16

THE AUSTRALIAN GREENS

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In May 2019, green parties were surging across Europe in the elections for the European Parliament, reaching their highest vote and representational levels of all time. In contrast, the Australian Greens saw some gains in the vote in the Senate, but only as a partial recovery towards the levels of support they enjoyed in 2010. Climate change, described by former prime minister Kevin Rudd as 'the greatest moral, economic and social challenge of our time', was expected to be a key focus for the election. Yet this did not occur; so, what happened?

First, it must be acknowledged that the Australian Greens (the Greens) did have a better election result than in 2016. The 2019 election brought a renewed focus on the environment, a reduced number of parties on the Senate ballot paper and an opportunity to focus on rebuilding the party's vote and image. The Greens retained their Senate seats in all six States, significantly increasing their vote in South Australia and Queensland. This chapter will explore why the election did not in fact become the climate change election, including some of the dynamics at play within the party, as well as the nature of the Greens' campaign.

Candidates

The Greens fielded candidates in all 151 House of Representatives seats and 35 in the Senate contest. Two of the House of Representatives candidates (in Lalor and Parkes) resigned over social media posts. Across all candidates, the Greens came close to gender parity (50.5 per cent men), and also fielded the only 'sex unspecified' candidate of the election.

In the Senate, the Greens nominated six candidates in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia, four in South Australia, three in Tasmania and two each in the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory. At this election, the party was also defending six of the nine Senate seats won in 2016. The senators standing for the Greens were not, however, the same team that had been successful in 2016. Two key replacements, one due to Section 44(i) of the Constitution and one to retirement, saw Jordon Steele-John replace Scott Ludlam in Western Australia and Mehreen Faruqi replace Lee Rhiannon in New South Wales. Disability advocate Steele-John took the seat previously held by the popular Ludlam after Ludlam discovered post election that he was in fact a New Zealand citizen, and Rhiannon lost her preselection to Faruqi in what some saw as a changing of the guard in New South Wales (for a fuller discussion of Section 44 issues, see Hobbs et al. 2018). Larissa Waters in Queensland had also fallen foul of Section 44 post election, with her seat initially taken by former Australian Democrat Senator Andrew Bartlett, but Bartlett resigned early to allow Waters to retake her seat, having renounced her previously unknown Canadian citizenship. All six defending senators had won three-year half-terms in 2016, so now had the opportunity to win full six-year terms.

In the House of Representatives, Adam Bandt recontested his seat of Melbourne, local firefighter Jim Casey challenged Anthony Albanese again in Grayndler, while Bartlett took on Liberal MP Trevor Evans in Brisbane. These would be the target seats in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, respectively. The Greens in Victoria also had hopes for three further seats: Cooper (formerly Batman), Macnamara (Melbourne Ports) and Wills. The party had come close to taking Batman in the 2016 election, though had faded slightly at the by-election in 2018. With a new candidate in Cooper, former Greens Senate candidate David Risstrom, the party might have been forgiven for thinking its chances were indeed

good in that seat. Equally, the former MP for Melbourne Ports, Michael Danby, retired at the election, leaving an open seat, and the Greens, with 2016 candidate Steph Hodgins-May recontesting, might have fancied their chances.
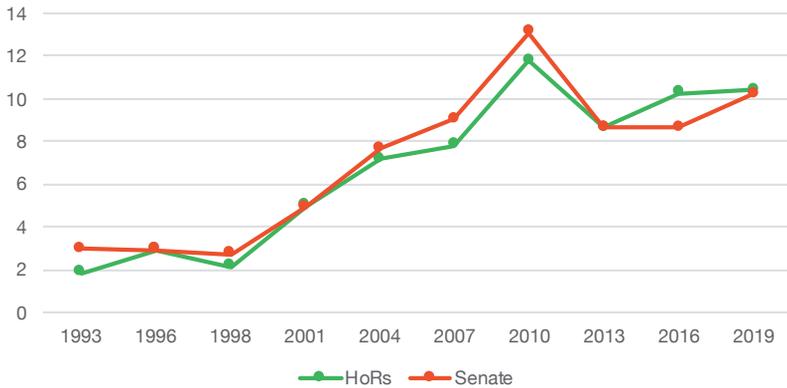
Results

The results show an overall increase in the Greens' Senate vote of just over 1.5 per cent, but the House of Representatives staying fairly stable. When we examine the State-by-State results, we can see the results overall are buoyed by increases in Queensland and South Australia. This is repeated in the House of Representatives. One point to note is that the South Australian result is most likely due to the disappearance from the ballot paper of Nick Xenophon and his NXT ticket, which had polled more than 21 per cent in 2016.

Table 16.1 Preliminary Australian Greens results

	Senate		House of Representatives	
State	**Primary**	**Change**	**Primary**	**Change**
NSW	8.73	1.32	8.71	–0.24
Vic.	10.62	–0.25	11.89	–1.24
Qld	9.94	3.12	10.32	1.49
WA	11.81	1.48	11.62	–0.44
SA	10.91	5.03	9.61	3.40
Tas.	12.57	1.41	10.12	–0.10
ACT	17.71	1.61	16.85	1.76
NT	10.24	–0.54	10.15	1.06
National	**10.20**	**1.58**	**10.40**	**0.17**

Source: AEC (2019).

As can be seen from Figure 16.1, there was steady growth in votes for the Australian Greens from 1998 to 2010 and the resumption of a slight upward trend from 2016.

Figure 16.1 House and Senate results for the Australian Greens, 1993–2019

Source: AEC (2019).

We can compare these with results from recent European Parliament elections in which Greens polled particularly strongly: Germany, 20.5 per cent; Belgium, 15.2 per cent; France, 13.5 per cent; Denmark, 13.2 per cent; the United Kingdom, 11.8 per cent; Sweden, 11.5 per cent; Ireland, 11.4 per cent; and the Netherlands, 10.9 per cent. Of the major Western European nations, it was only in Italy that Greens failed. For green parties in the European Parliament, this meant increasing their numbers by almost 50 per cent, from 55 to 74 (European Parliament 2019). In Germany—the new powerhouse of green politics—the Greens appear to be close to replacing the Social Democrats as the main Opposition party. The Australian Greens therefore sit towards the lower end of success when seen in comparison with their European cousins, even while they can claim to be one of the first green parties in the world (Crowley 1996: 532).

What is clear from the results, however, is that the Greens' Senate vote in the three largest States is now lagging behind that in all other States and the Australian Capital Territory. The situation in the House of Representatives is a little more complicated, but the overall impression is that the vote increase the Greens experienced in 2016 (from the low of 2013) has eased. Yet it is also obvious that the explanation is more complicated than that. A closer look at the seats where the Greens polled more than 20 per cent (Table 16.2), which includes those that are current and future potential target seats for the party, shows some interesting developments.

Table 16.2 Divisional Australian Greens results

Seat	Vote	+/–
Melbourne	49.30	4.70
Wills	26.62	–4.29
Macnamara	24.24	0.08
Griffith	23.65	6.67
Canberra	23.31	4.59
Grayndler	22.55	0.31
Brisbane	22.37	2.94
Higgins	22.47	–1.72
Kooyong	21.24	2.65
Cooper	21.14	–15.53
Ryan	20.35	1.59
Richmond	20.32	–0.12

Source: AEC (2019).

One point to note is that, with exception of Richmond, these are all inner urban seats. The trend of Greens doing particularly well in inner urban seats has been documented before (Jackson 2018) but is demonstrated again here. However, it might also be noted that, apart from the seat of Melbourne, the Victorian Greens did not have a successful election. Falls in Wills (–4.3 per cent), Higgins (–1.8 per cent) and, most dramatically, in Cooper (–15.5 per cent), with a status quo result for Macnamara (0.1 per cent), suggest a stagnation of Greens support in Victoria. The result in Kooyong, where high-profile barrister Julian Burnside took on Treasurer Josh Frydenberg—although heralded as a potential boilover—yielded a small primary swing of 2.6 per cent, and a TPP result of 44.3:55.7 (a larger, 7.1 per cent swing). In Melbourne, the increase in the primary vote was 4.7 per cent, though only a 2.8 per cent swing on TPP, with sitting MP Adam Bandt returned easily after the ALP candidate, Luke Creasey, withdrew partway through the campaign after injudicious social media comments by him came to light (Doran and Sweeney 2019). While good overall results in Melbourne and Kooyong were recorded, this was also less than might have been expected.

The problematic results in Victoria mirror in some way the problems the party faced in the 2018 Victorian State election, in which the Greens were expected to win new seats while retaining their upper house seats. However, a bruising (and ultimately unsuccessful) Batman by-election

in March 2018, with claims of undermining of the Greens candidate by disgruntled party members and local councillors, left a pall over the campaign. This overshadowed the win for the Greens in the Northcote by-election the previous November. The end result of the election was very mixed, with the Greens retaining two of their previously held seats (Melbourne and Prahran), winning the seat of Brunswick, but losing Northcote to the ALP. The upper house vote was down only slightly but, combined with a preference cartel between minor parties put together by Glenn Druery, the Greens lost four of their five seats (VEC 2018).

In a similar fashion, the NSW branch of the party emerged from a bitter, divisive and damaging previous year, yet recorded a solid rise in their Senate vote, even as the vote for the House of Representatives stagnated. The NSW State election in March, just two months before the federal election, meant keeping the party campaigning through two major elections in the first five months of the year, which it managed in relatively good order.

A year earlier, in May 2018, the 'Eastern Bloc' faction of the party had won the key preselections for the State's upper house (Visentin 2018). This was followed by Rhiannon's departure from the Senate in August 2018 after being defeated by Faruqi. The year was rounded out with the ouster from the party of State MP Jeremy Buckingham, prompting bitter attacks from both within and outside the party, but with the national party refusing to get involved. The beginning of 2019 started with a challenge in the courts to the existing State preselections, but once this was dismissed, the party successfully returned all its sitting MPs up for election, with their three State lower house MPs increasing their margins. Buckingham ran as an Independent but polled only 0.26 per cent, compared with his former party's 9.73 per cent (NSW Electoral Commission 2019). Finally, MLC Justin Field—not up for election until 2022 and a factional ally of Buckingham's—resigned from the party in April 2019, just before the federal election was called. However, for the first time in a number of years, the Greens were able to enter an election reasonably unified, with a popular candidate. The campaign period was therefore one of bringing the success and unity of the State campaign into the federal arena, with Faruqi's election perhaps signalling a change for the better for the NSW party.

A different story again can be seen in the Queensland branch of the party, with an increase in votes across the inner urban seats of Brisbane: Griffith, Ryan, Moreton and Lilley. This followed on from successful 2017 State and 2016 Brisbane City Council elections, in which the Greens won their first assembly seat in their own right and their first Brisbane City councillor—both in single-member districts. The campaign was boosted by the return of Larissa Waters. The Queensland party therefore presented a unified campaign. However, one element not effectively dealt with was Bob Brown's 'Stop Adani caravan', which appeared to galvanise anti-Greens sentiment in some quarters (SBS 2019b). This would indicate that the Greens have not found an appropriate role for their high-profile former leader.

South Australia saw the most dramatic shift in Greens fortunes, although this is also easily ascribable to the lack of the NXT ticket on the ballot. At the same time, the Greens' increase of 4.9 per cent was second only to the Liberal Party in terms of recovery of vote, suggesting that NXT voters in South Australia are now at least partly identifying the Greens' Sarah Hanson-Young as a fair replacement for their aspirations. While not recovering to its 2010 level, the House of Representatives vote for the Greens of 9.61 per cent remains the second-best result in nearly 30 years of the Greens contesting South Australian seats, and a substantial recovery from the 2016 result.

In the other States and Territories, the rises were generally more muted. While the Australian Capital Territory, Tasmania and Western Australia all recorded rises of around 1.5 per cent, this was really more of a status-quo result, and certainly in the case of Western Australia, it did not return the party to the 15.6 per cent heights of the 2014 Senate by-election. In the House of Representatives, the results were again muted, with no opportunities to advance in the inner urban seats of Perth, Canberra or Denison.

Campaign focus

If we are to believe the political rhetoric leading up to polling day, this was the 'climate change election'—as had been claimed for the elections in 2007 and 2010 (Grube 2014). Certainly, this was the point made by a series of polls and commentary in the lead-up to the election, with electors suggesting climate change was a significant issue (Hanrahan 2019;

Kassam 2019; SBS 2019a; Wade 2019a, 2019b). But was this borne out by the election media of the Greens themselves? Greens Leader Richard Di Natale's 'Leader's Address' to the National Press Club on 1 May highlighted that climate change, along with a series of other issues, would be important for the Greens campaign, but was clearly not the sole focus (Di Natale 2019). The Greens might therefore be expected to focus their media specifically on climate change. As we can see from Table 16.3, however, a different picture emerges—of many different issues covered by multiple voices.

Table 16.3 Australian Greens' media releases, 2019 campaign

Candidate	Media releases	Topic
Di Natale	7	Employment (1), Bob Hawke (1), health (1), democracy (1), environment (1), foreign affairs (1), Budget (1)
Bandt	9	Industrial relations (2), environment (6), employment (1), science and technology (1), election campaign (1)
Siewert	22	Employment (2), social security (5), mental health (4), environment (2), election campaign (1), Indigenous affairs (7), housing (1)
Hanson-Young	12	Environment (8), energy (1), Budget (1), communications (1), election campaign (1)
Whish-Wilson	8	Energy (3), environment (3), Budget (2)
Rice	17	Transport (2), environment (6), agriculture (2), LGBTQI issues (2), Budget (3), foreign affairs (2)
McKim	2	Environment (1), election campaign (1)
Waters	8	Environment (2), democracy (1), infrastructure (1), energy (2), election campaign (2)
Steele-John	6	Environment (2), disability (2), election campaign (2)
Faruqi	8	Animal welfare (1), housing (1), child care (2), environment (1), education (1), election campaign (2)

Source: Media releases as listed on Greens' webpage, from 1 April 2019 to 18 May 2019: greensmps.org.au/terms/article-type/media-release.

This needs to be considered in the context of a campaign that appeared to be driven by a particular agenda on the Coalition side—that of the paramount leader (Morrison) battling it out with the challenger (Shorten). The ALP's election material tended to emphasise the group nature of the ALP front bench, but Morrison's relentlessly personalised campaign

meant that Shorten was the key focus. In the context of a presidential-style campaign, the State-based and MP-focused campaign of the Greens struggled to cut through.

Taken together, we might consider Norris's (2000, 2004) concept of the 'premodern', 'modern' and 'postmodern' campaigns. The constituency turn for which the ALP had been lauded in Victoria (Mills 2014) remained a core part of the Greens' campaign, especially as they struggled to match the funding to run the kind of successful television advertising associated with 'modern' campaigning. The form of meta-campaigning associated with the postmodern campaign—using the party's social media access as the principal avenue for influencing voters—might then be seen as the key to a new form of Greens campaigning. Indeed, Hanson-Young, with 157,000 Twitter followers (more than Di Natale's 127,000), might be seen as pursuing the archetypal campaign, with some 120 tweets on a variety of issues during the campaign. Yet this form of campaigning can also be viewed as primarily supporting a more localised campaign structure in South Australia (particularly in relation to local issues such as the Murray–Darling river system).

When we follow this through and examine the number of followers and posts on Facebook for the various MPs, we find a shift in focus. For instance, more than half of Hanson-Young's posts on her Facebook page (for which she has 134,000 followers) covered environmental issues (44 of 83). The majority of these posts focused on three particular issues: the Murray–Darling river system, the Great Australian Bight and climate change. Certainly, in terms of the Greens' more outwardly facing campaign, the focus was much more on the environment than on the general set of issues that Hanson-Young normally has carriage of and is known for. The other thing platforms such as Facebook offer is the potential for at least some interaction. Although the site did not record a large number of conversations between Hanson-Young and others, it did have videos, commentary from volunteers and endorsements from high-profile individuals (Hanson-Young highlighted two, from columnist and commentator Jane Caro and former Australian cricketer Jason Gillespie.) As to whether this works, the simple fact of having 134,000 followers suggests some level of penetration. By way of comparison, Hanson-Young featured in only 14 stories in the main South Australian daily, the Adelaide *Advertiser*, with climate change and the Great Australian Bight featuring in seven of those.

Table 16.4 Social media followers of Greens candidates

MPs	Twitter	Facebook	Instagram
Di Natale	125,000	112,000	17,000
Bandt	179,000	125,000	7,000
Siewert	13,000	21,000	1,000
Hanson-Young	157,000	134,000	7,000
Whish-Wilson	17,000	26,000	2,000
Rice	11,000	26,000	2,000
McKim	17,000	38,000	2,000
Waters	64,000	80,000	15,000
Steele-John	10,000	34,000	6,000
Faruqi	21,000	60,000	5,000

Sources: Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

While the numbers contained in Table 16.4 are just 'viewing figures', they give some idea of the apparent social media preferences of each of the MPs. Hanson-Young is a significant performer on Facebook and Twitter but much less so on Instagram. In at least some respects, this fits with activity shifts and preferences noted in how campaigns use social media (Kreiss et al. 2018). Instagram is clearly favoured, at least to some degree, by Di Natale and Waters, while Bandt is a heavy user of Twitter. By way of comparison, former Greens Senator Scott Ludlam, much noted for both his tech-savviness and his following, still retains 117,000 Twitter followers and tweets regularly on issues of democracy, climate change and energy.

Campaign structure

As with previous Greens campaigns, the core campaign structures were housed within the State branches. The national office, apart from providing extensive research elements, left the running of the individual State campaigns to the State branches (see Kefford 2018). That there were six senators up for election meant there were parallel structures operating (a State-based structure as well as the national parliamentarians and national campaign coordinator). This election was the second without the necessity of preference negotiations around the group voting ticket (GVT), but it remained important to ensure consistency and the distribution of how-to-vote material. The negotiations themselves were

then directed to supporting particular candidates and parties, with the result that 82 per cent of Greens preferences favoured the ALP over the Coalition (see Raue, Chapter 9, this volume).

This structuring also meant that the bulk of funding for the campaign was held at the State level. Whether this lack of centralisation worked for or against the party should be the subject of further investigation, as it would appear that, although the individual States still contribute funding to the national body, this is primarily for the maintenance of the national organisation, as opposed to actual campaigning. National campaigning itself still reflects only an equivalent proportion of party funding to the NSW or Victorian campaign budgets. For the more populous States such as New South Wales and Victoria, regular staffing (in New South Wales, approximately10 full-time and part-time staff) is supplemented with four to five campaign-specific staff. In less populous States such as Western Australia, regular staffing numbers double in size.

Conclusion

The Greens would be fairly pleased with the result, given the major party posturing. Morrison's focus on Shorten set up a presidential-style campaign—a recurring feature of Australian elections—that did not allow the Greens the freedom they might otherwise have enjoyed. The party had struggled somewhat with internal issues over the year preceding the election, with resolution being reached only in New South Wales. The lack of resolution clearly dogged the party in Victoria, even as New South Wales seemed to emerge more united, if somewhat battered. The results do, unfortunately, have the capacity to reignite tensions both within and between the State parties. Certainly, both the NSW and the Victorian branches will have troubling fulfilling national funding priorities given their loss of State MPs. Even while returning their sitting senators and State MPs, for the Victorian and NSW parties, the loss of five and two State MPs, respectively, with only a marginal increase in the federal vote means a possible period of financial belt-tightening.

The shift in the vote in Queensland, however, would have to be seen as a high point for the party. The Queensland Greens—once constantly beset by internal division—are now winning seats at all levels of government. The resurgence of the South Australian party, coupled with steady results

elsewhere, places the party in a moderately good position going forward. This would appear to indicate that the Greens are not in any immediate danger of following the path of the Australian Democrats.

With a wait until August 2020 for the Northern Territory election (followed in October by both the Australian Capital Territory and Queensland), the party will have an opportunity to consolidate, build more robust internal processes and rebuild membership and funding.

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