammassari, Griffith University

Disaffected but efficacious: Why people join populist radical right parties

The number of populist radical right (PRR) grassroots members is on the rise, in contrast to the trend of membership decline in mainstream parties. While scholars have explained this by studying PRR parties' organisational strategies, I focus on party members, and ask: *Why do people join PRR parties?* To do so, I look not only at motivations, which is the dominant framework in party membership studies, but also at triggers, i.e. factors activating those motivations. Drawing on collective action scholarship, I argue that grievances against out-groups and elites can work as triggers for joining PRR parties. Using interviews with 82 members of the Bharatiya Janata Party, the League in Italy, and the Sweden Democrats, I uncover three dynamics in the PRR membership path: *disaffection*, *affiliation*, and *efficacy*. Alongside questioning established narratives on why citizens join parties, my findings provide a novel framework to investigate this form of political participation.

Ernest Mensah Akuamoah, Australian National University

Age and Political Participation in Ghana

Are Ghanaian youth politically engaged than their older counterparts? Political participation in Ghana has been very high by African standards, largely due to the mobilization strength of the two dominant parties—the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and National Democratic Congress (NDC) as well as an increasing civic culture among the populace. However, the question of which age cohort participates more has not been sufficiently researched. To answer this question, I pooled data from three Rounds (4, 5, and 6) of the Afrobarometer surveys conducted in Ghana in 2008, 2012, and 2015 respectively to test for individual-level participation in conventional and unconventional political behaviours. My empirical results indicate that whereas Ghanaian youth are less likely to vote compared to the older generation, the youth in Ghana are more likely than the senior citizens (but not the adults) to demonstrate. These findings have important implications for party mobilization and political activism in Ghana.

Nick Barry, La Trobe University and Rob Manwaring, Flinders University
Ideology and Crisis in the Liberal Party

The 2022 federal election resulted in an emphatic defeat for the Coalition, and for the Liberal party in particular. In this context, there are wider debates about the crisis of the centre-right. In 2021, Bale and Kaltwasser published a key volume which set out to explore the wider crisis of the centre-right, focussing on European cases. Their central framing analysis was to situate the crisis of the right in the debates about the rise of the ‘silent revolution’, and the attendant counter silent revolution. The back drop to the crisis is that in the face of value change, the parties on the right are wedged between more socially liberal voters, and those on the right as part of the ‘cultural backlash’. This paper draws the Liberals into this wider comparative debate, by focussing on a series of comparative cases including same-sex marriage, welfare policy, and climate. In this approach we can distinct differences between the crisis of the right in Europe and how this is playing out in Australia.

Do brands matter? Understanding public trust in fact checkers and their corrections

Andrea Carson, La Trobe University

Tim Gravelle, Momenive, Canada

Justin Phillips, University of Waikato

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Leah, Ruppanner, University of Melbourne

Abstract

The spread of mis and disinformation online is a global problem requiring urgent attention. Third-party fact checking is one of a number of widely used approaches to mitigate its harmful effects. Despite an emergent literature, the relationship between fact-checking and misinformation is not well understood. Studies have focused on the effectiveness of third-party fact-checking to correct dis- and misinformation circulating online, with attention to claim selection. This paper deviates from this approach to investigate whether the brand of a fact-check shifts public perception of false claims with a real-life post – a TV screenshot of then Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison being falsely represented online in his response to victims of the Queensland floods in 2022. We test theories of motivated reasoning and political polarisation through an experimental design measuring public trust in four real-life fact checks brands in Australia. We find high public trust in fact checking with little difference across brands, net of the respondents' political orientation. However, concerningly, we also find many participants are prepared to share disinformation despite trusting a fact check that tells them the information is false. Our study identifies a disconnect between trust in fact checks and their capacity to limit the spread of disinformation.

The 'Unheavenly Chorus' vs 'Won't you please, please help me?': Two distinct ways of contacting elected officials?

Daniel Casey, ANU;
Intifar Chowdhury, ANU

Despite a decline in conventional forms of participation, more than one in three Australians have contacted politicians or government officials in writing in the past five years. But are people who write to express an opinion different from people who write to seek help? If so, why? Recent works suggest that citizens contact politicians in two distinct ways (or with two different motives): a particularised contact seeks help or information, while a communal contact expresses an opinion. They differ in the resources required; the scope of engagement; and the level of conflict.

There is, however, a lack of a systematic enquiry of whether Australians who 'contact a government official' are in fact different from each other. Using a relevant survey

item from the Australian Election Study (AES) 1993 – which has been reintroduced in the AES 2022 - we test the hypothesis that those who sing “please, please help me” are distinct from those who sing as part of the “unheavenly chorus with a strong upper-class accent” to express an opinion. We then go on to investigate the socio-political factors, like education and income, that motivate each of these distinct forms of participation. Overall, this study aims to better understand the different modes and motivations of engaging in conventional, elite-directed forms of democratic participation.

Daniel Kirby, QUT

The dead pig’s photo album: affective visual rituals in collective identity formation

Recent research on visually mediated activism has focused on visual practices as forms of political expression. Conversely, this paper will demonstrate that visibility is not only used for personal expressions in protest action, but that it plays a significant role in solidifying movement-internal collective identity through a set of distinct visual rituals. Such rituals bridge boundaries (e.g. national, online-offline, and political values) and produce a shared understanding through *affective visibility*. Based on an ethnography of everyday visual practices and social experiences of visibility (online & offline) in the Save Movement’s “Pig Save” protest events, we identify three forms of affective visual rituals: (1) witnessing; (2) mourning; and (3) ritualistic semiotic practices. We argue that these visual rituals are not only expressions of shared values, but *construct* collective political identity through *visual emotion work* that transcends common barriers in language and region, ideological positioning, and digital and in-person activities.

Nathan Fioritti, Monash University

From Green Bans to Greensland: Movement Building within the Queensland Greens

One of the most significant changes to the Australian Parliament’s composition following the 2022 Federal Election was the rise in Greens representatives from Queensland – most notably the party winning three lower house seats in electorates around Brisbane. Drawing on media produced by and featuring key political organisers, this paper argues that the state member party’s success can be attributed

to the development of a distinct movement within the Queensland Greens that is equally as focused on social and economic injustices as environmental ones. In describing this movement building within the Queensland Greens, this paper also considers the influence the state member party has had on the Australian Greens as they seek to build a mass party federally, as well as Queensland's often overlooked radical political history and whether there is a throughline from relevant Australian social movements of the past such as the Green Bans movement of the 1970s.

Darren R. Halpin, Australian National University

Interest Group Agendas and Issue Priorities: An Exploration of Group Election Manifestos

What set of issues do groups see as relevant and of interest? What preferences do groups hold on these policy issues? What do they set out to achieve on these issues? Do they attract any attention to their issues? These types of questions about the policy agendas and issue priorities of groups are garnering more scholarly attention. Assessing the content and size of the policy agendas that advocacy groups set out to advance is a difficult task, presenting data and research design challenges. Existing work either focuses on the set of issues groups advance through active involvement in lobbying – their ‘active lobbying agenda’ – or report aggregate survey-based responses assessing the broad policy areas they have an ‘interest’ in. In this paper we report on a project that seeks to exploit the policy ‘manifestos’ issued by many groups during national election campaigns as a way to document policy agendas, and specifically their policy priorities. To illustrate the approach we report on results from the 2016 Australian Federal election.

Glenn Kefford, University of Queensland

Surveillance Technology and Political Parties: A Comparative Analysis of Digital Tracking Data

Political parties’ have gone digital. Successive studies in countries around the world have diagnosed the rise of the digital party and traced parties’ adoption of digital technology. One recurring question of interest within this literature has been the drivers of digital adoption practices. On the one hand, political scientists have posited, among other theories, the Americanisation thesis, foregrounding the significance of American parties and consultants as catalysts for adoption. On the other, political communication scholars have pointed to ‘Platformization’ citing the significance of technology companies in prompting innovation. To date, however, scholars have not examined the relative power of these explanations to understand the ways that political parties collect digital tracking data. In this paper we use computational methods to gather longitudinal data from over 90 parties in 18 countries to explore patterns of technological adoption globally. Focusing specifically on trackers and analytics technologies utilized on party websites, we

consider trends for technological adoption and test the resonance of these two theories.

Pat Leslie, ANU

The Contest for Descriptive Representation: Labor and the Coalition 1985-2020

The 1980s saw the first sustained election of a female cohort in the Australian House of Representatives. Initial increases in the selection and election of female candidates were led by the ALP, with the Coalition lagging behind – and this has been the shape of the two parties' approach to women's representation since. Less well attested, has been the increasing tendency of the ALP to select from within its own ranks relative to the Coalition, increasing the number of professional politicians in Parliament. This study traces patterns in the descriptive representation of gender and prior professional experience using a novel measure of disproportionality, comparing the parties' records in the House of Representatives and Senate since 1985. The paper then uses historical analysis to attempt to explain these differences, taking into account party competition for votes, increasing calls for diversity in parliament, and the steady liberalisation of the economy.

Friedel Marquardt, University of Canberra

Social Media, Narrative Engagement and Democratic Decision-Making

With the recent change in federal leadership, there has been much transition in the Australian government. One of the areas there has been significant attention concerns a First Nations voice to parliament. While yet to be determined what this looks like and how it will work, it does point to the importance of having voices heard in democratic decision-making around issues that matter to groups, specifically previously unheard or marginalised groups.

My research explores this issue and considers, in the current absence of a formalised body for this (such as a Voice to Parliament) whether social media is a viable space for First Nations perspectives to be heard regarding issues that matter to them. It considers the possibility of narrative engagement, especially challenging and reframing dominant narratives, through social media platforms and what that may mean for democratic decision-making around issues that matter to First Nations.

Duncan McDonnell & Stefano Ondelli, Griffith University

Populist Vocabularies: The Distinctive Words and Ideas of Right-Wing Populists

The juxtaposition that populists propose of themselves with the establishment is said to be reflected by the language they use compared to other politicians. Nonetheless, we do not know whether populists really do use different words to mainstream politicians, nor how these words and their related concepts vary across different languages and contexts. In this study, we therefore use large corpora of speeches to compare three prominent right-wing populist leaders of the past decade, Donald Trump in the United States, Marine Le Pen in France, and Matteo Salvini in Italy, with their principal mainstream opponents, and ask: *What distinguishes right-wing populist vocabularies?* This approach enables us, firstly, to assess which words are particular to right-wing populists in different political contexts and the ideas those words convey. Secondly, we can see how right-wing populist vocabularies resemble one another in terms of their distinctiveness, contents, and related ideas, across different languages.

Josh McDonnell, UWA

Compulsory Voting and Local Government

Despite the importance of local government as a 'training ground' for democracy, successive reforms in all Australian states have erected barriers that have made running and serving in local office an increasingly costly, time-consuming, and demographically exclusive affair. While a rich international literature exists on the connection between the structure of the electoral system and citizens' motivation to run for local office, the issue has been comparatively understudied in the Australian context. This study seeks to contribute to this inchoate and iterative candidate emergence literature by examining an under-acknowledged aspect of the political opportunity structure: compulsory voting (and the voter turnout rate). Specifically, through a survey of Tasmanian local elected representatives, the study will examine the impacts of the Tasmanian Government's recent decision to institute compulsory voting at the local government level.

Jordan McSwiney, University of Canberra, and Kurt Sengul, The University of Sydney

Humor, Racism, and Collective Identity: Pauline Hanson's "Please Explain" Miniseries

This paper examines the *Please Explain* miniseries, a series of 30 short web cartoons produced on behalf the far-right Pauline Hanson's One Nation (PHON) political party. The videos were disseminated across PHON's social media accounts throughout 2021/2022. The video series is a novel development in terms of Australian political

party advertising and campaigning, and comprised a significant (at least in terms of cost) component of PHON's 2022 federal election campaign.

Here, we focus primarily on the intersections of humor and racism, and how collective identity is articulated through speech and symbolism in the videos. Using critical discourse analysis, we examine how humor is used to "soften" articulations of racial exclusion and dehumanisation, as part of a wider project of far-right discursive mainstreaming. This research aims to advance our understanding of the increasing role of humour in the contemporary far-right's political communication arsenal.

Narelle Miragliotta, Monash University

When, why and how do deliberative theorists believe that deliberative forums can address the problems of party politics?

Over the last decade particularly, the work of deliberative democratic theorists has become highly influential in debates concerning political party reform. Much of this scholarship has either proposed changes to parties' internal decision-making structures (e.g., intra-party reform) or sought to moderate the decision-making (law-making) context in which parties operate (e.g. mini-publics). This paper seeks to identify the underlying assumptions built into these reform agendas and to weight them against the proposed reform. It is contended that some of reforms either misdiagnose or under-specify the party-ills that they are seeking to remedy.

Molly Murphy, University of Queensland

The case for non-dialogic counterspeech: Democracy and epistemic oppression

This paper offers a renewed look at the issue of inclusive democratic participation: particularly, how can we make democratic deliberation an inclusive space in which every person can participate? It draws upon ideas of counterspeech and democratic participation to argue that inclusive democratic participation should not exclude non-dialogic counterspeech from its remit; in other words, contributions to democratic deliberation need not be argumentative nor intend to persuade in order to be considered legitimate contributions that are beneficial to democratic communication. In so doing, it engages contemporary debates about the norms of public discourse and problematises the contention that actions such as boycotts, shaming, or withdrawing support for a speaker are the antithesis of democratic communication. Instead, it

argues that firstly, argument and persuasion are not always realistically attainable for every speaker, particularly those who are excluded from public discourse owing to systemic oppression; and secondly, that non-dialogic counterspeech is an (albeit imperfect) substitute for dialogic counterspeech where such exclusions exist, owing to the democratic benefits that non-dialogic counterspeech can provide.

Erin O'Brien and Kateryna Kasianenko, QUT

Boycotting Russia: instrumental and expressive political consumerism in surrogate boycotts

In response to the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in early 2022, Twitter users called for a boycott of Russia, urging consumers and investors to divest from Russian industries, boycott Russian products, and boycott businesses operating in Russia. These acts of political consumerism (Micheletti 2010) and investorism (O'Brien et al. 2022) constitute a surrogate boycott whereby products and businesses are targeted as surrogates for the Russian state. Surrogate boycotts of nation-states are often characterised as symbolic, or expressive, rather than instrumental. However, this is largely based on the results of the campaign, rather than the motivations of the participants. Through an analysis of Twitter users' communications about a boycott of Russia, we aim to judge not the efficacy of actions, but to infer users' motivations based on patterns of engagement with the subject of the boycott. We argue that Twitter users characterise the surrogate boycott as both instrumental and expressive. While boycott actors demonstrated clearly instrumental motivations in targeting specific companies and industries, the indirect nature of the surrogate boycott also reflected more expressive forms of participation.

Lachlan Poel, Flinders University

Electoral Disinformation in Australia

Democracies are facing increasing challenges from the threat of disinformation. One of these challenges is the threat that electoral disinformation on social media poses to elections. The 2022 federal election saw a rise of unfounded claims on social media about the integrity of Australia's electoral system, as well as misinformation and disinformation targeting policies, parties and candidates, which had the ability to reduce citizen trust in election results and manipulate public opinion. This paper uses oral testimony from Australian parliamentary committee hearings in addition written submissions to the Select Committee on Foreign Interference through Social Media to explore the threats posed to elections by electoral disinformation. The findings will

highlight the potential fragilities within the Australian electoral system, despite vote counting processes themselves being reasonably secure from outside interference.

Emanuela Savini, University of Technology Sydney

Democratic innovations and their representative claim: an exploration of public participation through the institutionalisation of deliberative engagement.

The proliferation of democratic innovations has often been premised by the notion that democracy is in ‘crisis’ (Papadopoulos 2013), and a pervading wariness for structures of elected representation. As part of this, there has been what is described as a ‘deliberative wave’ (OECD 2020), and a burgeoning of initiatives which putatively devolve power and encourage, or legislatively mandate, for broader public participation. Often these processes are championed to improve democratic decision making, founded on the presumption that by involving group of randomly selected citizens, they are less likely to be hindered by bias or political persuasion, and therefore more capable of making decisions for the common good.

In the context of the *Victorian Local Government Act 2020*, which legislated for ‘deliberative engagement’ as part of all local government strategic planning in state, this paper explores the ‘representative claim’ of democratic innovations. It outlines how the promise of broadening participation, beyond what are often referred to as the ‘squeaky wheels’, was one of the most resonant discourses for the authorising environment. However, what emerges from the research is that, despite the rhetoric of more descriptive representation, there was an inherent default to existing channels of participation.

It appears that democratic innovations need to not only be reconciled with structures of elected representation, but also with prevailing avenues for civic participation such as those taken up by social movements (della Porta 2020). This empirical analysis may be useful for understanding what Lowndes (2005, p. 296) describes as an ‘institutional stickiness’, where the practices of government agencies are effectively no different despite legislation for more public participation.

Josh Sunman, Flinders University

Conceptualising Democratic Decline

This paper aims to order the sprawling field of democratic decline through a review of seminal literature, complemented by a scoping review of key concepts. Democratic

decline has been a key and enticing focus for political scientists, philosophers, public law scholars and even media notables over the past decade. It is a phenomenon which has been conceptualized and theorized, as well as measured and analysed, using an array of different descriptive terms. This has generated a myriad of partially overlapping, but not entirely synonymous concepts. What has emerged is a broad and sprawling field of research which, whilst having clear commonality, suffers from a severe lack conceptual clarity. This lack of clarity presents a problem for scholars – how can ongoing challenges to the health of our democracies be successfully understood without common conceptual grounding? As such, rather than trying to develop an all-encompassing or master concept of democratic decline, this paper highlights and groups different concepts which address it. The first component of this is a scholarly literature review to highlight key concepts, map out the major contours of conceptual debate, and provide context around the use of particular terms. This is complemented by a scoping review, which captures the salience of particular concepts over time, and provides insights about what kinds of scholarly literature they have been applied in. The contribution of this paper will assist future research in focusing on the most relevant concepts without contributing to conceptual proliferation which will assist scholars in avoiding becoming mired in an increasingly wide and complex field.

Marija Taflaga, ANU

The challenges to party learning: Making choices about resources

This paper examines the institutional resources of political parties and how parties are required to ration scarce resources between policy-making activities and other competing interests. It will examine how conservative parties have dealt with these relationships at the intra-party level across the United Kingdom and Australia. That is, it will examine how institutional structures of parties and relationships between the party in parliament and the party in central office (and to a lesser degree the party on the ground) influence how decisions about resource allocation are made. It will describe the different dilemmas parties face, and opportunities parties can exploit, depending on their status as either the government or opposition. Here the dilemmas and opportunities of political parties in government and opposition are examined. Given that there exists a large literature on government policy making, the chapter will dedicate more space to outlining the institutional distinctions between government and opposition, in conjunction with resource scarcity, makes opposition an important time in a party's life cycle for the institutionalisation of policy making processes. This paper includes data on the different resources available to each party in different jurisdictions. It will argue that the point that while policy making is a minimal function of political parties (that is they must present some policies to voters to appear credible), the political, institutional and resource contexts in which parties operate are significant.

William J. Wallace, University of Newcastle

Bob Katter's Populist Initiatives: Tilting at Windmills or Misplaced Power Seeking?

Over the past decade Bob Katter and his eponymous Katter's Australian Party (KAP) have established a niche position within the Australian political landscape – one member of the House of Representatives and three members of the Queensland parliament. Katter aimed to attract specific groups of 'rusted off' voters to KAP's policy agenda, and in so doing develop a broader base of support amongst rural and regional voters. However, success in gaining electoral representation is one thing, success in translating that into realising policy objectives is another. This paper compares KAP's stated policy objectives and the legislative program it has pursued in the federal parliament. A thematic content analysis provides the basis for determining the degree of fit between KAP's policy objectives and the legislative agenda KAP has pursued within the federal parliament. The paper argues that while there is a substantial degree of consistency between KAP's policy objectives and its legislative initiatives, Katter has not been able to translate those initiatives into actual legislative outcomes. The paper also considers what this might tell us about Katter's (and KAP's) particular form of populism.

Finley Watson, La Trobe University

The Australian Christian Lobby and the National Policy Agenda

The Australian Christian Lobby (ACL) has been a major presence in Australian politics since its formation in 1995 and has been at the forefront of a number of high profile conservative Christian advocacy campaigns. Despite its prevalence, there has been little interest in understanding the organisation's ability to shape national politics. This paper intends to fill this gap in the literature by analysing the ACL's ability to shape recent debates over same-sex marriage and religious discrimination legislation. It does so by conducting an agenda setting analysis of media and parliamentary discourse concerning these issues between 2010 and 2022. I argue that although the organisation was ultimately unsuccessful in achieving its legislative objectives on same-sex marriage and religious discrimination, it has demonstrated a substantial ability to influence the way these issues were framed, and the salience of their position on the national policy agenda.