

# “Not Parliamentary”?: Australian semi-parliamentarism and the role of the Australian Senate

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Ladies and gentlemen thank you very much for having me speak with you today. My name is Dr Marija Taflaga, Senior Lecturer in the School Politics and International Relations at The Australian National University. And today I’m here to talk to you about a rather obscure subject in some ways—what we call our political system. Now everyone in this room is obviously interested in politics to some degree otherwise you wouldn’t be here, so therefore you might be familiar with the many names that political scientists have coined in an attempt to classify Australia’s hybrid political system. For example you might have heard of Elaine Thompson’s (1980) the Westminster mutation, or other variants such as “strong bicameralism” or my personal favourite Stanley Bach’s (2003) “not parliamentary”.

“Not parliamentary”, I think really encapsulates the dilemma that I encountered when I was asked to contribute to a special symposium on the subject of Australia’s executive-legislative relations (Ganghof, Eppner, and Pörschke 2018; Taflaga 2018). I was invited by visiting German from Prof, Steffan Ganghof, from the University of Potsdam, who developed a new definition for a political system that really wasn’t parliamentary but shared more features with a parliamentary system than not. And this is where the term semi-parliamentary comes from. At first, I have to say I was rather sceptical of this concept of semi-parliamentarism. Did we really need yet another label, yet another typology?

However, I soon changed my mind, deciding that Prof Ganghof was on something, and it reflected the difficulty that other scholars have had in describing Australia’s political system. I came to be a convert to this line of argumentation and in essence my goal here today is to explain to you what it means to be a semi-parliamentary system and to give you a couple of reasons why it might matter.

## **Do labels matter?**

It’s November 1975. The Whitlam government is attempting to stare down an intransigent Senate to get its budget passed. This is not the first time that the Whitlam government has had to face this kind of obstruction from the upper chamber, but in the previous occasion the dispute was resolved by resorting to an election.

The 1975 dismissal crisis is an evocative encapsulation of what happens when political actors do not have an agreed definition of the operating system that they are functioning within and its attendant norms. The first major difficulty was simply that the Liberal and Country Parties were not convinced that Labor had a legitimate right to occupy office. This is an important norm—a big one—but it is not related to our discussion of semi-parliamentarism. The second, and it goes to the heart of what generated the crisis, is that there was not an agreed position amongst the politicians as to what the powers of the Senate were. Without raking over a history that most people know, it was deeply ironic that it was Whitlam and Lionel Murphy who innovated in the area of advocating for and in a

way rediscovering the Senate's latent and dormant powers (see Evans and Laing 2012). In particular, its veto power over normal legislation and its effective veto over budgetary bills. One strand of the debate turned on whether the Senate *could* do what it did by blocking supply. But in reality, it was always a question of whether the Senate *ought* to have done what it did. Because the Senate hadn't used those powers before, the political system struggled to recognise that it always held those powers, which did not mean that the Senate couldn't choose to exercise them.

Third, in what is perhaps less well understood, is the way that Whitlam chose to react to the news that he had been sacked. What happened, was that he went back to the lodge with his closest political confidants to formulate a tactical response to the actions of the Governor general and Malcolm Fraser over beefsteaks. They came up with an ingenious solution, one that went to the heart of parliamentary practice, and it was to call a vote of no-confidence on the floor of the House of Representatives. The fact was that the Fraser opposition simply did not have the numbers in the lower house and therefore could not under the doctrine of responsible government, maintain confidence of the chamber and would have to resign. This would place Governor-General Kerr in the invidious position of having sacked one Prime Minister only to have another, his alternative, sacked by the Parliament. What would Kerr have done in such a circumstance?

Indeed, Kerr was incredibly lucky that he did not end up in that situation. Because in all the excitement, and all the planning, no one bothered to inform the Labor Senate leadership team of what happened. And so, when Reg Withers and the Liberal Senate leadership team informed Labor's Senate team that they were ready to vote, they were only too happy to oblige. The budget, upon which everything hinged, was passed. Whitlam's lower house tactical manoeuvring worked—Fraser was not able to maintain confidence on the floor of the House of Representatives— but it did not matter because the budget had been passed, the immediate crisis had been averted, the machinery of government would keep working and the government would not be facing a literal shutdown. The constitutional crisis was over, and the political crisis would be resolved with an election. This was precisely the deal (pass the budget and go to an election) that Kerr had struck with Malcolm Fraser.

Whitlam's tactical manoeuvring and planning had failed to really account the role of the Senate. He was thinking like someone in a parliamentary system where it is the confidence college, that is the part of the legislature that is responsible for supplying confidence to the executive (the government), that is supreme. In such a system, the other part of the legislature, if there is even one, does not have its own mandate or equal source of legitimacy from voters and the attendant powers to match. Had Whitlam fully appreciated that he operated in a semi-parliamentary system he may have strategized differently, and the 1975 crisis as we know it may have gone another way.

This is an illustrative example of why something seemingly trivial like the correct label for something might in fact really matter. It is also an illustrative example of why we might call Australia semi-parliamentary rather than parliamentary. Parliamentary simply cannot account properly for the role of the Senate and its real-world impact on the way politics actually operates in this country. But does this really matter? And you are right to be sceptical. I would say it does for two reasons.

### **Correct labels resolve disputes and help reforms**

The first is that labels do matter. It's a matter of common sense that if we all agree that swans can be black or white then we are doing a better job of describing reality. In the case of a political system, it can help us to resolve disputes more quickly. And here the common refrain of lower house members criticising the Senate for being obstructionist is a good example. Political history has

demonstrated to us that not only can the Senate block legislation, but enough Australians clearly like it that way, and they vote accordingly.

Having the right labels can also help us to diagnose or clearly identify problems in our political system that we would like to resolve. In this case, it's not the fact that we have two chambers, (a bicameral system) or even that the Senate is powerful that generated the 1975 crisis, it is more that the actors did not have an agreed definition about who could do what and the attendant norms or "the rules of the game". Thus, the dispute arose and it was ultimately resolved in a highly destructive and damaging way, which eventuated in some formalisation of unwritten norms (for example, removing state premier's powers to appoint replacement Senators against the wishes of the relevant parties) and a repeated commitment to informal norms—that parties wouldn't block the budget. Likewise, having a clearer idea of where problems lie naturally helps in the design of solutions. Finally, having a clear conception of what a political system is, means it is easier to compare and learn from other political systems.

Another reason to care whether Australia is a semi-parliamentary system is directly related to our ability to consider the normative possibilities of our political system. Reform debates in Australia are often defined by a set of arguments around the importance of stable government. Rhetorically, this argument rests on the idea that voting for non-parties of government or changing the voting system to achieve higher degrees of proportionality undermines the ability of stable cabinet formation. But, by recognising that our system is not actually parliamentary, but semi-parliamentary we can potentially move beyond this idea that we must make a binary trade-off. This is because our system is already set up to accommodate institutional innovations that can allow us to maximise the strengths of both efficiency or representative focused parliamentary systems — that is stability, efficiency, and proportionality with the strength of presidential systems — which are known for their clear separation of powers and multiple mandates.

### **What is semi-parliamentary is anyway?**

Here is the minimal definition of a semi-parliamentary system as defined by the ideas author, Steffan Ganghof. I note that it's the minimal definition for an "ideal type". This just means it's a textbook definition, rather than one that reflects the messiness of reality. The textbook definition has three components, which we will review in greater depth, so do not panic if you get confused:

- The first, is that no part of the executive is directly elected.
- The second, is it the Prime Minister and the cabinet are selected by an assembly with two parts, only one (in our case, the House of Representatives) can dismiss the cabinet in a no-confidence vote.
- Third, that there must be a second part of the legislature (in our case, the Senate), which has equal or greater democratic legitimacy and a robust veto power over ordinary legislation.

Hopefully, you can see some resemblance to our own political system. But I think to really understand the difference it is important to explain where semi-parliamentarianism fits within other executive-legislative relationships.

There are two main families of executive-legislative relationships. Parliamentary regimes and presidential regimes. Both types have different institutional logics and tend to produce consistently different results which relate directly to their strengths and weaknesses.

*How does semi-parliamentary compare to parliamentary and presidential regimes?*

The major strength of parliamentary systems is typically understood to be their ability to streamline accountability. This is because executives are responsible to a legislature that can sack them. This is in direct contrast to presidential systems, which typically have more formalised separations of power. This has some advantages but the trade-off is lower levels of accountability (though strictly speaking this is debated depending on how accountability is framed/defined (See Strøm 2000)). For example, the legislature cannot sack a president except in extreme circumstances, and even then, it's very difficult to do. The other advantage of a presidential system is that presidents have a high degree of popular legitimacy because they are directly elected by the people, parliamentary systems typically have prime ministers that are appointed by the legislature, but these days, prime ministers are in reality appointed by their parties and have a quasi-popular mandate. Parliamentary systems are typically considered to be more institutionally flexible and therefore better able to adapt with changing times.

What about weaknesses? Parliamentary systems are believed, theoretically, to be better set up for efficient government and clear lines of accountability (again, research suggests that there is actually a great deal of heterogeneity amongst parliamentary systems (see Cheibub, Elkins, and Ginsburg 2014)). However, parliamentary systems do often struggle to balance the legislative parts of the job — that is being representative, deliberative and being a legislative critic with the demands of providing confidence to a government. That is, these days, legislatures in parliamentary systems are often dominated by their executives and therefore do not always do the best job of scrutinising the government.

However, the weaknesses of presidential systems are considered to be more serious (see Linz 1990 for a famous example; Ganghof 2021b). Presidential systems concentrate executive power into the hands of one person. Which is dangerous for obvious reasons. It is perhaps glib to say, but a president is, in effect, a secular King. One of the major ways that presidential systems manage this problem, is by introducing term limits. This does have the consequence of (1) denying governing talent from a regime and (2) undermining accountability. Once a president is in their second term, a major accountability lever (elections) is lost. If a regime is unable to enforce term limits, then the danger of concentrating all that executive power into the hands of one person becomes terribly apparent and a regime may backslide into autocracy.

In reality, parliamentary systems are either set up to favour efficiency or majoritarian values. Efficiency is achieved through majoritarian voting systems which increase the probability of stable majorities with clear lines of accountability. While representational values are achieved via proportionality, typically through proportional representational voting systems common in European democracies or New Zealand. In these systems, coalition governments are formed, reflecting the preferences of a wider number of citizens, but where policy outcomes are subject to compromise. This can blur lines of accountability for voters. As noted, this is to large degree driven by electoral systems, but also by the fact that in parliamentary systems the part of the legislature in charge of providing confidence for the cabinet (the government), is not counter balanced by another part of

the legislature with its own equal mandate and equal powers. In Australia, our Senate is that imperfect counterbalance.

Now scholars came to realise the typology of just parliamentary and presidential systems did not do the best job of capturing variation across systems. In the case of presidential systems, Maurice Duverger (1980) argued that there was such a thing as a semi-presidential system, where he was referring to a polity (eg. France) where a president and a Prime Minister have their own mandates and share executive office.

A few years ago, Steffan Ganghof (Ganghof 2017; Ganghof, Eppner, and Pörschke 2018) argued the same about parliamentary systems. That there was a distinct and different subgroup called semi-parliamentary systems. He argued that the Australia Commonwealth, most of the Australian states and Japan constituted such a system.

#### *A minimal definition of semi-parliamentarism*

Let's look at this minimal definition again in a bit more detail.

The **first** condition is that no part of the executive is directly elected. That is, for the executive only one mandate is sought in effect, and it is channelled through the chain of delegation from voters to the legislature and then to the executive, via Parliament. That is, the executive holds an indirect mandate, which is channelled through, and dependent on, the legislature. In the Westminster tradition (Rhodes, Wanna, and Weller 2009) we call this responsible government. That is, the executive is drawn from the legislature and is in turn responsible to it. Put another way, the legislature can fire the cabinet. There are no rival sources of legitimacy for executive power as in the case of a semi-presidential system.

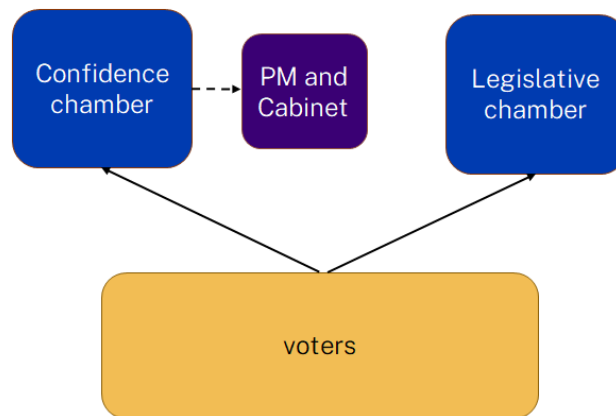
The **second** condition is that the executive is selected by a legislature with two parts, where only one part has the power to dismiss the cabinet via a no-confidence vote. This has important implications. As only one part of the legislature is responsible for supplying confidence to the government (our HoR), it means the other part of the legislature (our Senate) can go in very interesting and creative directions in terms of democratic and normative experimentation. Importantly, this second part of the legislature (our Senate) can do this without threatening the ability of a stable government to be formed with clear lines of accountability. Which in this case may simply boil down to everyone knows who to blame when something has gone wrong.

It's important to note that I said *two parts* and not *two chambers*. A semi-parliamentary system *does not* rest on it being bicameral. In fact, it is entirely possible to construct a semi-parliamentary system with one chamber. All that is required is that one part of the legislature is in charge of supplying confidence to the cabinet and the other part can (in theory) do whatever it likes. For example, we could have a unicameral semi-parliamentary system by having a nationwide electorate that used a proportional representational voting system. You might argue that parties need to clear a 2 per cent threshold to claim their seats on a strictly proportionate basis, but a party would need to clear a much higher percentage of the vote (eg. 10 per cent, 15 per cent 20 per cent ), in order to vote in no-confidence motions. In this way, you've created two parts of a legislature, with different jobs (Ganghof 2017).

The **third** element is that the second part of the legislature—in Australia that's our Senate—has equal or greater democratic legitimacy. That is, it has its own mandate from voters, which is where our Senate differs from the House of Lords in the UK or the Canadian upper chamber whose

members are appointed by the government of the day. It also matters that this second part of the legislature has robust veto powers, which make it a meaningful adversary for the part of the legislature responsible for providing confidence to the cabinet (In Australia, this is the House of Representatives).

Here is an example of what this looks like in abstract terms (Figure 1).

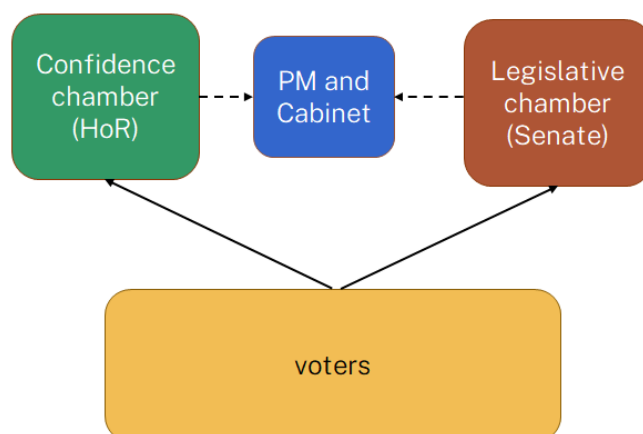


**Figure 1: Two Parts of the legislature: an ideal type of semi-parliamentary executive-legislative relations**

*Source: adapted from Ganghof (2021a).*

Voters elect the confidence chamber from which the executive is selected. Voters also elect a legislative chamber, which can concentrate on the deliberative, representational, and scrutineering jobs. In this idealised/simplified schema Ganghof (2021a) has (perhaps cynically) highlighted the lack of deliberation going on in the confidence chamber, which is focused on maintaining the position of the government.

Here is what it looks like at the Australian Commonwealth level (Figure 2).



**Figure 2: Two Parts of the legislature in Semi-Parliamentary in the Australian Commonwealth**

Voters elect the House of Representatives, which in effect is, typically and overwhelmingly, dominated by the government of the day. The Australian Commonwealth House of Representatives acts like a confidence chamber. Voters also elect legislative chamber, the Senate, which is more

proportional though not absolutely so. This is where the majority of the deliberative and scrutinising work of the legislature is thought to be done in the Australian Commonwealth. This reality is in large part the result of the power of the Senate's committee system and reflected in the Senate's standing orders, which are much more favourable to smaller parties and the opposition. At the Commonwealth level the executive is drawn from both chambers, but critically the government lives or dies by its ability to maintain confidence in the House of Representatives alone.

Now some of you are probably thinking, sure the Senate is more deliberative and representative than the House, but could it do more? As mentioned before, the minimal definition given reflects an ideal type and here we can see that on the six measures that Ganghof (2017) developed to assess a semi-parliamentary system, the Senate is only fulfilling three out of six. That is because of the high degree of disproportionality in our upper house. For example, a Senate vote in New South Wales is worth less than it is in Tasmania because of the differences in population size. The Australian Senate also lacks an absolute budget veto, however, as we have seen with the example of the dismissal crisis above, it has a *near* absolute budget veto. Additionally, the Senate does not maintain its veto when the conflict resolution mechanism is triggered, that is we have the double dissolution mechanism to resolve deadlocks between the chambers.

Incidentally, institutionally at least, New South Wales does meet the definition of an ideal type. However, anyone who follows politics and the 'bear pit', would not readily characterise NSW politics as an ideal type of gentle democracy and it retains features many citizens do not like such as highly visible adversarialism. That is because the institutional design of a political system is not the only factor in determining how systems run. The actors matter too, which we will discuss a little later.

### *But why does this matter?*

Before I go on, it's important to remind ourselves why this matters. The answer is quite simple: I told you at the beginning of this lecture that often when we discuss political reform in Australia, we are given a false binary between stable government and greater representation. But as I have attempted to demonstrate, our political system is already structured to do both normative jobs of efficiency and representation well. This is because we have these two parts of our legislature that draw equal legitimacy, but where only one part has to supply confidence to the government. This means that we can have one part of a legislature doing the job of providing confidence in the government, cabinet stability, and clear lines of accountability, while the other part of a legislature can be pushing further down the road towards more meaningful deliberation, scrutiny, representation and even normative experimentation.

### **What might we want out of our political system? Norm, trade-offs and semi-parliamentarism**

So let us consider norms, in the light of a semi-parliamentary system. One way to do this is to think what we want from our political system. Typically, we tend to think of normative values falling under the efficiency banner or the representational banner.

The efficiency of the system relates to three factors:

- First, **identifiability**, or how easy it is for voters to identify policy alternatives between potential governments. In reality, this happens between parties that form government.
- Second, **cabinet stability**, that is how easy it is for a government to maintain its grip on power and who it must negotiate with in order to do so. This is directly related to the;
- Third, which is the **clarity of responsibility**. This boils down to how easy it is for citizens to work out who to blame when things go wrong.

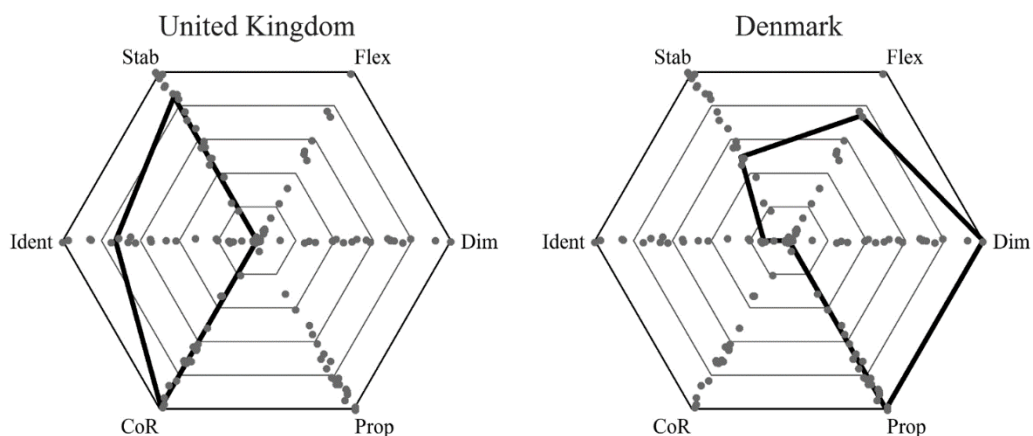
In European-style proportional representation systems, which rely on coalition governments, it is harder for voters to work out exactly who to blame. In the UK, it is very easy to know exactly who is to blame, because of its majoritarian system, which produces strong majority governments that lack a meaningful challenger. In fact, efficiency is typically thought to be most prevalent in majoritarian systems.

By contrast, representational values emphasise three different factors:

- First, **proportionality**, that is how well the electoral system translates votes by the public into legislative outcomes. This is typically understood to mean seats in Parliament.
- Second, **dimensionality**, which is how well the system reflects that voter’s preferences aren’t uniform across the left-right spectrum. That is someone might like lower taxes (typically coded “right”), but also a lot of education spending (typically coded “left”).
- The final relates to **flexibility**, which is how much governments are able to choose amongst coalition partners when constructing voting majorities to pass legislation. Greater flexibility means an increased likelihood that of a larger number of voters preferences may be incorporated into the totality of government decision-making.

Importantly, these trade-offs are linked, but not necessarily always zero-sum.

If we consider what these norms might look like in the real world, we can see how different political systems can do a better or worse job at fulfilling all six normative dimensions. Figure 3 is a graphic demonstration of the six dimensions used by Ganghof (2017).

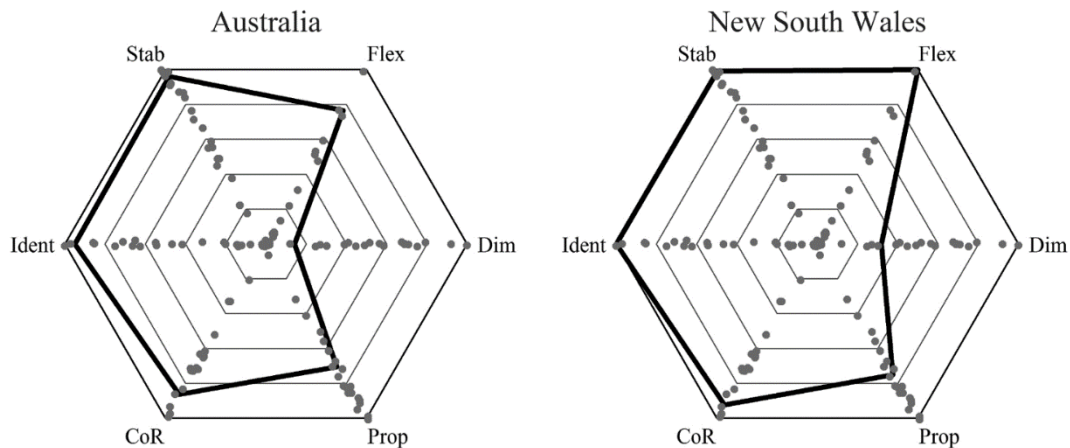


**Figure 3: United Kingdom and Denmark mapped on six normative dimensions (Ganghof 2017)**

In Figure 3, we have the example of the United Kingdom and Denmark, which are considered the ideal type for an efficient parliamentary system and a representational parliamentary system respectively. Here we can see that the UK does a very good job of fulfilling the efficient normative dimensions but performs poorly in terms of representational normative dimensions. By contrast, Denmark is very strong on the representational normative dimensions and comparatively quite weak at the efficient normative dimensions.

If we compare this with the Australian Commonwealth and New South Wales (Figure 4), which if you recall is considered an ideal type of a semi-parliamentary system, we can begin to see how Australian models of executive-legislative relations performs better on both the efficient and representative normative dimensions. Where these models struggle is in the area of dimensionality, or the system’s ability to reflect voters’ multidimensional views on policy issues.





**Figure 4: The Australian Commonwealth and New South Wales mapped on six normative dimensions (Ganghof 2017)**

Importantly, the reason why Australian models of executive-legislative relations can perform well across a higher number of normative dimensions, is because our upper chambers (the second part of our legislatures) are not responsible for providing confidence in the cabinet and they are also powerful in their own right.

Now some of you might be thinking, well that spider diagram looks great, but why do I feel politics does a bad job? That is a complicated question.

#### **Institutions matter and so do actors**

One of the main reasons why Australians may feel so dissatisfied with politics is because a lot of discussion of executive-legislative relations tends to overlook or under-play the importance of political parties as key actors. The reality is that although legislative theory tends to assume voters elect representatives who then do all of the deliberative, representational, scrutiny hearing and confidence-securing work of legislature, it's actually political parties that occupy and execute these functions rather than individual legislators.

Political parties are in effect interest aggregators. They make it easier for voters to work out who to vote for by providing us with ideological shortcuts. They are also subject to their own internal logics driven by their formal and informal institutional norms (Poguntke, Webb, and Scarrow 2017). Parties are highly adaptive and are outstanding at extracting resources from the state and work hard to lock out competition were possible (Katz and Mair 1995). Reform to Australia's voting system is a ready example of this: politicians appear to make reforms when the existing system appears threatening to the interests of parties of government. But it does mean that legislative systems that were designed before parties became dominant mean that there is a gap between the ideals and the reality of what actually happens.

Parties are not all bad though. Parties are also important democratic linkages between the executive and the governed. However, the capability of parties to act as a meaningful democratic linkage has significantly deteriorated over time. Parties struggle to attract members from a wide cross-section of society. Voters are different than they were in the 1950s and are not interested in programmatic politics in the same way as they once were. Aside from electoral pressure and competition there are few institutional incentives for political parties to take the democratic linkage role seriously. They have learnt they can occupy office with small organisations that are not reflective of the general public (Dalton and Wattenberg 2002).

Political parties are the key actors that interpret both the formal and informal rules of how politics operates. And we can see this very clearly in the evolution of the Senate's role. Our nation's constitutional framers (who were overwhelmingly white men) argued over the precise role of the Senate. Many were wary of giving the Senate the vast powers that were eventually written in to the Constitution (Galligan 1995; Uhr 1998). After the solidification of the party system in 1910, and the way the voting system operated meant that the Senate was typically dominated by whichever party won government and the chamber produced supermajority at that.

The result was that the Senate was not the location of contestation that we understand to be today. That was in large part because of the way parliamentary actors and political parties understood the Senate to function, or wanted it, to function that way.

It was only the result of a change to the voting system and, later, the rise of the Democratic Labor Party that both voters and parliamentarians began to come to grips with the representational normative potential of the Senate. It started with people voting for minor parties, senators began advocating for the chambers' right to fulfil its democratic functions; they created the committee system and evolve the standing orders to better reflect a more equal relationship between government and opposition. The political parties were essential actors in seeing these changes and evolutions occur and its political parties that continue to see our legislative institutions evolve (Bach 2003).

So now that we have an idea of what a semi-parliamentary system is, and what some of the implications might be, what we might do with this knowledge?

### **Semi-parliamentarism and implications for reform**

We know that in recent years Australians' have been frustrated with the political system. Levels of satisfaction with democracy were in steady decline from the time of the election of the Labor Rudd government until they reversed—a little—after the election of the Labor Albanese government (Cameron and McAllister 2022).

Indeed, the data shows a mixed picture. When we consider questions of trust, voters have low levels of trust in government, and, overwhelmingly, believe that people in government look after themselves. Australians also believe that the government is run for a few big interests rather than everyone which matches their feelings that governments are too distant from ordinary people. Yet, Australians generally believe that their vote matters. And that it can make a difference (Cameron and McAllister 2022, 101–5).

The long-term trends indicate that there is a cyclical dimension, with declines in satisfaction aligning with significant political crises. What was so alarming about the long-term decline in trust in recent years was the fact that the election of a new government in 2013 did not seem to make a difference. What is interesting about the 2022 data, is that people seem to be more satisfied with democracy, but still do not rate governments or politicians very highly.

Indeed, it seems Australians have low confidence in politicians as a class of actors because they appear out of touch and have in recent decades increasingly appeared to run government in favour of elites. Yet, voters still think that who they vote for matters and there is an underlying faith in the overall system. These trends points to, in part, a disillusionment with political parties for some of the reasons that I outlined above, particularly relating to the breakdown of parties role as vital civic linkages.

However, our political system has responded to this (perception?) deficit through intense local organising. The “voices of” and “Teal” movements are an exciting live experiment in grassroots democracy. It has demonstrated that the political system can still generate sufficient electoral competition to keep the major parties on their toes. But significantly, these independent movements are not institutionalised to the same degree as political parties.

Indeed, one of their virtues is their flexibility and dependence on meaningful civic engagement. Their success has shown that Australians are interested and desirous of more meaningful representation and would like the legislature to do a better job on some of the representative norms outlined earlier. The risk, however, of relying on independence movements is the large amount of informal volunteer labour required to sustain them. There is no guarantee that the movement will continue or that it will deliver the results that the community wants.

This is not to talk down independents movements, rather it is to point out that we can think about how to introduce formalised institutional features that improve Australia's representational outcomes. We may want to add more members to the legislature in order to weaken party discipline, which contributes to several undesirable outcomes (such as the way it generates multiple disincentives towards open deliberation and

debate). We could consider different kinds of proportional representational arrangements in order to increase proportionality. We could consider creating an explicit confidence college, in effect formalising the reality of how politics is largely practised in the House of Representatives and concurrently experiment with different representational models in the Senate.

The point is that our system is already configured in such a way that we do not have to trade off stability for a different representational outcome. We can, actually, manage both well. This doesn't mean that there wouldn't be unintended consequences—there almost certainly would be. It just means that a core argument that we hear for not undertaking reforms—that we are a *parliamentary system* and that we should not put stable government at risk—is just not true. We are a semi-parliamentary system that already does a better job than most systems at balancing off norms of efficiency with norms of representation and we could do more if we desired it as a nation.

Of course, because most of us have never heard of semi-parliamentary system. Further to that, I suspect my argument is not terribly popular if results from the AES, which shows that Australians are lukewarm about the Senate's alternative mandate (Figure 5). Thought, importantly, between 20 and 30 per cent of Australians appear to have no opinion either way.

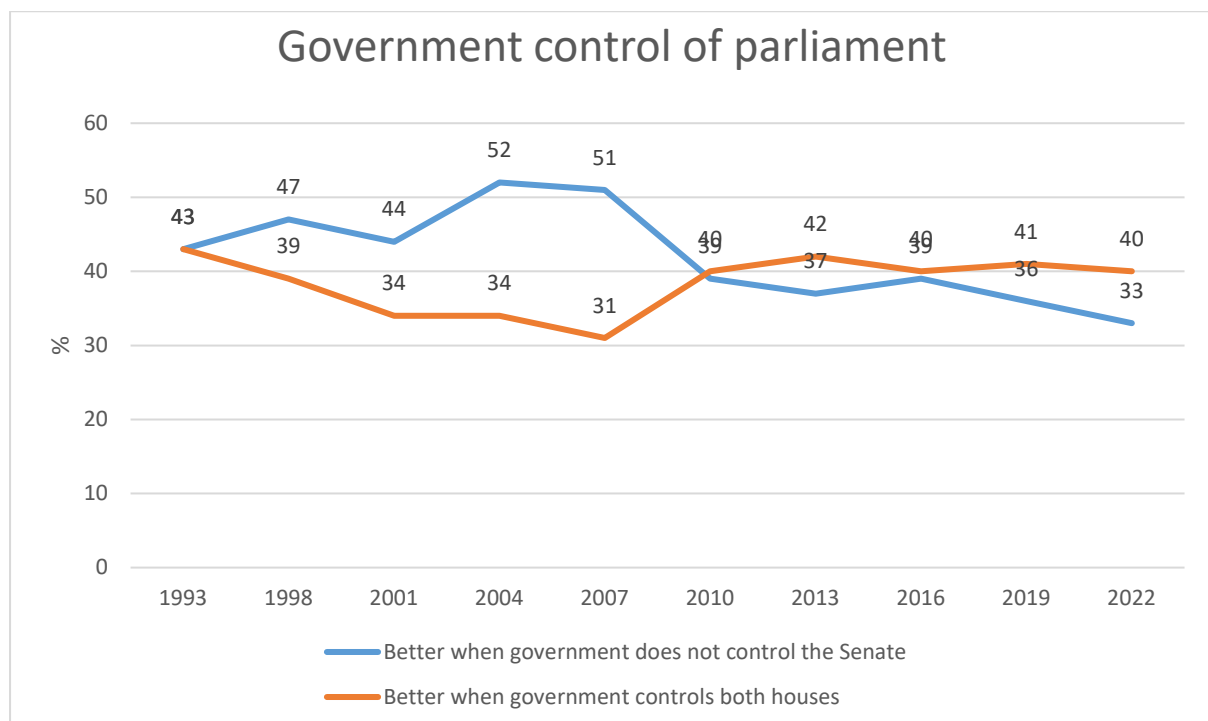


Figure 5: Government Control of Parliament (Australian Election Study, Trends 2022 p. 107)

But perhaps this is because we are thinking like people who believe they are in the parliamentary system, rather than a semi-parliamentary one.

Thank you. Are there any questions?

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