

# **Labo(u)r Governments, Consultation and the New Social Democracy**

**Five case studies of consultation by Labo(u)r  
governments in Britain and Australia (1997–  
2008)**

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## Summary

Labo(u)r governments in Britain and Australia have shown a renewed interest in democratic renewal. A confluence of agendas has triggered an attempt to reformulate the relationship between the state and civil society: the dominance of neo-liberalism, the influence of the New Public Management, declining political trust, and crucially, changing patterns of political participation. Yet, despite these factors, these Labo(u)r governments have been ambivalent about the value of democratic renewal. Their experiments in 'democratising democracy' have been limited to top-down 'big-picture' consultations. The consultation experiments have been underscored by a number of difficulties and contradictions, not least a tension between devolving responsibility but centralising power. Moreover, these 'new' attempts to reconnect with the public have done little to address the persistent inequalities of civic engagement.

This thesis critically evaluates this agenda by examining five cases of attempts at innovative consultation. In all cases, the influence of the New Social Democracy (NSD) is evident. The NSD is a political project to 'modernise' social democracy, and it has evolved from the 'Third Way' paradigm most closely associated with the British New Labour government and the political thought of Anthony Giddens. The Australian and British Labo(u)r parties have been increasingly drawn together by the nexus of ideas that inform the NSD; as they attempt to transcend both neo-liberal and the 'old' Labo(u)r statist approaches to politics. Democratic renewal is a recurrent, but low priority and under-theorised, theme in the NSD. These tensions and difficulties are evident in the case studies reported in this thesis.

The five cases reported in this thesis are all either consultation 'firsts' or are large-scale examples of engagement undertaken by the Labo(u)r governments. There are two British cases: New Labour's 'People's Panel' (1998-2002) and the 'Big Conversation' (2002-04) initiatives. The People's Panel is the first time that a citizens' panel has ever been used by a national

government. The Big Conversation is the largest consultation ever undertaken by a British political party. There are three Australian cases. The first is 'Growing Victoria Together' (GVT) agenda (1999 – Present) instigated by the Victorian State Labor government. This Victorian Labor government was the first Australian State government to develop a State-wide strategic plan. The second Australian case is the 2006 consultation on South Australia's Strategic Plan (SASP), and is the largest consultation ever undertaken in that State. The final case study examines the Federal Labor government's 'Australia 2020 Summit' (2008). The 2020 Summit was a unique elite exercise in political consultation with a 1000 prominent Australians invited to Parliament House to debate ideas for Australia's future.

The five cases are evaluated in a comparative context using, as the two main evaluative principles, the notions of responsiveness and representativeness. This evaluation reveals the cases as bold experiments, albeit with significant flaws. Many of the tensions and contradictions associated with the NSD program for democratic renewal played out in the five reported cases. The thesis concludes that the consultation exercises can be seen as providing a 'glittering façade' to the anaemic and lacklustre response to democratic renewal exhibited by these Labo(u)r governments.

# Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signature.....

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## List of Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
AES	Australian Election Study
AuSSA	Australian Survey of Social Attitudes
ALP	Australian Labor Party
ASBO	Anti-Social Behaviour Order
AWB	Australian Wheat Board
BES	British Election Study
BNP	British National Party
BSA	British Social Attitudes
CIR	Citizen Initiated Referenda
CEB	Community Engagement Board
CLP	Constituency Labour Party
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CSR	Comprehensive Spending Review
DPC	Department of Premier and Cabinet
DVC	Department of Victorian Communities
EDB	Economic Development Board
EPG	Empowered Participatory Governance
FOI	Freedom of Information
GM	Genetically Modified
GP	General (Medical) Practitioner
GVT	Growing Victoria Together
IAP2	International Association for Public Participation Australasia
ICPSR	International Consortium for Political and Social Research
ICS	Indicators of Community Strength
IPPR	Institute for Public Policy Research
JPC	Joint Policy Commission
LGA	Local Government Area (Australia)
MORI	Market and Opinion Research International (now called IPSOS MORI)
MP	Member of Parliament
MPSG	Modernising Public Services Group
NCH	National Children's Home
NEC	National Executive Committee
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NHS	National Health Service
NPF	National Policy Forum
NPM	New Public Management
NSD	New Social Democracy
NT	Northern Territory
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PiP	Partnership in Power
PSA	Public Service Agreement
SA	South Australia

SACOSS	South Australian Council of Social Services
SASP	South Australia's Strategic Plan
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SIB	Social Inclusion Board
SSP	State Strategic Plan (now SASP)
VEESAC	Victorian Economic Environmental and Social Advisory Council
WA	Western Australia

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## Introduction

This thesis is a comparative study of five innovative consultation initiatives developed by Labo(u)r governments in Britain and Australia.<sup>1</sup> These initiatives are a central part of a wider program to foster democratic renewal and civic participation in both countries. The first two case studies were developed under former Prime Minister Tony Blair's New Labour government. Of the three Australian case studies, two involve State Labor governments (former Premier Steve Bracks' Victorian government and Premier Mike Rann's South Australian government). The final case study examines the 2020 Summit instigated by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's Commonwealth government.

The timeframes for all the Labo(u)r governments examined in this thesis are outlined in Table 1. For contextual information, Table 1 also includes all the corresponding governments in the other Australian States and Territories. (It is interesting to note the dominance of Labor at a State level in the early-to-mid 2000s, yet with the Liberal-National Party Coalition dominating at a Federal level).

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<sup>1</sup> A note on terminology: for ease of reference, the term 'Labo(u)r governments' is used to describe both the British and Australian (Federal and State) governments. The 'u' was dropped from the Australian Labor Party (ALP) in 1908 to reflect the growing influence of the American Labor movement. Despite the apparent clumsiness of the '(u)' in Labo(u)r, it serves a useful function of reminding the reader that the two 'sister' Parties are being examined. The use of the term 'Labor governments' will refer specifically to past and current Australian Labor governments. Similarly, the use of the term 'Labour governments' will refer to both current and past British Labour governments. The term 'New Labour' will be used to refer to the British Labour Party since the election of former Prime Minister Tony Blair as its leader in 1994 and continues to denote the Party since the leadership of Prime Minister Gordon Brown. David O'Reilly in his important 2007 work on the links between the Australian Hawke-Keating governments and New Labour uses the term 'New Labo(u)r' when referring to both these sets of governments (O'Reilly 2007, p. 31). However, this thesis will not use the term 'New Labo(u)r' as this is likely to confuse the reader. The Hawke-Keating governments never embraced Third Way politics in full or used the label. Similarly, the Australian Labor governments examined in this thesis have not adopted the New Social Democracy (NSD) in full, so the term 'New Labo(u)r' is rather misleading.

**Table 1: Labo(u)r Governments in Britain and Australia**

Gov't	Year																			
	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09
UK (Nat.)																				
Australia (Nat.)																				
NSW																				
VIC																				
QLD																				
WA																				
SA																				
TAS																				
ACT																				
NT																				

**Key:**

	Labo(u)r Government
	Conservative/Liberal Government

What links these Labo(u)r governments is the underlying process of ‘modernisation’ taking place in the Labo(ur) domain in both Britain and Australia (Scott 2000). To varying degrees, the influence of what has been termed the New Social Democracy (NSD), can be detected in both (British) New Labour and the Australian Labor Party (ALP) (Fitzpatrick 2003; Giddens 1998, 2002, 2003).<sup>2</sup>

The NSD is an attempt to reinvigorate progressive social democratic politics, and it emerges from the debates about the Third Way ‘project’. Essentially, the NSD seeks to develop and deliver government policy that transcends both the traditional Labo(u)r statist approach and the neo-liberal consensus which had emerged since the 1980s. This thesis examines the extent to which the NSD has influenced both the thinking and practice in these Labo(u)r government initiatives to foster democratic renewal and civic participation.

In part, these government-driven consultation exercises can be seen as attempts to respond to the changing patterns of political support and political participation occurring across many advanced industrial societies (Dalton 1999; Marsh 1995; Norris 1999; Nye 1997; Sawyer & Zappala 2001; Stoker 2006). Some of the main trends include falling voter turnout at (British) elections; citizens identifying less with the main political parties; and the rise of social movements.

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<sup>2</sup> There is a wide-ranging (if perhaps a little tedious) debate about the terminology of the NSD. Hitherto, it had been largely referred to as the Third Way. Since the NSD is now what Giddens (2002), the chief proponent of the Third Way, calls it, NSD will be used throughout this thesis. A more detailed discussion of the change from Third Way to NSD is outlined in this chapter.

These trends pose significant challenges for governments in advanced industrial societies as they place greater stress on what Richardson (2002, p.23) calls ‘the burden of legitimation’. The case studies reported in this thesis illustrate—in part—the attempts made by Labo(u)r governments in Britain and Australia to respond to these underlying structural changes and to supplement representative democracy.

These innovative consultation initiatives can be seen as experiments in the NSD. However, the literature on the NSD is limited in what it prescribes for renewing democracy in the face of perceived citizen disengagement. The main rallying cry of the NSD is embodied in Giddens’ call for the ‘democratising of democracy’ (Giddens 1998, pp. 70-7, 2000, p. 61).<sup>3</sup> These experiments are part of what might be called the search for more dialogic government. For New Labour this was reflected in its aims to achieve more responsive government (Cabinet Office 1999a).

Yet, while Giddens and other proponents of the NSD call for democratic experiments, they are vaguer about what these should look like and the underlying principles which should inform this process of enriching democracy. Labo(u)r governments in Britain and Australia responded by initiating a number of ‘top-down’, centrally driven initiatives. This thesis examines how effective these initiatives have been in their experimentation with democratic renewal. The case studies provide key insights into how this process of the democratising of democracy might evolve, and they offer a more substantive critique of the NSD democratic renewal agenda.

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<sup>3</sup> The term ‘the democratising of democracy’ is used by Giddens to encapsulate the democratic renewal agenda in the politics of the NSD (Giddens 1998, pp.70–7, 2000, p. 61). This term will be used as a short-hand for this agenda throughout this thesis, but uses the British and Australian spelling of ‘democratisation’ (no ‘z’) for consistency. It is a key concept to NSD politics, and given its extended use in this thesis it will not be referenced to Giddens at every citation for ease of reading.

As the thesis outlines, the NSD is one of a number of drivers for the search for more dialogic government. A separate, but overlapping, factor has been the advent of the New Public Management (NPM) reforms which swept through a number of advanced industrial societies from the 1980s onwards (Bevir & Rhodes 2003, p. 124). The central impulse of the NPM was to instigate wide-ranging reforms to governance structures by adopting principles and ideas from the private sector. A range of governments initiated new and innovative methods of citizen engagement: partly inspired by new marketing and advertising techniques. These reforms pose a distinct challenge for Labo(u)r governments as they challenge traditional social democratic ideas of the scope and role of the public realm. The case studies in this thesis provide insights into how Labo(u)r governments are wrestling with the legacy of the NPM. A significant response from NSD-influenced Labo(u)r governments has been an attempt to reformulate the role and scope of government – encapsulated in the notion of an ‘enabling’ or ‘ensuring’ state that ‘steers, not rows’ (Coote 1999; Osborne & Gaebler 1992).

### *The Original Contribution of the Thesis*

From the outset, it is important to state the original contribution of this thesis and how it builds on and develops existing social and political knowledge. In summary:

- Many of the debates about the NSD and the Third Way have focused on welfare reform rather than democratic renewal. In the case of New Labour, much more attention has been focused on its constitutional reforms rather than its other programs of democratic renewal (Gamble 2003a; Norton 2007;

Seldon 2007). This thesis examines some concrete examples of the democratic strand of the NSD.

- The case studies examined are relatively new government initiatives, and there is a lack of published information and research about them that this thesis redresses. The case studies in this thesis are examined in detail, and while some of them have been considered by other authors, they have only provided partial accounts—for example, Lilleker and Lees-Marshment's (2005) account of the 'Big Conversation'.
- This is a rare comparative study of this kind of phenomenon. While some links have been drawn between some of the different initiatives; this thesis makes a systematic comparison. The merit of a comparative approach is that it can reveal a political phenomenon in greater detail. Furthermore, much of the literature on the NSD is focused on Britain and Europe, but this thesis makes a stronger connection with social democratic politics in Australia.
- Classifications and evaluative frameworks of community engagement and consultation strategies are evolving (Bishop & Davis 2002). This comparative study uses concrete examples to test the adequacy of these classifications and frameworks and builds on them in a way that tries to add further insight.

### *How the Thesis is Organised: an Overview*

The thesis is organised into two main parts. The first section (Chapters 1–4) sets the context for the thesis and reviews the relevant literature. Chapter 1 interrogates the NSD and its role in emerging Labo(u)r thinking and practice. The politics of the NSD is examined in detail, and crucially, the links between its influence in both Britain and

Australia are outlined. In this first chapter, the democratic renewal strand of the NSD is examined in detail, and the underpinning tensions and contradictions at the heart of this project are outlined. Chapter 2 examines the different ways of classifying and evaluating consultation and community engagement initiatives. This chapter also locates the role of political participation in both the NSD and wider democratic theory. In this chapter, the framework for evaluating the different case studies is outlined, and draws upon the work of Pratchett (1999). Pratchett argues that two broad principles can be used to 'audit' new modes of consultation and deliberation; namely the principles of representativeness and responsiveness.

Chapter 3 is empirically focused and outlines the key trends in political behaviour and political participation in Britain and Australia. This chapter makes clear that in most respects, the patterns of political support and participation in Britain and Australia are very similar. While some indicators of political participation (such as the public's 'general interest' in politics) have remained stable over the past 30 years, there have been significant changes in other important modes of political participation. These include declining trust in governments, falling political party membership, and declining trade union membership. In the British context, falling voter turnout at general elections has been of significant concern. These structural changes appear to have placed added pressure on Labo(u)r governments to seek new ways to engage with civil society, and are a crucial factor in driving the democratic renewal agenda forward.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodology and research methods. The merits and pitfalls of the comparative case study approach are explored, and systematic comparisons

between Britain and Australia are made. This chapter argues that, while there are acknowledged limitations with the methodology and methods used in this thesis, it remains a viable and robust framework for comparing these attempts at innovative consultation.

The second section of the thesis examines five case studies in detail. Chapters 5 and 6 examine two Blair's New Labour case studies. Chapter 5 examines the 'People's Panel'—a key initiative in New Labour's first term. It was the first time that a national government has ever established a citizens' panel. Chapter 6 outlines New Labour's Big Conversation—the largest consultation ever undertaken by a British political party. These chapter highlight that, while they were bold experiments by New Labour, they were not without significant flaws as mechanisms to engage with the wider public.

Chapters 7, 8 and 9 examine the Australian case studies. Chapter 7 examines the Bracks-led 'Growing Victoria Together' (GVT) Summit. This process was central in Victoria becoming the first Australian State to develop a whole-of-State strategic Plan. Chapter 8 is the Rann government's 2006 consultation on South Australia's Strategic Plan (SASP)—the largest consultation ever undertaken in South Australia. Chapter 9 then examines the Rudd Commonwealth government's 2020 Summit which took place in 2008. It remains one of the most innovative attempts at consultation with its aim to establish a 'national conversation' about the future of Australia. In common with the British case studies, it is apparent that these are significant and bold attempts at consultation, but all had key weaknesses and limitations.

Chapter 10 concludes the thesis. It evaluates the case studies in a comparative context, and offers the key insights from these experiments in democratic renewal. This final chapter then provides an enriched critique of the NSD's call for the democratising of democracy and speculates on the future direction of the democratic renewal agenda. The chapter concludes that the NSD call for democratic renewal is underpinned by a number of tensions and contradictions, which were evident in the case studies reported in this thesis. Many of the cases were driven by a range of multiple, and often competing, aims and this served to blunt their overall effectiveness. These initiatives have done very little to address the persistent inequalities of 'voice' and civic engagement. Moreover, while the Labo(u)r governments place a high rhetorical value on enhancing political participation, their actual programs for engagement are rather weak and lacklustre. The Labo(u)r governments examined in this thesis are ambivalent about the value of democratic renewal, and this ambivalence has blunted the impact of their attempts at innovative consultation.

## Section 1

### Chapter 1

#### *The New Social Democracy and Democratic Renewal*

## **The New Social Democracy—Labo(u)r Government Responses in Britain and Australia**

This thesis examines five innovative consultative processes and mechanisms developed by Labo(u)r governments in Britain and Australia. The Labo(u)r governments examined in this thesis have introduced new community engagement and consultation initiatives which have been driven, in part, by an attempt to meet the challenges posed by the changing nature of political support and participation (see Ch. 3). What is characteristic of both sets of governments is the influence of the politics of the New Social Democracy (NSD) on how they have sought to reinvigorate the relationship between the state and civil society. This chapter explores the politics of the NSD and begins by focusing on its origins. To some extent, the origins of the NSD lie in the Hawke–Keating (former Prime Ministers) governments (1983–1996) and were a pivotal influence on the formation of New Labour under former Prime Minister Tony Blair’s leadership. In turn, the politics of the NSD implemented by New Labour have, to a varying extent, inspired Australian State Labor governments and more recently, Prime Minister Rudd’s Commonwealth government.

This chapter defines the NSD and examines the underlying assumptions and ideas that inform it. The main criticisms of the NSD are outlined. The chapter then proceeds to a detailed discussion of the changing roles of the state and civil society in the NSD. The focus then shifts to the role of democratic renewal in the NSD which sets the context for the case studies in this thesis.

### *The Third Way, the NSD and New Labour*

This chapter sets the context for the thesis and locates the case studies as experiments in what is termed the NSD. This chapter explores the main themes and ideas bound up with the NSD, but before this can proceed, it is important to untangle the overlap and connections between the NSD, the Third Way and New Labour.

Before New Labour came to power, and during its first term in office, the Third Way was used as a term to describe its overall political program and guiding philosophy (after a brief flirtation with the ideas of stake-holding—Driver & Martell 2002 p. 68). However, by New Labour's second term (from 2001 onwards) it stopped using the Third Way as a defining motif of its politics (Clift 2004, p. 36). Alongside this change, key advocates, such as Giddens, adopted the term—NSD—as they argued that the debate about the Third Way label was obscuring the wider aims and ideas which underpin the project in 'modernising' social democracy (Giddens 2002; White 2001). So, in the academic discourse there has been some movement toward using the NSD as a label rather than the Third Way (Gamble & Wright 1999b).

For the purposes of this thesis, the Third Way and the NSD are essentially the same, but the Third Way is more narrowly associated with the formative years of New Labour. The NSD is a more useful umbrella term for describing the political narrative adopted (in varying degrees) by the Labo(u)r governments under scrutiny in this thesis.

This thesis uses the concept of the NSD as a metaphor to describe the cluster of ideas which predominantly informed the political narrative and discourse of New

Labour, but also to a lesser degree, the other Labor governments examined here.<sup>4</sup>

Richards and Smith (2004, p. 109) note that the Third Way is not a coherent ideological package, and they cite Newman (2001) to observe that:

... the third way should be understood as a metaphor for centre-left parties in both Europe and the US to help them to forge political settlements that combined a recognition of the increasing importance of the global economy with attention to the importance of social cohesion ...

The NSD remains a powerful metaphor for understanding the political narratives adopted by the Labo(ur) governments in this thesis, even though it is not a label they have adopted.

There is a related issue of whether New Labour is the 'archetype' of the Third Way–NSD. Or to put it another way, is New Labour the NSD 'in practice'? Ludlam argues:

Herbert Morrison, deputy Labour leader and grandfather of Peter Mandelson, once replied impatiently to the question, 'What is socialism?' that it was 'What the Labour Government does'. Perhaps it is too soon to answer the question, 'What is modernising social democracy?' with the reply that it is 'What the New Labour Government does'. But given the wide variety of social democratic programmes that history offers us, and the complexities revealed ... it may turn out to be as concise an answer as can be offered. (Ludlam & Smith 2004, p. 14)

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<sup>4</sup> There is debate as to whether the Third Way or the NSD constitutes an ideology (White 1998). This thesis does not consider the Third Way–NSD an ideology, but it is more useful to see it as a metaphor for the politics of New Labour, or a key discourse which informed its policies and programs.

Fitzpatrick (2003, p. 13) argues that New Labour is an expression of the NSD in its 'purest form'. This is a view shared by Callinicos (2001, p. 10):

The case of New Labour thus offers an opportunity to analyse this purported renewal of social democracy in a chemically pure form.

Invariably, there is no consensus on this issue. In his insightful account of New Labour's political philosophy, Beech (2006, p. 120) argues that:

... the 'Third Way' is most appropriately interpreted as Blair's personal philosophy rather than as New Labour's political philosophy.

For the purposes of this thesis, the New Labour government is taken to be the closest expression of the NSD. However, it should be stated that there is more than one route to achieving the NSD. Moreover, even advocates of the NSD, such as Giddens (2003, p. 5), have argued that, at times, New Labour has deviated from the underpinning ideas of the NSD.

There are important implications for this thesis in locating New Labour as the archetype of the NSD. Firstly, much of the literature tends to focus on critiquing New Labour explicitly (and the NSD more implicitly). The main strength of this is that now, after 10 years of New Labour in power, there is a much more comprehensive view of what the NSD looks like in practice. For this reason, much of the literature examined in this thesis focuses on New Labour because its embodiment of the NSD is so strong. The main limitation with this approach is that some of the criticisms of New Labour have less relevance for the Australian case studies, although for the most

part, they remain pertinent. At the outset of each case study, the degree to which the Australian governments in question have adopted the NSD ideas and thinking is outlined. The central contention is that the NSD remains a powerful prism for understanding the political dilemmas and challenges faced by centre–left parties in advanced industrial societies.

### **Australian Roots of the NSD**

The roots of the NSD politics are disputed to some extent (Giddens 1998; Pierson & Castles 2002; Sheil 2000). It is commonly assumed in the United Kingdom that the main NSD influence came from the repositioning of the ‘New Democrats’ in the United States under former president Bill Clinton. However, it is clear that the antecedents of Tony Blair’s Third Way (as it was then called) can be traced to the earlier Hawke–Keating Labor governments in Australia (1983–1996 — Johnson & Tonkiss 2002; Mendes 2000; O’Reilly 2007; Pierson & Castles 2002; Scanlon 2001; Sheil 2000). In the words of Paul Keating, ‘We didn’t call what we were doing the third way. For Australia, we saw it as the only way’. (Pierson & Castles 2002, p. 683). To the chagrin of some Australian political scientists, the influence of the Hawke–Keating governments on New Labour tends to be either downplayed in the British literature, or more commonly, it is not acknowledged at all. For example, Bevir (2005) and Newman (2001) make no reference to it, and other accounts focus more on the modernisation reforms instigated under former Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock (Driver & Martell 2006; Ludlam & Smith 2001).

Scott’s work (2000) on the modernisation of Australian and British Labo(u)r lays the groundwork to understanding the Australian influence on the NSD. However, it is

O'Reilly (2007) who clearly outlines the links and policy transfer between the Hawke–Keating governments and New Labour. This thesis now builds upon and develops this field of knowledge.

Interestingly, pre-Blair, the Australian Hawke model was largely resented by Labour and attempts by both Hawke and Keating to influence Kinnock were largely fruitless (O'Reilly 2007, pp. 65–7). It was the arch-modernisers led by Blair and Brown—in their roles as junior shadow ministers—who made trips to Australia to learn about what O'Reilly calls 'New Labor'. Bob Hawke boasted he had told Blair and Brown 'what it was all about' (O'Reilly 2007, p. 12). Other British modernisers, such as former New Labour Minister Dennis McShane (1995), also praised and cited the Hawke–Keating governments as influences. Blair has also been explicit about the influences of the Australian Labor Party (ALP):

... in many ways the ALP has far greater similarities than a lot of European parties and we share many of the same positions. (Johnson & Tonkiss 2002, p. 7)

O'Reilly (2007, p. 66) identifies three key reasons for the influence of the Australian model on New Labour. Firstly, Blair lived in Australia as a child, and later he developed a strong relationship with Paul Keating. O'Reilly claims that Keating acted as a mentor to Blair. Secondly, Patricia Hewitt played a key role in facilitating policy transfer. Hewitt was Neil Kinnock's press secretary; then moved on to head up the influential 'think-tank'—Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR); and eventually

was Health Minister in Blair's Cabinet.<sup>5</sup> Thirdly, Gary Gray was a British-born ALP activist who returned to the United Kingdom in 1985 and helped develop links between the two political parties.

The main reason for New Labour's interest in the ALP was primarily its successful electoral strategy (Pierson & Castles 2002, p. 683). This is hardly surprising since the British Labour Party had not been in office since the fall of the Callaghan government in 1979. Part of this appeal was about timing, as at that time, many of the European social democratic parties were struggling to gain mainstream electoral support, and:

Down under, economic and social reform in the 1980s was led by parties of the left not right – parties intent on building broad electoral support for pragmatic market-led policies. (Driver & Martell 2006, p. 42)

Pierson and Castles (2002) argue that when the ALP first came to power it did not see itself pursuing a Third Way–NSD agenda, and it did not adopt the term to describe its policy innovations. They characterise the Hawke–Keating governments as being of 'regulatory state activism'—a model of centre–left politics which has parallels with the NSD (Pierson & Castles 2002, p. 685). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to describe the Hawke–Keating governments in full, instead the characteristics most appealing to New Labour are outlined.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Hewitt was born in Australia and schooled in Canberra. She went to Cambridge University and has remained in the United Kingdom since graduating. Her Father is Sir Lennox Hewitt, formerly a senior Australian public servant and Chair of Qantas.

<sup>6</sup> O'Reilly (2007, Ch. 2) outlines the Australian context for the emergence for the Hawke–Keating era in more detail. Essentially, O'Reilly uses the work of Paul Kelly (1992) and sees the Hawke-Keating era as a response to the demise of the five pillars of the 'Deakenite Settlement'.

Significantly, Pierson and Castles (2002) and O'Reilly (2007) find clear evidence of policy transfer between Australia and Britain. O'Reilly (2007, p. 13) argues for two sets of transfer: firstly, the political 'skills set' devised by the ALP; and secondly, specific public policies.<sup>7</sup>

The Hawke–Keating model is distinctive for a number of reasons. Firstly, it was a right-wing Labor government which provided an innovative response to the challenges posed by neo-liberalism (Johnson 1989). Hawke and Keating undertook a wide-ranging program of privatisation and financial deregulation, which to some extent, overturned prior social democratic orthodox thinking. In his distinctive, charismatic style:

... [Hawke] boasted his government has been 'responsible for more free-market economics than had been dreamt of' by previous coalition governments ... (O'Reilly 2007, p. 27)

Secondly, it introduced a range of policies, such as the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) and the Child Support Agency (CSA), which to some extent, resist categorisation on the traditional left–right spectrum. The CSA invokes notions of mutual obligation—a key NSD theme—and these policies are not easily linked with traditional social democratic goals such as public ownership. A hallmark of the NSD is how it seeks to transcend the left–right divide.

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<sup>7</sup> O'Reilly (2007, p. 132) argues that three key policies developed by Hawke and Keating were transferred and adopted by New Labour—The Child Support Agency (CSA), the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) and the 'Working Nation' reforms.

Thirdly, it was successful at gaining electoral support and had developed sophisticated campaigning techniques. Another significant characteristic of the Australian model was an internal one. When Hawke and Keating assumed the leadership (like Blair and Prime Minister Brown), they both inherited and built upon the process of modernisation. The upshot was that:

... the Blair and Hawke Keating governments were essentially unshackled from their parties and free to take national policy making, essentially, in wherever they chose ... (O'Reilly 2007, p. 20)

O'Reilly probably overstates the degree of autonomy that Hawke and Keating could exercise, but the process of party emasculation over policy is correct. This snapshot of the Hawke–Keating governments aims only to give a 'flavour' of this model of Australian social democracy and to highlight some of the key themes which foreshadow the emergence of the Third Way–NSD ideas in full.

There has been significant debate in Australia about whether the Hawke–Keating governments have betrayed and/or broken with the Labor tradition (Bramble & Kuhn 2009). For some, its embrace of neo-liberalism suggests that they have (Maddox 1989, 1991). However, even those still critical of the direction taken by Hawke and Keating argue that they still broadly operated within Labor traditions and can find some historical precedents (Bramble & Kuhn 2009; Johnson 1989; Pierson 2001). This debate is fiercely contested and foreshadows a similar debate about New Labour (Fielding 2003; Hay 1999; Ludlam 2004; Marquand 1998; Moschonas 2002; Pierson 2001; Shaw 2007). These debates underscore the difficulty in defining the NSD.

### *Influence of the NSD on the ALP and the British Labour Party*

The spread and embrace of NSD within both political parties is limited to some degree. Unlike the Hawke–Keating governments, the Blair New Labour government came to fully embrace the term—Third Way—and implement policy change on this theme (Blair 1998; Fitzpatrick 2003). In Britain, the left-wing within both the individual membership and the parliamentary party has evinced scepticism and criticism about New Labour from the outset. Former Labour member of parliament (MP) Tony Benn<sup>8</sup> described New Labour as:

... [a] new political party. I'm not a member of it. It's probably the smallest political party in the history of British Politics, but they're all in the cabinet so it makes it quite powerful. (Stone 2000)

One of the key factors for varied adoption of the NSD within the Labour Party is that the Party itself is a complex entity made up of different constituent parts. The individual membership, trade unions and affiliated organisations (such as 'Compass') have differing ideological positions toward the NSD. This diversity of opinion is also reflected within the parliamentary Labour Party and the elected Labour local councils across Britain. However, as widely noted, the Blair New Labour government has deliberately set out and pursued a NSD agenda. New Labour is rightly seen as the purest form of the NSD in action (Callinicos 2001; Fitzpatrick 2003; Giddens 2002).

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<sup>8</sup> Tony Benn was a Minister for the Harold Wilson government from 1967 to 1970, and also from 1974 to 1976. In 1981, he contested and narrowly lost the party deputy leader position to Denis Healey. During his career, Benn has migrated to the left of the party and since retirement in 2001 has been a prominent anti-war activist.

Bevir (2005, p. 48), in an important contribution to the debate, argues that the Third Way–NSD is a ‘shared framework’ of ideas held by senior Labour figures along with a wider network of policy advisers and key social scientists. Together this network effectively combines the ideas of the NSD into a coherent package. Crucially, Bevir (2005, p. 61) asserts that ‘competing positions exist within New Labour’, yet ‘we can aggregate most of these positions without too much simplification’.<sup>9</sup> This dovetails with Beech’s assertion that the Third Way is Blair’s personal philosophy (Beech 2006, p. 120). While this might be the case to some extent, the politics of the NSD (which overlaps with the Third Way) is the basis of this framework of ideas shared by the New Labour leadership. For the purposes of this thesis, it is argued that New Labour has a much more tightly agreed NSD framework than its Australian counterparts.

In Australia, the influence and spread of the Third Way picture is less pronounced. The Hawke–Keating years can be seen as an early incarnation of Third Way politics. However, some strands of NSD thinking, such as ‘active citizenship’, were not fully fledged in this era. The strongest advocate of the NSD in Australia is former ALP leader Mark Latham (Johnson 2004; Latham 1998, 2001).<sup>10</sup> Latham’s conceptualisation of the NSD is explored later. However, Latham resigned as leader after the losing the 2004 Federal election and never got the chance to implement his brand of the NSD. As explored in Chapter 10, the Rudd Labor government, elected

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<sup>9</sup> Bevir (2005, p. 48) cites an interesting example of the competing positions within the NSD–New Labour network in that Charles Leadbetter and Geoff Mulgan disagree with Will Hutton’s and John Kay’s ideas of stake-holding as being too cumbersome to meet the challenge of the evolving knowledge-based economy.

<sup>10</sup> Latham was leader of the ALP from December 2003 to January 2005. Prior to becoming leader, Latham began developing and propagating his belief in the NSD.

in 2007, has employed some of the key motifs of the NSD but has not adopted the label.

There is also an important distinction between the Federal ALP and the State level ALP.<sup>11</sup> As Parkin and Marshall (1994, p. 20) observe, 'The ALP is not simply, or even primarily a "national" entity ... the ALP is a complex and dynamic amalgam of interest and values'. The ALP has different components, and the relationships between these elements are multifaceted and sometimes at odds with each other. A key debate about the ALP has been the tension between the centralist and de-centralist camps (Galligan & Mardiste 1992; Parkin & Marshall 1994). The case studies of this thesis focus on the State Labor governments in South Australia and Victoria. Like the Rudd government, it is argued here that these governments have only adopted the NSD in part.

### **Defining the NSD**

Giddens (1998, 2001, 2002, 2003) and Gray (1996) are the thinkers most closely associated with mapping out the Third Way–NSD (see Pierson 2001). Giddens is widely seen as the most high profile proponent of the NSD (Bevir 2005). This section examines the work of Giddens (1998, pp. 70–7, 2000, p. 61) in defining the NSD with an emphasis on his call for the 'democratising of democracy'. Bevir (2005) argues, convincingly, that Giddens should not be seen as the inventor of the NSD:

Perhaps the high profile of Giddens' theories acts merely as a retrospective systematisation and legitimation of ideas and policies that New Labour already had developed from other sources. (Bevir 2005, p. 41)

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<sup>11</sup> The British Labour party and the ALP are compared and contrasted in Chapter 3.

Giddens outlines his belief in the influence that his early work had on the Third Way:

Well, first of all there was a massive response across the world to this Third Way book – there was a response you would not believe that any academic book could get....Second, I think it contributed a general framework for discussion, rather than influencing particular policies. (A Giddens, 2007, interview, 10 December)

One of the central criticisms charged at the NSD is that it is a vague and opaque political project (Giddens 1998). Giddens (1998, p. 8) cites Jeff Faux who comments that the term has become 'so wide as that it is more like a political parking lot than a highway to anywhere in particular'. A useful interpretation of the NSD is provided by White (1998, p. 4) who argues that it is a 'relatively general normative framework ... which can be rendered determinate and concrete in a number of ways'. However, White is adamant that it 'does not add up to anything like a complete political philosophy in itself'. This is a view shared by Beech (2006). Lukes (1999) cited by Kelly (2003, p. 243) argues that the Third Way was not really a concept or theory but rather a 'rhetorically defined space'.

Pierson and Castles (2002, p. 685) see it 'less as a programme and rather more as an omnibus term for a particular reorientation of parties of the centre-left in the face of a series of substantial changes in their external environment'. The NSD can be seen as an attempt to provide a new framework which (proponents argue) avoids the 'mistakes' of the traditional Left responses and the unresponsiveness of state socialism. For the purposes of this thesis, it is worth bearing in mind that one of the

main factors that have shaped the emergence of the NSD is the 'growing disaffection with mainstream politics and parties' (Pierson & Castles 2002, p. 684). This thesis follows the work of Pierson and Castles (2002), Richards and Smith (2004), and Newman (2001) in identifying the NSD as a metaphor for describing the political narrative adopted (in part) by the Labo(u)r governments examined here.

Fitzpatrick (2003) and Callinicos (2001) make an important link between the apparently 'thin' ideology of the NSD and the New Labour project. Fitzpatrick's (2003, p. 13) analysis of the NSD political program examines it 'in what arguably remains its purest form, that of Tony Blair's post-1994 Labour Party and the ideas which have been deployed to both motivate and justify its approach'. Fitzpatrick argues that it is the very thinness of the NSD ideology which allows the analysis to focus on the actions and discourse of political parties. This observation has important implications for this thesis because it validates the approach that to understand the democratic renewal aspects of the NSD, it bears fruit to examine concrete case studies of the NSD in practice.

Cuperus, Duffek and Kandel (2001) identify 'multiple third ways'. Giddens (2003) and Merkel (2001) also argue that the NSD has taken different forms across Europe including:

- the market-orientated approach of the New Labour government
- the Dutch 'Polder' model with a consensus-orientated approach to the market
- the reformed welfare-state model of Sweden
- the statist approach of the French Parti Socialiste.

While all these political parties may face the common challenge of the dominance of neo-liberalism, it is rather unhelpful to see them all as variants of the NSD. Clift (2004) argues persuasively that there have always been critical differences between British Labour and its European counterparts. It is hard to see where the 'new' social democratic politics begins in some of these models and where the 'old' ends: particularly in the French case. The NSD is a lightning rod for a wider, vociferous, critical, (and at times rather entertaining) ongoing battle for the 'soul' of social democratic politics. Critics of the NSD are irritated by their belief that the NSD has misrepresented the character of the 'old' social democracy (Fitzpatrick 2003; Pierson 2001). In turn, Giddens (1998, 2002) lambasts those on the Left who hang onto long cherished myths about social democracy: particularly resisting the reform of the public sector and the changed role of the state.

The NSD arrived at an interesting moment in the history of social democracy. Gamble and Wright (1999a) argue that while variants of social democracy have never been more widely practised, with the rise of neo-liberal politics, the aims of social democracy have never been more called into question. Critics, such as Fitzpatrick (2003) and Hamilton (2006), argue that the NSD arrives (rather too conveniently) as the saviour of social democracy: particularly with its appeal to pragmatism. Hamilton (2006, p.19) argues:

... the Third way came from nowhere, sparkled briefly in the political firmament and then winked out. Its function is now clear. It provided an ideological vehicle – a cover story – for former social democrats who had decided to abandon the ideas of the past but did not want to be seen to have cast their lot with the conservatives.

## The Main Themes of the NSD

White (1998) identifies the main themes of the NSD, basing his analysis on Giddens' work. The main themes of the NSD emphasise 'real opportunity', 'civic responsibility' and 'community'. In terms of the role of government, White (1998, pp. 3–6) identifies five ideas:

1. The state should be guarantor (not necessarily direct provider) of opportunity goods.
2. The state needs to be receptive to forms of 'mutualism'.
3. New thinking about public finances.
4. Employment-centred social policy.
5. Asset-based egalitarianism.

It is not the focus of this thesis to evaluate the NSD in full because the author's interest is principally in its implications for citizen participation and related government strategies. However, it is useful to sketch what the NSD has meant for political leaders in both Britain and Australia. Blair has outlined his approach in a number of essays, articles and speeches. Blair identifies the main values as: 'equal worth of each individual', 'opportunity for all', 'responsibility' and 'community' (Blair 1998, p. 2). Blair then outlines the main policy objectives as:

- a dynamic knowledge-based economy, based on individual empowerment and opportunity
- a strong civil society with rights and responsibilities—where government is partner to strong communities
- a modern government based on partnership and decentralisation, 'where democracy is deepened to suit the modern age' (Blair 1998, p. 7).

Latham offers a distinctly similar view of the central values of Third Way politics. The underpinning relationship for Latham is that a strong society and strong economy are mutually reinforcing, and a growing market economy can be reconciled with a 'good society' (Latham 2001, p.26). Latham (2001, p.27) outlines the main values of Third-Way thinking as:

- interdependence (nations and communities working together)
- responsibility
- incentives
- devolution.

For Blair and Latham, the historical divide between the Left and the Right is no longer the central division in society. Interestingly, Rudd also argues that the old left-right divide is a 'political straitjacket' (Rudd 2008c). Blair remains largely devoted to this worldwide view. In a speech given in July 2006, Blair argued that:

Most confusingly for modern politicians, many of the policy prescriptions cross traditional left-right lines. Basic values, attitudes to the positive role of government, social objectives - these still divide among familiar party lines, but on policy cross-dressing is rampant and a feature of modern politics that will stay. (Wintour 2006)

Gamble and Wright (1999a, p. 3) consolidate this analysis of the NSD. They argue that the main sectional interest for social democratic political parties was the Labour movement, but 'this era, even in Britain, is now ending. Party leaders are no longer the representatives of a unified, disciplined labour movement, but brokers in an

increasingly pluralistic and diverse politics'. This leads the proponents of the NSD to argue that NSD parties need to represent and lead from the 'radical centre' (Fitzpatrick 2003). Rudd prefers the term 'reforming centre' (Manne 2008b, p. 25). Giddens (2002) argues that the focus on the radical centre reflects the growing divergence of citizens from the main political parties (see Ch. 3).

For the purposes of this thesis, drawing upon the ideas of Blair, Giddens and Latham, the following main themes of the NSD narrative are identified:

- a 'new politics' that transcends the left–right divide
- an ensuring, enabling state that 'steers', not 'rows'
- the value of community has a central place in the new political settlement
- a moving away from public ownership (means) as a vehicle for achieving greater social cohesion (ends)
- an emphasis on equality of opportunity rather than outcomes
- a democratic renewal to enhance the relationship between state and citizen
- a seeking of new institutional forms such as networks.

These component themes are discussed in more detail later in this chapter. By identifying these as the main themes, it is possible to then see how far the Labo(u)r governments in this thesis espouse and embody the politics of the NSD.

### **The NSD and its Critics**

With the main themes of the NSD outlined, it is useful to highlight some of the main criticisms. Giddens (1998) and Fitzpatrick (2003) have catalogued many of these

criticisms. Fitzpatrick's (2003) catalogue of the criticisms of the Third Way–NSD focuses on the practice of New Labour:

- An early focus of New Labour's NSD was the promotion of community, but this concept is not differentiated enough to shape effective policies. New Labour's initial attraction to the communitarian ideals, such as those espoused by Tam (1998) and Etzioni (1993), was based on the belief that community could help find the middle way between collectivism and egalitarianism (Fitzpatrick 2003). Feminist critiques of New Labour argue that community is a vague concept which tends to romanticise the role of women in the family (Franklin 2000). Giddens also acknowledges that 'the term "community" does too much work in communitarian theory' (Giddens 2000, p. 63). There is an argument that NSD thinking does not differentiate the components of civil society enough (Edwards 2004).
- Fitzpatrick (2003, p. 22) argues that because New Labour aims to be compatible with global capitalism, the brand of communitarianism in its policy-making tends to be authoritarian and moralistic rather than reflexive and heterogeneous.
- New Labour elevated the principle of meritocracy but pays sufficient attention to its limitations. Fitzpatrick (2003, p. 21) invokes Michael Young's (1958) famous work on meritocracy: 'genuine equality requires the removal of the structures that distribute power, wealth and capital unevenly'.<sup>12</sup>
- The overriding emphasis on equality of opportunity evinced by NSD proponents also requires some equalisation of outcomes (Fitzpatrick 2003). NSD thinkers, such as Giddens, are highly sensitised to this charge. Giddens

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<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, this was a criticism that Burchell (2009) also levelled at the Rudd *2020 Summit* (see Ch. 9).

argues strenuously that the NSD requires both components, and if inequality persists in Britain, it is partly due to New Labour not implementing the NSD in full (Giddens & Diamond 2005). Shaw considers New Labour's commitment to equality of opportunity itself has been thin, despite some redistribution (Shaw 2007, p. 202).

- The NSD (falsely) accuses the 'old' social democracy of ignoring the importance of duties in its discourse of reciprocity. Fitzpatrick (2003, p. 22) counters with an important claim, 'What *traditional* social democracy recognised, unlike New Labour, was the duty of the state to structure the job market. And at its worst what New Labour has done is to *decentralise responsibility* while *centralising power* upon those who already hold it'. Fitzpatrick argues that this has occurred even when New Labour has been at its most radical in its act of devolution. This overall claim has important consequences for this thesis as it is closely bound up with many critiques of citizen participation initiatives.
- The focus on 'rights and responsibilities' is rather one-sided (Fitzpatrick 2003, p. 22). Responsibilities tend to be directed at those from lower social economic groups. In Britain, this has taken the form of the so-called respect agenda and its exhortations for decent public behaviour, and the use of anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) as a local policy tool to police behaviour. Whereas, there seems little policy directed at the responsibilities of higher social economic groups. For example, critics argue that New Labour has done little to stop the inner-city based middle classes from not sending their children to their local state-funded schools.

- ‘Social participation is equated with participation in employment, neglecting the informal sector and the unpaid forms of work that lie outside the wage contract and so marginalising the contribution that domestic labour (still predominantly performed by women) makes to national and global wealth.’  
(Fitzpatrick 2003, p. 23)

These are only a small number of the criticisms levelled at New Labour and the NSD in general, but they are the most relevant to the case studies in this thesis. There is wide debate about many different aspects of the NSD. Giddens has been energetic, to say the least, in refuting some of the criticisms levelled at the NSD (Giddens 1988, 2001, 2002, 2003; Giddens & Diamond 2005). Crucially for this thesis, it is what the NSD has to say about political participation and civic engagement that is central to understanding the program responses by Labo(u)r governments.

### **The NSD - the Role of the State and Civil Society**

A central motif of the NSD is that social democrats need to rethink the role of the state (Gamble 2003b). The NSD seeks to reconfigure the relationship between state and civil society to shore up political participation and support.<sup>13</sup> Giddens offers the most clearly articulated view of the role of the state in the politics of the NSD. It is important to note that Giddens argues that the political thought of the NSD is

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<sup>13</sup> Civil society is a contested concept. A useful summary of the key elements is provided by Edwards (2004, pp.vi-viii). He identifies three main elements of civil society: (1) ‘associational life’ (2) civil society as ‘the good society’ (this is the institutionalisation of civility) and (3) civil society as the ‘public sphere’—the realm where the common good is discussed and democratically deliberated (building on the work of Jürgen Habermas). There are strengths and limitations to all three aspects. Edwards argues that to function well, civil society needs to mesh all three areas.

evolving and developing over time. There has been a change in emphasis of the rightful role of the state in NSD thinking.

Giddens (1998, p. 51) demarcates the state, the economy and civil society; and he argues that 'all need to be constrained in the interests of social solidarity and social justice'. Giddens (1998, p. 37) recognises a tension between each of these spheres and cautions that:

There are interest groups, and groups of the powerful, that any self-respecting left of centre government must confront, face down, or regulate.

The challenge of 'interest politics' is also a central feature of both Latham's and Blair's account of Third Way politics. Latham (1998, p. 165) outlines the additional tiers of equality which heap more pressure on the social democratic project. Latham (1998, p. 165) argues that since the 1970s there has been a new focus on:

... the behavioural characteristics of life – the relatively fixed characteristics of people which help to fashion the context of social interaction. These features include, gender, sexuality, culture, race, nationalism, language plus personal values. This new tier of state activism involved programs such as affirmative action, multicultural funding, cultural development and national identity.

Latham's apparent denigration of 'segment of life' sectional interests invoked a wide range of criticism (Clark 2003; Johnson 2004; Johnson & Tonkiss 2002). For Latham, it is clear that government's role is not to pander to these elements by rewarding 'active' citizens.

Similarly, Blair identifies the elements that government should 'face down':

In these conditions political leaders have to back their instinct and lead. The media climate will often be harsh. [Non-Government Organisations] NGOs and pressure groups with single causes can be benevolent, but also can exercise a kind of malign tyranny over public debate (Wintour 2006).

### **The NSD and Interest Politics**

At this juncture, it is worth taking another look at why proponents of the NSD, such as Latham and Blair, are apparently so hostile to interest groups.

A wide range of thinkers and commentators have identified the recent rise of social movements (which include new types of interest groups) in modern industrial nations including Britain and Australia (Marsh 1995, 2005; Sawer & Zappala 2001; Skocpol 2003; Stoker 2006). Since the 1960s, there has been a growth in social movements organising around issues such as civil rights, the environment, gender issues and race–ethnicity. The initial wave and growth of these social movements and their attendant interest groups set new challenges for representative democracies: particularly with calls for fairer representation among the political class.

Since the initial wave of these groups and movements, there has been some agreement that the character of interest group politics and civil society is changing. Skocpol (2003) argues that in the United States there has been a decrease in the range and number of wider membership organisations, and increasingly, governments are engaging with more professional lobby groups to set and agree

public policy. Skocpol (2003) argues that the United States democracy is diminished as everyday citizens are not included in this political interaction between government and the lobby groups.

Marsh (1995, 2005) argues that, to some extent, there are similar patterns occurring in Australia. Stoker (2006, p.104) identifies a similar process in Britain and argues that increasingly, civil society is characterised by 'the professionalism of activism'. This view is also shared by Mulgan (2006), Blair's former Head of Strategy. While many of the lobby groups have large memberships; 'activists are few, and those that remain involved do so on the margins of Party decision-making' (Stoker 2006, p. 106). Stoker argues that professional advocacy groups are needed, but they need to work better for wider democracy.

Therefore, the professionalisation of lobbying presents another challenge for the NSD, and this becomes an underpinning factor in why Latham, Blair and Giddens might see the need to face down these groups. Professional lobby groups potentially place governments under more intensive scrutiny than ever before. NSD thinkers might also argue that professional lobby groups regulating the state are not the same as civil society performing this function.

There is an apparent conflict of representation, with the elected political class being suspicious of the interest group sector, which is perceived to have a democratic deficit caused by the growing professionalism of the NGOs. Fitzpatrick (2003, p. 193) argues that where the political class is not rooted in the 'life-world' of wider civil society (as apparently is the case for Britain), then 'conservatives have found it

easier to detach social democratic institutions from those they were originally designed to assist’.

It is through this new set of challenges to the relationship between the state and civil society that proponents of the NSD have sought to clarify the role of government.

### **The NSD and the Ensuring State**

Giddens, along with Blair and Latham, hold distinct conceptions of the role of government in the relationship with civil society.<sup>14</sup> Giddens argues that the lesson from state socialism is that state power can be suffocating and there is a difference between a big state and an active state. Government, for Giddens (1998, p. 60), is a vehicle for confronting apathy:

The self-reform of government and the state needs not only to meet efficiency goals, but to respond to the voter apathy from which even the most established democratic states are suffering. In many countries, levels of trust in political leaders and other authority figures have declined while the proportions voting in elections and expressing an interest in parliamentary politics have also dropped.

Initially, Blair invoked Giddens’ earlier notion of the active state (as a counterpoint to the traditional social democratic vision of the big State). Latham, along with later NSD thinkers, uses the concept of the enabling state. More recently, Giddens and

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<sup>14</sup> It is notable that despite large areas of agreement between Giddens, Blair and Latham, there are differences in their conceptual understanding and emphasis of Third Way–NSD politics. Giddens is often seen as providing intellectual cover for Blair, but an interesting account of the differences in their thinking is provided by Driver and Martell (2001, pp. 36–49).

others, such as Schuppert (2003), have seen limitations in the concept of the enabling state and argue for an ensuring state. Giddens (2003, p. 13) argues:

The central idea of the enabling state is that the state should empower its citizens – the state should provide resources that allow individuals to develop their own lives, rather than being told what to do or how to act ... the state is conceived of mainly as a facilitating agency

...

The concept of the ensuring state, however, recognises that the state also has obligations of care and protection for citizens, and some of these obligations should be provided as guarantees ... It recognises that many services once delivered directly by the state are now provided by non-state agencies.

Despite this recent change in emphasis in the role of the state, proponents of the NSD argue that the state has a key role in fostering active citizenship (Blair 1998; Latham 2001, p. 27). Blair, Giddens and, to a lesser extent, Latham<sup>15</sup> have then argued for democratic renewal.

For Latham (1998, p. 34):

The electorate is now riddled with cynicism and apathy about the political process. Political change needs to be built on a strengthening of political choice. Ironically, this mass disillusionment with politics has taken place at time when

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<sup>15</sup> While Latham has outlined ideas for democratic or civic renewal (or at least offered a diagnosis for political cynicism with party politics); much of the focus of Latham's thinking on the relationship between State and civil society is in the context of welfare reform and rewarding 'active' citizens. (Latham 1998, Ch. 18).

most political messages represent a recycling of opinion poll messages. This is, in fact, a form of direct democracy, albeit flawed in its motivation and practice.

For Blair (1998, p. 15):

The democratic impulse needs to be strengthened by finding new ways to enable citizens to share in decision-making that affects them. Far too long a false antithesis has been presented between 'representative' and 'direct' democracy. The truth is that in a mature society representatives will make better decisions if they take full account of popular opinion and encourage public debate on the big decisions affecting people's lives.

For New Labour, this concept was institutionalised in the creation of the Active Community Unit (Bevir 2005, p. 72). The notion of active citizenship draws directly from the earlier NSD theme of civic responsibility. This appeal to active citizenship is one way that the issue of the professionalisation of lobby groups can be addressed—as wider associational life and civil society is reinvigorated. However, as is quite often the case with some aspects of NSD thinking, this concept is not as self-evident and straightforward as it first appears. White (1999, p. 166) argues that 'New Labour's rhetoric of civic responsibility is compatible with a variety of different philosophical positions. Therefore, what the NSD value of civic responsibility looks like in practice remains a more open question which the case studies in this thesis go some way to exploring.

## **The NSD—the Democratising of Democracy**

Latham, Blair and other NSD proponents have called for some form of democratic renewal. Giddens (2000, p. 61) calls for a 'second wave of democracy' or what he calls 'the democratising of democracy'. Giddens gives some indications of what this might look like and the different forms it might take, such as constitutional reforms and experiments with democracy including citizens' juries, electronic referenda and forms for direct democracy. Giddens (1998, p. 65) emphasises the role of civil society in constraining the state and the economy:

Civil society, rather than the state, supplies the grounding of citizenship, and is hence crucial to sustaining an open public sphere.

The tension between the state and civil society highlights ambivalence in Giddens' dictums for government (a problem also for other NSD proponents such as Blair and Latham). Interest groups are clearly identified as entities that need to be regulated and faced down, yet government also has a central role in reinvigorating civil society.

Despite the various NSD calls for democratic renewal (Bentley & Halpern 2003; Blair 1998; Giddens 1998, 2003; Latham 1998), the actual content and character of what the democratising of democracy should look like is rather vague. Giddens (1998, pp. 70–7) talks about the need for 'experiments' at the local level, but it is one of the least extensively developed areas in his writings on the NSD.

Likewise, Bentley and Halpern (2003) strongly argue for concentrating more power into communities, but their prescriptions are still rather suggestive. They call for:

... devolving responsibility for service management and priority setting to local governance, and creating new subsidies and support for specific communities to develop their own health, education or crime reduction strategies. (Bentley & Halpern 2003, p. 85)

Ultimately, the central difficulty for NSD-influenced governments is how they achieve this. Fitzpatrick (2003) argues that where New Labour has tried this, it has devolved responsibility but centralised power. Interestingly, even Blair's former Head of Strategy argues that decentralisation does not always guarantee the fair exercise of political power; 'it can be a tool for governments that want to dispose of their responsibilities rather than powers' (Mulgan 2006, p. 175).

Marquand (1999) argues that throughout the social democratic tradition there has been a tendency for the state to be used as a 'surgeon' operating on the 'patient' (citizen body). For critics, New Labour has not been able to escape this strand of paternalism. In theory, the NSD may advocate devolution and democratisation, but in practice this has not been fully realised. Much of the criticism of New Labour's radical constitutional program reinforces this view (Driver & Martell 2002, 2006; Flinders 2004; Gamble 2003a; Norton 2007; Richards & Smith 2004). The push for wider democratic renewal is inherently complex:

... the local modernisation reforms of the current British government highlight the tensions inherent in trying to balance vertical and horizontal accountabilities. (Smyth, Reddel & Jones 2005b, p. 200)

There are a number of reasons why the democratising of democracy may not have been fully realised by New Labour. Firstly, democratic reform is a second tier issue in the NSD. For example, it is far less developed in Giddens' work than other issues such as welfare reform and reconciling public services with economic growth. This is due, in part, to the historical backdrop of the past few decades where social democratic parties have lost ground to conservative parties on these issues.

Secondly, thoroughgoing democratic reform often takes place at a slower pace than other aspects of making public policy, and the results can be less tangible for NSD-influenced governments. This is obvious in New Labour's approach to constitutional reform. As Gamble (2003, p. 19) notes:

There are several reasons for this caution. The constitution is seen as an issue with limited political appeal, popular amongst a vocal section of the political class, but largely regarded with bemusement by the rest of the electorate. Secondly, constitutional reform became a major part of Labour's programme under the leadership of John Smith. It never had the same priority for Tony Blair, but many of the commitments, particularly those on devolution, were impossible to abandon, and the Party fought the 1997 election on a far reaching programme of constitutional reform. In government, however, the Blair government, like all Labour governments before it, proved cautious in the way it

implemented the programme, often choosing the least radical option, and disappointing the high hopes of the reformers.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the centrality of the theme of democratic renewal in NSD thinking, it remains underdeveloped and rather narrow in focus. Driver and Martell (2001, pp. 44–5) argue that for New Labour at least, the focus on democratic renewal is specifically constrained:

The core of New Labour has little interest with active democratising processes for citizens in everyday life outside mainstream politics...The democratisation programmes are *of* government, not *beyond* government.

Flinders (2004, p. 138) makes an important link between New Labour's constitutional reforms and the Third Way–NSD politics:

... the lack of a coherent statement of goals or clear framework that would offer a holistic view of the constitution as a whole. Arguably, this is reflected in the fact that constitutional reform has never been located clearly within the 'third way' project.

Giddens, despite remaining a supporter of the New Labour project, is sceptical of its record on democratic renewal:

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<sup>16</sup> There are interesting parallels here with the Australian Rudd Labor government. Obviously, in Australia the constitutional reform questions are different to reflect the different political system. Rudd's approach to creating an Australian Republic is a low priority and limited to a referendum in a second term of office. There has also been some push for a Bill of Rights, but again there is little enthusiasm in the Rudd government. The Bill of Rights was a key theme of the *2020 Summit* (see Ch. 10) and there has been no rush to adopt one. Rudd instigated a national consultation on human rights issues, which enabled him to be seen to be doing something without any firm commitments to strong constitutional reform (Keane & Harris 2008).

And I think it was pretty clear that Labour didn't really think things through the devolution agenda ... There's very imbalanced devolution as everyone can see, and Labour initially weren't really committed to it a strong outburst of regional autonomy and therefore it was voted down. And frankly, naming no names, they put John Prescott in charge of it – which was a sign about how they felt about it. It wasn't at the forefront of their thinking I would say ... from the beginning there should have been a clearer idea of what kind of Britain they wanted to create around the frontiers of democracy, and I don't see that there was a clear [idea] of that really, and so I see that as kind of weak thread for New Labour. (A. Giddens, 2007, interview, 10 December)

In addition, democratic reform in the modern age is made more complex in the face of the changing nature of government, which in some respects, is tilting towards governance. Finally, reforming representative democracy in itself is an inherently complex and difficult project (see Ch. 2).

Arguably, it is for these reasons that the NSD prescriptions for renewal remain rather underdeveloped. In the case of New Labour, it is also indicative that after some early reforming zeal (for example, creating the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly); other constitutional reforms have been considered 'half-baked' (Toynbee & Walker 2005, p. 299). Arguably, these early reforms were the easier ones to initiate as they were less experimental than other potential democratic reforms. For example, there has been much debate in Britain about the concept of 'subsidiarity',<sup>17</sup> but institutionalising this concept has remained more elusive (Bentley & Halpern 2003; Giddens 2003).

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<sup>17</sup> Subsidiarity is taken to broadly mean that citizen decision-making should be devolved to the lowest level possible where appropriate.

Despite the clear place for democratic renewal in NSD thinking, New Labour and other NSD-influenced governments have shown a willingness to experiment in the democratising of democracy. This thesis offers a systematic and comparative approach to auditing and evaluating these experiments. Before returning to the case studies, it is important to locate the NSD's push for democratic renewal alongside what has been called the 'challenge of governance' (Richards & Smith 2004, p. 106). This challenge offers new complexities in how the relationship between state and civil society is reconfigured. NSD experiments in the democratising of democracy are both a cause of, and a response to, this trend towards governance.

### **NSD and Governance**

Meyer (2001) argues that governance is one of the key issues around which consensus is building regarding the direction of social democracy. Governance as a term is contested and has been used in a variety of different contexts (Bevir & Rhodes 2003; Hirst 2000; Kjaer 2004; Pierre 2000). There is a clear difference between traditional social democratic conceptions about the role of the state, and the politics of the NSD which welcomes and promotes the use of governance and network to achieve policy outcomes. Rather than a unified, centralised decision-making authority (underpinned by the attendant classical Weberian bureaucracy); governance requires a devolution of the decision-making process, which is carried out through a multi-layered set of institutions and/or networks. Governance requires government to 'steer more and row less' (Coote 1999, p. 117). In addition:

Governance refers to the informal authority of networks as constitutive of, supplementing or supplanting the formal authority of government. (Bevir & Rhodes 2003, p. 13)

Meyer (2001, p. 193) argues that the transformation from government to governance involves a greater focus on 'co-production, forming alliances, and striking contracts between government and society, towards support of societal actors instead of government acting as the monopolist of welfare related political action'. This growth of governance arrangements dovetails with the NSD thinking about civic responsibility:

New Governance, thus, is mainly about more self-responsibility and participation of citizens (i.e. civic empowerment); [what is] required is a revival of the spirit of republicanism. (Meyer 2001, p. 194)

Bevir and Rhodes (2003, p. 124) argue that governance is a political narrative that New Labour has adopted:

New Labour's adherence to the Third Way stands as a general response to the dilemmas highlighted by Thatcherism, while its belief in joined-up government stands as a more specific response to the consequences, often unintended, of [New Public Management] NPM.

Under New Labour, there were two waves of governance reforms (Fawcett & Rhodes 2007).<sup>18</sup> Firstly, when New Labour took office, the onus was on joined-up government. The second wave saw a shift in focus to ‘delivery’. Joined-up government was developed to respond to three main unintended problems that resulted from the Thatcher–Major (former Prime Ministers) reforms of the public sector:

- fragmentation—New Labour inherited a much more disparate range of networks and organisations
- steering—New Labour claimed that the Conservatives had not strengthened the strategic steering capacities of government enough in light of the NPM reforms
- accountability—the worry is that institutional complexity erodes the chains of accountability (Bevir & Rhodes 2003, p. 133).

Under New Labour, this emphasis on governance came to fruition under the guidance of the Number 10 Strategy Unit. A range of initiatives were established including a plethora of partnership bodies comprising statutory local agencies, such as local councils, the police, and voluntary and private-sector bodies. Some of these initiatives have been detailed by Ling (2002) and Coote (1999).

There is widespread agreement that there has been distinct and unresolved tension between centralisation and decentralisation in New Labour’s governance reforms

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<sup>18</sup> It is important to note that the governance narrative is not confined to Britain. It has been taken up in Australia, notably under former Premier Beattie’s government in Queensland (Smyth, Reddel & Jones 2005a, 2005b). As outlined in Chapter 7, there has been some experimentation with governance in South Australia (Manning 2005, p. 274). Rudd’s *2020 Summit* examined the future of Australian governance. Again, it is argued that New Labour has gone much further in promoting and implementing modernising governance reforms than its Australian counterparts.

(Bevir & Rhodes 2003; Fawcett & Rhodes 2007; Newman 2001; Peele 2003).

Fawcett and Rhodes (2007, pp. 93, 103) argue that the reforms suffered because

Blair:

... never knew what he wanted' [from the civil service] ... This lack of direction was just as evident in his constant renaming and refashioning of central departments ...

...

There was no consistent vision and it was a recipe for, and a classic example of, muddling through.

This lack of vision parallels the lack of a clear framework for the constitutional reforms. The problem for advocates of the NSD and New Labour specifically, is how to increase and facilitate citizen engagement in the governance story. For example, in the United Kingdom it has been unclear what role local councillors play alongside the wide range of new local partnership bodies. As Ling (2002, p. 631) notes, 'the relationship between public involvement and joined-up government is a not a simple one'.

In the NSD theory at least, the shift to governance is an opportunity for more meaningful citizen input into the political process. Reddel and Woolcock (2004) identify a trend away from traditional forms of community consultation towards more participatory governance. Fung and Olin Wright's (2003) work on empowered participatory governance (EPG) strongly advocates for a deeper level of citizen involvement. They surveyed a range of different examples of the EPG and are optimistic that within clear boundaries there is an enhanced role for citizens in local

decision-making. However, it remains open to question how far these models can be realised and translated into other political systems and contexts.

For example, many have been optimistic about the use of 'participatory budgeting' in Porto Allegro, Brazil (Wiseman 2004).<sup>19</sup> Perhaps characteristically, Gordon Brown has been more interested in these than Blair, and in 2008, 22 pilots in participatory budgeting were set up under the oversight of the Department of Communities and Local Government (Ministry of Justice 2008). However, it is still too early to say how effective this policy transfer has been. The use of such mechanisms was also discussed at Rudd's 2020 Summit, but it remains unlikely they will be readily adopted in Australia. The concerns are that these are 'top-down' solutions to foster citizen engagement and power-sharing remains one-sided. There is wider scepticism that some forms of the EPG are rather idealistic. For some, such as Stoker (2006), the difficulty is that often these models suggest a normative ideal of the 'good citizen' rather than reflect how people currently engage with liberal democracy.

To recap, a central part of NSD thinking is to meet the challenge of governance, and part of the democratising of democracy is the search for new experiments and mechanisms for enhancing the relationship between the state and civil society. The governance narrative suggests an increased use of networks and other organisational arrangements away from centralised control. The concern remains that for New Labour, at least, its governance reforms have decentralised responsibility but centralised power (Fitzpatrick 2003). The case studies in this thesis

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<sup>19</sup> Fung and Olin Wright (2003, pp. 3–44) provide further details of this democratic experiment.

can be seen as a small part of this wider architecture of governance. A central question for this thesis to consider is: how far have these tensions and difficulties in enhancing citizen engagement and improving government responsiveness been met by the different initiatives?

### **The NSD and Labo(u)r Governments—a Recap**

In summary, the NSD can be seen as a wider metaphor for the political narratives adopted (in part) by the Labo(u)r governments in this thesis. The NSD is an attempt to transcend the problems of neo-liberalism and the 'old' social (statist) democracy. For the purposes of this thesis, the following themes are identified as main components of the NSD:

- a 'new politics' that transcends the left–right divide
- the ensuring–enabling state that steers, not rows
- the value of community placed in new political settlements
- the move away from public ownership (means) as a vehicle to achieve greater social cohesion (ends)
- an emphasis on equality of opportunity rather than outcomes
- the relationship between state and citizen enhanced by democratic renewal
- new institutional forms, such as networks, are sought.

The NSD is a dynamic, not static, set of ideas. Crucially, there are underpinning tensions and contradictions, such as the push for both centralisation and devolution. The NSD does not constitute a fully fledged ideology. It has both conservative and radical elements (fiscal conservatism on one hand and constitutional reforms on the

other). NSD governments—New Labour is the closest example of its archetype—have at times asserted the conservative strand, and at other times, asserted the more radical elements, such as zeal for the modernisation of public services. The NSD is a prism for understanding the political dilemmas facing Labo(u)r governments: particularly their response to the dominance of neo-liberalism.

The NSD call for the democratising of democracy raises a whole suite of questions which forms the core of this thesis. Have the Labo(u)r governments been able to carry out these experiments in democracy with any great deal of success? What does this ‘success’ look like? How effective have the case studies been in facilitating, at least in part, a reconfiguration of the relationship between state and civil society? Have these experiments opened up new paths of dialogue and opportunities for citizens to influence government policies? What lessons can be drawn from the case studies? Will these experiments contribute to reinvigorating the state institutions sufficiently well to be able to address the apparent disillusionment with the party system? Can the state be used as an effective instrument to manage the tensions between itself and civil society and also foster active citizenship?<sup>20</sup> Have these experiments been able to transcend some of the contradictions and tensions within the NSD thinking?

The case studies in this thesis aim to explore the Labo(u)r experiments in democracy and their innovative consultation initiatives and programs. To be able to critically appraise these programs, it is essential that they are placed within an

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<sup>20</sup> Since resigning from his leadership, Latham has been more trenchant and despairing of the ALP being an effective vehicle for progressive politics (Latham 2006). In this sense, for Latham (unlike Giddens or Blair), the tension is resolved, in so far as the current party system will not deliver the requisite democratic–civic renewal.

appropriate framework. What will become apparent from the case studies is that these government programs are varied in their scope and form. The next section focuses on what the appropriate framework should be for examining their impact.

## Chapter 2

### *Understanding Political Participation*

## **Understanding Political Participation**

As outlined in Chapter 1, the New Social Democracy (NSD) offers a vision for democratic renewal and calls for experiments to meet the challenge of the 'democratising of democracy' (Giddens 1998, pp. 70–7, 2000, p. 61). The five case studies in this thesis are examples of how Labo(u)r governments in Britain and Australia have made innovative attempts to consult and engage with wider civil society. To be able to effectively audit and evaluate these case studies, it is important to place them in the wider debate about how to classify and evaluate consultative mechanisms. This short chapter sets the context for understanding the role of political participation in advanced industrial democracies.

The first part of this chapter sets the framework for classifying and evaluating the case studies. The second part of this chapter focuses on the wider theoretical debates about the role of participation in democratic theory. It will be shown that there is a link between how participation is classified and the more normative conceptions of how participation fits into democratic politics.

## **Classifying Participation and Engagement**

The starting point for understanding the role of political participation and civic engagement has been to focus on examining the typologies of engagement (Stewart 2009). Over time, a number of different typologies have emerged which have sought to capture the range and forms of participation (Althaus, Bridgman & Davis 2007;

Arnstein 1969; Bishop & Davis 2002). This section outlines some of the main contributions to the debates about classifying participation and engagement.

One of the first and most influential contributions to mapping participation is Arnstein’s ‘Ladder of Participation’ (Arnstein 1969). Arnstein (1969, p. 216) argues that ‘citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power’. Bishop and Davis (2002, p. 17) argue that her position is one of ‘citizen activist’, where any participation that is not meaningful becomes tokenistic. Arnstein’s ladder (Table 2) is a continuum which shows the gradations of power.

**Table 2: Arnstein’s Ladder of Participation (1969)**

8. Citizen Control	Degrees of citizen power
7. Delegated Power	
6. Partnership	
5. Placation	Degrees of tokenism
4. Consultation	
3. Informing	
2. Therapy	Non-participation
1. Manipulation	

*Source: Arnstein 1969, p. 217.*

Bishop and Davis (2002) group this approach with that of Pateman (Pateman’s work will be discussed fully in a later section). Pateman (1970) identifies three main types of participation: pseudo, partial and full participation. The central criticism of

Arnstein’s ladder (and Pateman’s work) is that they risk ‘making direct democracy the only test for participation’ (Bishop & Davis 2002, p. 18).

Bishop and Davis identify an alternative approach to classifying participation that was developed by John Clayton Thomas. Thomas’s innovation is linking participation to the policy problem at hand. Thomas argues that the type of policy problem will help identify the most appropriate type of participation. Thomas outlines five approaches to decision-making which range from ‘autonomous managerial decision’ to ‘public decision’ (Bishop & Davis 2002, p. 18). The merit of this approach is that it locates participation in the realm of the official, and it deems that participation is not an absolute virtue.

For Bishop and Davis (2002), this approach is problematic, in so far as it still conceptualises participation as a continuum. They link this to the work of Shand and Arnberg (1996) for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). As shown in Table 3, Shand and Arnberg identify a participation continuum with five key discernible points linking types of participation to government objectives.

**Table 3: Shand and Arnberg’s Continuum of Participation (1996)**

<i>← Minimum participation</i>		<i>Maximum participation →</i>		
Information	Consultation	Partnership	Delegation	Control

*Source: Shand & Arnberg 1996, p. 21.*

The Shand and Arnberg continuum foreshadows the International Association for Public Participation’s (IAP2) spectrum for public engagement shown in Table 4.

**Table 4: IAP2's Spectrum for Public Engagement (2004)**

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fact sheets</li> <li>• Web sites</li> <li>• Open houses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public comment</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Public meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Deliberate polling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizen Advisory Committees</li> <li>• Consensus-building</li> <li>• Participatory decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizens' juries</li> <li>• Ballots</li> <li>• Delegated decisions</li> </ul>

*Adapted from: International Association for Public Participation 2004.*

The central feature of these typologies is that power is dispersed along a continuum from minimum to maximum citizen input. Bishop and Davis (2002) argue that while these typologies might improve on Arnstein's more overtly normative ladder, they are still underpinned by normative assumptions about public participation. Bishop and Davis propose an alternative typology, and they argue that participation needs to be seen as a set of discontinuous acts reflecting the range of policy issues at hand. Bishop and Davis propose a five-point characterisation of participation types in Table 5.

**Table 5: Bishop and Davis's Typology of Participation (2002)**

Participation as consultation	This can include contact with officials and meetings to encourage comment on policy proposals
Participation as partnership	This involves citizens and organisations in policy recommendations through advisory boards or through co-production
Participation as standing	This enables citizens to enter the policy process through the courts or through third-party appeal rights
Participation as consumer choice	This is often found in service delivery mechanisms
Participation as control	This allows citizens to make choices through referenda and other forms of direct control

*Adapted from: Bishop & Davis 2002, pp. 23–6.*

These are five broad categories of participation, and within them there is much scope for further elaboration. Bishop and Davis are emphatic in categorising participation as a range of techniques. This stems from the wider debate about the place and role of participation in a modern, industrialised liberal democracy. Bishop and Davis (2002, p. 21) attempt to make their typology outside the realm of normative judgements:

Participation is shaped by the policy problem at hand, the techniques and resources available, and ultimately, a political judgement about the importance of the issue and the need for public involvement.

The merit of this typology is that it helps categorise participation without reference to the relevant normative place of participation in democratic theory. Successful or meaningful participation is left to the appropriate political judgement. However, it is not immediately clear what the implications of this are. Does 'political judgement' mean that the role and extent of participation is defined and ultimately framed by government? The Bishop and Davis typology still firmly locates participation within the frame of the state official. Government remains the gatekeeper to the type and mode of participation.

The problem with these typologies is that they are only limited tools for understanding the dynamics of participation. They leave unanswered a whole suite of questions about how effective different forms of participation can be, and they are only suggestive about how participation might be evaluated. For example, if two of the forms of consultation located on Arnstein's ladder are compared, what criteria

might be used to compare them and decide which, if any, was more or less tokenistic? A limited consultation can still be well executed, even if some groups and individuals in the community may have unrealistic expectations of the process or outcome. As Ginsborg (2005, p. 191) argues:

It is crucial for our purposes to distinguish between consultation and deliberation. The former is what many present-day democratic politicians have in mind when they talk of citizens' participation. People will be listened to, sometimes patiently, sometimes not, and then politicians will decide. Because the voice of the people, in its raw state, is usually cacophonous and inchoate, it is all too easy for politicians to adopt paternalistic, even dismissive, attitudes towards it. 'Consultation' is very often a political ruse, and should be exposed as such. On the other hand, deliberation implies the active involvement of citizens in a decision-making process. It has to do with learning and with empowerment.

The central issue is what criteria can be used to expose consultation as a 'political ruse'. Ginsborg himself does not go on to outline this in more detail.

Invoking the NSD thinking on the criteria for evaluating different forms of participation is not necessarily very helpful either. The NSD provides some clues as to what success might mean, but they remain only clues. For example, how far can a community consultation be dominated by interest groups, given the NSD's latent hostility towards them? In Giddens' (2000, p. 37) thinking, the government should regulate civil society, and civil society should regulate government. It does not automatically follow that what a left-of-centre government might consider as a 'success' in engaging with civil society will be shared by wider civil society. The

government's view of a successful consultation is inevitably different to an evaluation of the same process by civil society.

### *From Classification to Evaluation*

Typologies are a useful introduction to understanding civic engagement, but they are limited evaluative tools. As a number of commentators have noted, since the 1970s there has been an increase in the use of more innovative methods of participation (Barnes et al. 2003; Head 2007; Newman 2001; Stewart 2009). One side effect of this 'explosion' is the plethora of handbooks, guidelines and other materials targeted at both policy makers and participants (Warburton et al. 2008; Warburton et al. 2007). Petts and Leach (2000) provide an interesting overview of the literature on evaluating methods of consultation. The merit of such consultation manuals is that they can provide practitioners and participants with a generic framework for evaluating consultation exercises. However, as more robust and academic critiques, these manuals are, at best, suggestive. The manuals encourage a detailed analysis of each exercise under scrutiny, but they make it harder to make wider comparative judgements about different types of consultation exercises. As Head (2007, p. 450) notes:

Community engagement and participatory processes clearly span a variety of different practices and possibilities. This is no doubt part of the reason for the widespread lack of clarity over criteria for judging the effectiveness of participatory processes.

Head goes on to identify a potential range of evaluative indicators including:

- quality of processes
- service delivery outcomes for clients
- organisational factors, such as inequalities and capacity-building.

Other evaluative criteria have been suggested elsewhere. In their review of the literature, Petts and Leach (2000) suggest a number of criteria for evaluating public participation which are shown in Table 6.

**Table 6: Petts and Leach’s Criteria for Evaluating Public Participation (2000)**

Clarity of objectives
Clarity of legal processes
Clarity of linked processes
Consensus on agenda and procedures
Consensus on effectiveness
Representativeness
Inclusivity
Transparency
Deliberation
Capability
Social learning
Decision responsiveness
Enhancement of trust

*Source: Petts & Leach 2000, p. iv.*

The evaluative criteria used for this thesis are outlined below, and to some extent, they draw on Petts and Leach’s (2000) work. However, this thesis does not use all of the criteria in their list because for example, there is some overlap between the criteria, and crucially, criteria, such as ‘clarity of legal processes’, are not relevant for the case studies analysed in this thesis. The two criteria relating to consensus are rather contentious. Consensus as a policy outcome of consultation also has normative overtones. Consensus might be a desirable outcome, particularly for

policy makers, but there is a risk that consultation may attempt to fuse consensus onto interest groups and ‘publics’, which belies the power differentials and disagreements between the groups.<sup>21</sup> It should be reiterated that Petts and Leach’s list was researched and written for a United Kingdom government agency—the Environment Agency—and to this extent, falls within the category of practitioner manuals and guidebooks. Using a government agency ‘frame’ for evaluation, risks privileging the views and needs of the organisation above those of the participants and publics.

A somewhat more simplified set of criteria is suggested by Brackertz (2006, p. 10) in his examination of a range of community engagement initiatives in Victoria, Australia. He suggests three main evaluative criteria:

- Is it representative and therefore does it support procedural legitimation?
- Is it worthwhile, given the outcomes that result?
- Does it serve to establish relationships?

This approach is useful and dovetails closely with the one taken in this thesis. The criteria are flexible enough to enable comparison between a broad range of democratic initiatives, but they are not too wide as to render comparison meaningless. However, this thesis does not use Brackertz’s (2006) third criterion which relates to building relationships. Arguably, all the case studies in this thesis have a much shorter temporal focus, and the focus on new relationships has less relevance.

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<sup>21</sup> Newman (2005), Newman and Clarke (2009) and Barnes et al. (2003) suggest using the term ‘publics’ rather than ‘public’ to capture the full diversity and heterogeneity of the people involved in consultation and community engagement initiatives.

This overview of different evaluative criteria is by no means exhaustive, but rather it is suggestive of some of the different ways of auditing consultation exercises. It is apparent that a number of key common themes underpin these different evaluative frameworks. This thesis uses a framework which draws on the work of Pratchett (1999) and Beetham (1994).

### **The Evaluative Framework of this Thesis**

Pratchett (1999), in his evaluation of the new modes of civic participation, uses a framework based on Beetham's pioneering democratic audit work in the United Kingdom (Beetham 1994; Beetham et al. 2002). Beetham and his colleagues were the first to develop a framework to evaluate and audit the strengths and weaknesses of current democratic practice.<sup>22</sup> Beetham argues that despite the wide range of normative conceptions of democracy, there are two underpinning principles which can be used to audit the 'health' of a democracy: namely, political equality and popular control. In a democratic polity, political equality can be used as a measure to ensure that some citizens do not have greater citizenship rights than others (the Great Reform Act of 1832 is an historic example of an attempt to extend citizenship in the United Kingdom). In more recent times, political equality can be used as an index to identify which groups vote in elections and which groups do not (see Ch. 3). Popular control refers to the degree of power the citizenry have over their political representatives. As is commonly pointed out, voting in periodic general elections is a crude aggregation of popular control in mass industrial democracies. Beetham

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<sup>22</sup> Democratic audits have now taken place in a number of advanced industrial countries including Australia (Sawer, Abjorensen & Larkin 2009).

argues that political equality and popular control can be utilised as benchmarks for a range of democratic practices.

Pratchett (1999) extends these two principles and argues that in the context of auditing citizen engagement initiatives, they translate into the two themes of representativeness and responsiveness. Simply put, representativeness refers to the degree to which different socio-economic groups have participated in the exercise. Responsiveness refers to the degree to which the government agency has taken into account the full range of canvassed opinions. Using these principles as auditing tools closely meshes with the work of Brackertz (2006) and Petts and Leach (2000). Pratchett (1999) argues that these two principles are a way of examining the democratic standard of different engagement methods. As explored in the following section, Pratchett argues that, in some respects, many of the new modes of participation can be found wanting.

This thesis will call this method of evaluation, the 'Beetham–Pratchett framework', and it will use this tool to evaluate the NSD-inspired case studies. However, it should be made clear that the two principles of representativeness and responsiveness provide a prism to view the case studies: rather than being fixed categories. As will be shown, a number of the case studies were never fully intended to be—as one interviewee puts it—'a scientific or "Capital D" democratic process' (M Taylor, 2007, interview with author, 5 December). Often, the ambition for a number of the consultations was quite limited, and they need to be evaluated in this context. The two principles provide a lens to examine the democratic credentials of the consultation initiatives: rather than being a 'tick-box' exercise. The reader should not

expect to see the full expression of either representativeness or responsiveness in the case studies, but they are flexible criteria for evaluating how far the initiatives sought to address these principles. A summary evaluation using the two principles is offered at the end of each case study, and then these summaries are compared in the final concluding chapter.

On face value, the concept of representativeness and responsiveness as auditing tools is seemingly straightforward, yet invariably, they seek to capture complex and dynamic political processes. The main issue associated with using responsiveness as an auditing principle is the difficulty in showing causality. How far, if at all, did the consultation impact upon the decision-making processes? Consultation only seeks to inform decision-making, so it can be very hard to prove what actual difference the consultative process has made on the end result.

The difficulties and complexities associated with using representativeness as an auditing principle are arguably even more complex. Representativeness is a complex and highly contested term (Catt & Murphy 2003; Munro-Clark 1992; Newman 2005; Newman & Clarke 2009). Catt and Murphy (2003) note the complexity in weighting the different voices in a consultation. Newman (2005) and others have used the notion of publics rather than public to highlight the heterogeneity and of the multiple collective and individual identities of the people who constitute the 'general public'. Catt and Murphy (2003, p. 409) note:

The general public is in fact a particular kind of group, namely the group of people normally resident within the boundaries of the political unit in question, be that a

municipality, province, country, region, etc. Groups of this nature may not share a common identity, set of values or shared characteristics, as do ethnic or cultural minorities, but they are nonetheless, groups with discernible boundaries and distinctions between insiders and outsiders for instance or members or non-members.

The central issue here is that even 'the public', a seemingly straightforward political entity, is a complex and differentiated group of people. It follows that achieving representativeness of the public (or publics) is a highly contentious process. As explored in the case studies, many of the initiatives in this thesis were designed to appeal to and involve the community. Yet, this is a highly politicised concept. In a number of the case studies, the legitimacy of the consultations is based on the involvement of the wider community (see Ch. 7), and yet, this has the effect of masking the inequalities in participation taking place.

One of the most thorough critiques of the role of representation in the new democratic experiments is offered by Newman (2005) and Newman and Clarke (2009). Newman and Clarke (2009, p. 141) argue that many proponents for democratic experiments in citizen engagement apply a fixed and static notion of representation:

Representation, then rests, on a narrow view of politics and of identity. It essentialises identity itself, inviting people to 'stand for' specific categories: the young or old, black or white, male or female population, without taking any account of the dynamic relationships between the multiple dimensions of personhood.

Newman argues that the net effect can be fostering a process of de-politicisation where 'more collective or politicised voices are excluded' (Newman 2005, p. 131). This is not to say that representativeness cannot be used as an auditing tool, but it reinforces the notion that it should be applied as a critical prism for viewing the different initiatives. For example, it is insufficient to merely count the number of women involved in a consultation initiative, and if the gender balance is 50:50, then make the assumption that all voices and contributions are weighted equally. Rather, examining the consultation through the prism of gender representativeness encourages a discussion of both the amount and range of female voices heard, along with the barriers that some women face in having their concerns articulated.

The following section examines some of the suggested models for the democratic experiments which are designed to supplement the institutions of representative democracy. Pratchett's (1999) work highlights how the principles of political equality and popular control can be used to show the strengths and weaknesses of these new modes of participation.

### **Evaluating Different Models for the Democratisation of Democracy**

As noted from the outset, since the 1970s there has been a growing explosion of new consultative and deliberative mechanisms (Barber 1984, 2001; Carson et al. 2002; Fung & Olin Wright 2003; King, Feltey & O'Neill Susel 1998; Pratchett 1999; Stewart 2009; Young 2000). In tandem with this growth of new initiatives has been a growing body of academic work critiquing and evaluating these new experiments in democratic renewal (Carson 2001; Dryzek 2000; Head 2007; Munro-Clark 1992;

Newman 2005; Newman & Clarke 2009; Pratchett 1999; Reddel & Woolcock 2004).

This section examines some of the new vehicles suggested for democratic renewal, and then it sets out the framework for comparing and evaluating the case studies in this thesis.

A wide range of candidates have been offered as a way of supplementing representative democracy including the following:<sup>23</sup>

- citizens' juries
- citizens' panels
- focus groups
- 'community planning' models
- 'visioning' events.

Pratchett (1999) is among a number of writers who have critiqued these 'new fashions' in public involvement and found them wanting in many respects. Pratchett argues that New Labour has given a fresh impetus to the growing citizen participation agenda. Pratchett (1999, p. 626) argues that in its drive for democratic renewal, New Labour holds 'an implicit assumption that any form of participation contributes to democratic practice'.

A short summary of the limitations of some of the suggested models for democratic renewal is outlined in Table 7.

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<sup>23</sup> A detailed description of these different models is given by Pratchett (1999).

**Table 7: Summary of the Limitations of Suggested Models for Democratic Renewal**

Mode of participation	Comment
Citizens' panels	They are based on a representative sample of the population. However, the agenda for the panel is usually set by the organisation so it can often miss key issues. Those recruited from recalcitrant groups may not be typical of that group. Panels can also lead to what is called the 'Hawthorne effect'—whereby the act of being observed in a project or activity can lead people to modify their behaviour. <sup>24</sup> The risk associated with citizens' panels are that participants can become 'good citizens' and no longer represent the wider society.
Citizens' juries	Policies examined in small non-representative groups. Juries lack formal powers for their recommendations. There is usually no binding verdict and they lack the rigour of the judicial process. Juries can also be dominated by policy elites and networks. This criticism is also shared by Carson (2001) and Segall (2005).
Focus groups	'The democratic credentials of focus groups are questionable' (Pratchett 1999, p. 623). Focus groups originated as marketing tools for getting consumer responses to a marketing strategy. Most focus groups are not representative of the wider public. The danger with focus groups is that the conversations generated are rather superficial.
Community planning models and visioning events.	These events do tend to engage the wider community more fully, but there are usually no guarantees of representativeness. Outcomes are not always formally binding. In addition, long-term visions and goals can be lost in organisational translation.

*Adapted from: Pratchett 1999, pp. 621–8.*

<sup>24</sup> The 'Hawthorne effect' is named after a series of research projects conducted in the 1920s and 1930s to improve productivity at the Hawthorne Plant in Chicago. The projects received a good deal of sociological investigation, particularly by Elton Mayo. Mayo (1966) argued that the act of observing the workers was a key reason for them becoming more productive rather than other variables. A more recent re-appraisal of the Hawthorne data suggests that the 'Hawthorne effect' may have been overstated in the original experiments ('Light work: questioning the Hawthorne effect', *The Economist* 4 June 2009).

Other suggested models have also been critiqued, and in some capacity, they have been found wanting. These models (and critiques of them) include:

- community-initiated referenda (Williams 2001)
- consensus conferences (Carson 2001)
- deliberative polling (Carson 2001)
- televote (Carson 2001)
- public meetings (Thorne & Purcell 1992)
- surveys (Thorne & Purcell 1992)
- resident-initiated participation (Purcell 1992)
- deliberative forums established by government agencies (Barnes et al. 2003).

There are many other types of models and forums for citizen participation, each with differing strengths and weaknesses. Many of these have been catalogued by Keane (2009). It has become clear that no single model, in its own right, can deliver a reinvigorated democratic polity.

On the whole, the literature on citizen participation initiatives tends to be rather pessimistic (Newman & Clarke 2009). It is apparent that just increasing public involvement per se, does not automatically supplement representative democracy (Kerley & Starr 2000). A central concern is that, more often than not, it is people from higher socio-economic groups who are able to articulate their concerns through such means, at the expense of those from lower socio-economic groups (Abers 2003; Sandercock 1978).

Some of the main generic problems and risks with many of these models of democratic experimentation include:

- government agenda-setting can make them political exercises (Munro-Clark 1992, p. 17)
- even when legislative or other drivers exist which mandate government agencies to consult or use innovative mechanisms, the commitment to do this and the quality of these experiments varies (Brackertz 2006; Colebatch 2006;; Petts & Leach 2000)
- some mechanisms can be dull, time-consuming and costly (Althaus, Bridgman & Davis 2007; Irvin & Stansbury 2004)
- it can be difficult to ensure legitimacy in decision-making with 'representative' groups (Althaus, Bridgman & Davis 2007; Catt & Murphy 2003)
- some groups can dominate over others (Althaus, Bridgman & Davis 2007)
- there can be a lack of resources and insufficient time allocated to the process (Considine 2005)
- tokenism and manipulation (Considine 2005).

In his summary of the different modes of participation, Pratchett (1999, p. 629) concludes:

In short, it is the organisation which defines when and how people can participate, the issues to which their participation can contribute, and the extent to which any initiative will feed into the policy process. At best, this limits the scope for public participation. At worst, however, it is possible to see participation initiatives as self-serving exercises designed to support the internal interest of organisations rather than the broader interests of the community.

In a more recent survey, Head (2007, p. 452) argues that there is little evidence showing that many of the democratic experiments have involved real power-sharing and cites two main reasons:

First, governments tend to regain control of these processes through funding, service contracts and regulation. Government institutions find it difficult to devolve power and control. Second, the capacity and motivation of citizens to participate effectively, or to create alternative forums, remains a weakness in community engagement strategies.

It would be wrong, however, to be left with an overwhelmingly pessimistic view of such initiatives. Many of the critics have argued that some of these modes of participation can have a role, albeit a limited one. As Pratchett (1999, p632) notes, there is a democratic impulse in many public sector organisations which is laudable. Newman and Clarke (2009, p. 151) describe themselves as ‘critical enthusiasts’—a view shared by the author of this thesis. The case studies presented in this thesis are selected to see how successful the NSD-influenced attempts at democratic renewal have been in addressing these challenges and tensions.

### **Participation and Democratic Theory—a Short Overview**

This thesis uses the Beetham–Pratchett framework to audit Labo(u)r governments’ innovative attempts at consultation. The underpinning principles of responsiveness and representativeness are operational tools for seeing how effective these case studies have been in engaging with the public and fostering participation. However, the audit approach of this thesis cannot be divorced from more normative accounts

of the role of participation in democratic theory. The key issue is that to understand the case studies, it is important to locate them in wider democratic theory. This section provides a (very) short overview of these issues. The debate about the role of participation is exhaustive and evolving, and this section aims only to capture some of the key underpinning themes and ideas.

Participation is a central feature of democratic theory, and it can be traced back to accounts of democracy in the Athenian city–state. David Held provides a useful overview of the changing role of participation in democratic theory and outlines a number of models of democracy (Held 1987, 1996, 2006). This section highlights some of the key ideas from some of these models. Appendix 1 provides a summary of the role of participation in each of Held’s models.<sup>25</sup>

The idea of active and direct participation in the polity is a powerful ideal which continues to endure. The classical model of democracy is based on the Athenian city–state where participation is clearly linked to a common civic duty. ‘Pericles describes a community in which all citizens could and indeed should participate in the creation and nurturing of a common life’ (Held 1987 p. 17). Participation, of course, was limited to male citizens and confined to a city–state that was based on a slave economy. However, it is this notion of participation as a civic virtue which continues to sustain the democratic ideal.

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<sup>25</sup> The need for brevity means that not all of Held’s models are examined in full, but rather some of the key developments and ideas are outlined. It should be reiterated that the political thought of Rousseau, Locke, Hobbes, Machiavelli, Bentham, JS Mill, Maddison and a large number of other prominent contributors to the debate is complex, nuanced and contested. This account cannot do full justice to them all. The overriding aim is to give a contextual flavour of the oscillating and contested place of political participation and civic engagement.

In Held's (1987) account of the evolution of democratic thought, it is the developmental model of democracy which promotes a highly active citizenry and is most closely associated with the political thought of Rousseau. Rousseau's ideas in his 1762 work, 'The Social Contract', (cited in Held 1996) remain a wellspring of inspiration for later democratic enthusiasts such as Pateman and MacPherson. For Rousseau, where participation is limited to periodic voting of elected officials, 'the people' cannot be truly free. Rousseau's account of the active citizen is based on his ideas about the character of sovereignty. In this well-known passage, Rousseau argues:

Sovereignty can not be represented, for the same reason it can not be alienated ... the people's deputies are not, and could not be, its representatives; they are merely its agents; and they cannot decide anything finally. Any law which the people has not ratified in person is void; it is not law at all. The English people believes itself to be free; it is gravely mistaken; it is free only during the election of Members of Parliament; as soon as the Members are elected, the people is enslaved, it is nothing. (Rousseau cited in Held 1996, p. 58)

These ideas are developed further by JS Mill. Mill shares Rousseau's belief that participation can be an engine for moral self-development, but Mill argues, 'Participation in political life is sadly but inescapably limited in a large-scale, complex and densely populated society' (Mill cited in Held 1987, p. 93). Mill desires and encourages active citizenry but argues that it can only remain a limited feature of the modern state.

Much of the debate about the role of participation in democratic theory then becomes a discussion about where to draw the line that determines how far citizens should be involved in the political system outside of their role of electing their representatives. Joseph Schumpeter is a key thinker who argues, against Rousseau and JS Mill, that political participation should only have a very minimal role (Schumpeter 1950). Held (1996, p. 197) encapsulates Schumpeter's ideas in the 'competitive elitist democracy' model. For Schumpeter (1950, p. 269), democracy is conceived as no more than a political method for electing the political elites. Participation is limited to the election of the political elites or the freedom to compete to join the elite. Schumpeter argues that an overly participative society would be an inherently unstable polity. Held (1987, p. 192) finds these ideas echoed in the thoughts of Lipset, who suggests that political apathy may be a useful function for liberal democracy—an expression of general content and delegation to the government to resolve dispute and arbitrate interest.

Participation gets a deeper examination in the works of Pateman (1970) and MacPherson (1973). Pateman draws upon Rousseau and JS Mill in particular, to emphasise the educative role of participation for the citizen. Greater participation increases the quality and operation of democracy. Pateman calls for greater participation in society, such as through the workplace. Pateman suggests that there are limits to this expanded role of participation, in so far as people are less likely to be interested in national events than issues closer to home. She contends that increasing participation 'would enable the individual better to appreciate the connection between the private and public spheres' (Pateman 1970, p. 110).

For some, such as Stoker (2006) and Walzer (1970, 1991), those who espouse greater democracy often impose a normative ideal of increased participation that does not correlate with how citizens currently engage with the political system, which is more spasmodic and fitful. Walzer (1970), rather entertainingly, satirises the role of participation offered by others in the Left in his essay, 'A day in the life of a socialist citizen'. Walzer (1970, p. 231) argues that 'ultimately it may require almost continuous activity, and life will become a succession of meetings'. Walzer (1970, p. 230) recalls the famous quote attributed to Oscar Wilde, 'Socialism would take too many evenings'.

Interestingly, Walzer (though to a much lesser extent than Pateman) still argues that democracy can be enriched and renewed. In the era of mass democracy, the difficulty is to reconcile representation with wider participation. These ideas are developed further in Young's (2000) conception of an inclusive democracy. Young argues that political representation is a necessary part of a modern democracy, but this needs to be reconceptualised in more dynamic and inclusive terms. Young makes a strong case for special representation of excluded groups. Crucially, for Young, there are clear limits of the role of civil society. As much as civil society can be a voice for excluded groups, the state has specific, unique functions which cannot be replaced by civil society. The tension between the state and civil society can not be transcended, but through inclusive political communication—developed from Habermas's (1979) theory of communicative action—the state can mediate and represent excluded groups.

It is interesting to note that while Young (2000) and Stoker (2006) are among many who argue that the state cannot be replaced, there is a tradition of political thought which argues that civil society can transcend the state—notably, Marx's (1938) political theory which overturns Hegel's classical demarcation of the state and civil society. A more idealistic strand is evinced by Morris in his visionary 1912 work, 'News from nowhere' (cited in Mulgan 2006, p. 250), 'We are very well as to politics—because we have none'.

It is common to the political thought of Held (1987), Pateman (1970), Young (2000) and Stoker (2006) that while the tensions between the state and civil society will persist, they can (and ought to) be reinvigorated. This view is shared by Giddens in his call for the democratising of democracy. Stoker (2006) argues that the current practice of representative democracy is not the final stage of its development: it is still evolving.

### *Limits to Democratic Renewal*

Hindess (1997) makes a cautionary note regarding the calls for democratic renewal and argues that while the democratic dream still lingers as an ideal (which has its roots in the Athenian model of direct participation), disenchantment will continue to be a feature of participative democracy. Dunn shares this view and notes that an ongoing feature of democratic political life is that it remains 'consistently disappointing' (Dunn 2000, p. xii cited in Hay 2007, p. 6). Hindess argues that the democratic dream will persist while there remains confusion about the nature of political power, and the distinction needs to be made between power as a right and

power as a capacity. Governments may have the right to make laws but not always the capacity to do so. Hindess takes issue with those, such as Pateman, who examine the 'democratic deficit', and argues that while spreading democratic institutions may spread authority (which may not be a bad thing), it also expands the range of locations where the ability to influence the agenda of government will be frustrated.

The implication of Hindess's (and Dunn's) insight for Labo(u)r is that democratic renewal is an inherently limited project because it simultaneously seeks to strengthen the democratic ideal, and yet, reasserting the ideal only exposes the utopian foundations on which it rests. Democratic renewal then becomes a dual process of idealisation and disappointment. Paradoxically, democratic renewal can lead to apathy and what Burchell (2002, p. 65) terms, 'perpetual disillusionment'. Burchell, invoking the political thought of Carl Schmitt (1976), argues that essentially politics is in a different realm of human relations from other spheres such as family life. Confusion arises if this distinction is ignored. For Schmitt, the overriding characteristic of politics is the 'capacity for political relations to be reduced to what he called "friend-enemy" relations' (Burchell 2002, p. 67). For Schmitt, liberals perpetuate a myth of democracy as they promote an overly consensual approach to politics. This leads Burchell (2002, p. 77) to argue:

At least part of our perpetual disillusionment with politics may be attributable to the fact that we have never really pulled it out of the clouds.

This links to the realism of the sociological thoughts of Weber. Weber, in his classic essay, 'Politics as vocation', argues that politics requires a particular set of human

skills, and a tough and unyielding disposition is a prerequisite for the modern politician:

Politics is a strong and slow boring of hard boards. It takes both passion and perspective. Certainly all historical experience confirms the truth – that man would not have attained the possible unless time and again he had reached out for the impossible. But to do that man must be a leader, and not only a leader but a hero as well, in a very sober sense of the word. And even those who are neither leaders nor heroes must arm themselves with that steadfastness of heart which can brave the crumbling of all hopes. This is necessary right now, or else men will not be able to attain even that which is possible today. (Weber, Gerth & Mills 1977, p. 128)

This inherent tension between idealism and realism strongly resonates in NSD thinking. Pierson (2001, p. 145) argues that social democratic politics itself, might well be ‘the politics of perpetually diminishing expectations’. NSD thinking, at times, seemingly wants to espouse an idealistic and transformative strand of ‘New Politics’ (Blair 1998). Yet, it is also an exercise in downplaying the expectations of the electorate: particularly ‘fiscal conservatism’ inherent in the politics of the NSD (Manne 2008b, p. 26). NSD thinking espouses both idealism and pragmatism: perhaps to the detriment of both. The Labo(u)r governments considered in this thesis may well be able to attract significant electoral support, but they may also be fuelling society’s perpetual disappointment in their calls for democratic renewal.

Understanding the NSD experiments in the democratising of democracy cannot be divorced from the wider debates about the rightful place of political participation in democratic theory. The case studies reported in this thesis can be seen as part of a

wider program to reconfigure the relationship between the state and civil society and to foster a form of active citizenship. The case studies shed some light on how the Labo(u)r governments have addressed some of these tensions and paradoxes within the democratic tradition.

Before leaving this discussion about democratic theory, it is important to briefly address the emergence of what has been broadly called deliberative democracy. The emergence of calls for forms of deliberative democracy can be linked to the NSD narrative of democratic renewal.

### **The Deliberative Challenge to Representative Democracy**

Partly in response to what some commentators perceived to be a 'crisis of democracy' in the late 1960s and early 1970s, there has been a growth in calls for the introduction of forms of 'deliberative democracy' (Besson & Martí 2006).<sup>26</sup> Calls for forms of deliberative democracy are varied, and there is wide disagreement between its proponents about the underpinning principles and the institutional design of deliberative democratic mechanisms (Benhabib 1996a, p. 6). However, the central theme of the debate is the argument that in a mass society, representative democracy is a blunt tool for aggregating citizens' needs. These writers call for new deliberative policy-making mechanisms to supplement the institutions of representative democracy (Benhabib 1996b; Dryzek 2000; Elster 1998; Fishkin & Laslett 2003; Young 2003).

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<sup>26</sup> Besson and Marti (2006, pp. xiii–xxxi) provide a useful overview of the evolution of deliberative democracy.

The starting point for many deliberative democracy enthusiasts is Habermas's defence of the public sphere (Benhabib 1996b; Habermas 1979, 1989; Newman 2005). For Habermas (1996), the political imperative is to institutionalise the public use of reason. The main strength of this approach is that it can produce better and more legitimate decision-making processes. The quality of decision-making under deliberative processes trumps that of a cruder representative democracy. This is particularly the case in existing democracies where political representatives tend to be white, male and relatively affluent. Proponents of deliberative democracy are keen to increase the range of deliberative forums to foster wider and more inclusive debate.

On one level, this seems to fit with the NSD calls for the democratising of democracy, but as Besson and Martí (2006, p. xv) note, there is an ambiguous relationship between deliberative democracy and participative democracy:

Contrary to what is usually supposed by many commentators, however, deliberative democracy is not conceptually committed to a participatory or direct-democratic ideal.

For deliberative enthusiasts, it is not the overall amount of participation that is desirable (although many would welcome more): it is an improvement in the quality of decision-making which will strengthen democratic legitimacy.

Deliberative democracy has been subject to a wide range of criticisms (Benhabib 1996b; Fishkin & Laslett 2003; Held 2006; Sunstein 2003; Young 2003), and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to interrogate them all. However, it is worth highlighting some of the key problems. Feminist critiques of some accounts of

deliberative democracy have detected an underlying patriarchal use of instrumental reason which risks excluding women (Benhabib 1996b). A second concern is the institutional form of deliberative democracy and how it might dovetail and enhance the existing institutions of representative democracy. As Beeson and Marti (2006, p. xv) note, the second wave of deliberative politics has focused more on this issue. Fishkin's (2002) development of deliberative polling is arguably the most robust and sophisticated response.<sup>27</sup>

Young (2003) argues that there may be good reasons why activists may not want to engage in forms of deliberative democracy. For Young, the emphasis in deliberative democracy is to produce consensual outcomes. She argues that for many activists, their concern is to question the political status quo, and their agendas risk being coopted in the deliberative processes. Sunstein (2003, p. 81) raises a more technical, but still compelling, objection by observing that in many small group discussions, the 'law of group polarisation' can take place:

In brief, group polarization means that members of a deliberating group predictably move toward a more extreme point in the direction indicated by the members' predeliberation tendencies.

Sunstein cites the example of affirmative action, where if the members of the group are generally predisposed towards affirmative action measures before the deliberative event, they tend to be much more supportive after the event. This poses

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<sup>27</sup> A version of Fishkin's (2002) deliberative poll was used on a random sample from the 1999 Australian republic referendum. Interestingly, support for a republic increased dramatically by 20 per cent among those involved in the poll.

a whole suite of difficult questions for policy makers regarding the representativeness of such views obtained through deliberative events.

The development of deliberative democracy poses a new set of questions and challenges for the ongoing evolution of democracy and the role of political participation. Yet, to some extent, while these questions are interesting, they are peripheral to this thesis. Interestingly, in the most recent audit of Australian democracy, Sawyer, Abjorensen and Larkin (2009) use the principle of 'deliberation' alongside political equality and popular control as evaluative tools. Therefore, it is tempting to include deliberation as an additional criterion for the evaluation of the case studies in this thesis. However, while the extent and role of deliberation is briefly considered in the concluding chapter of this thesis, deliberation is not included as a criterion in the summary evaluations of each of the case studies. The main reason for this is that most of the Labo(u)r consultation initiatives under consideration are explicitly not deliberative. Most of the case studies were not intended to be deliberative attempts at consultation, although it is a minor feature of some of them. Auditing the case studies against the principle of deliberation runs the risk of accusing them of failing to meet a standard of inclusive public dialogue which they never sought to achieve from the outset. The emergence of deliberative democracy is an important part of the overall backdrop to the NSD calls for democratic renewal, but it is not a central focus of this thesis.

## **Labo(u)r Governments and the Democratisation of Democracy**

This chapter sets the context for the thesis and has two main aims. Firstly, it has outlined the evaluative framework for the thesis. Drawing on the works of Pratchett (1999), Beetham (1994) and Beetham et al. (2002), this thesis uses the two principles of responsiveness (popular control) and representativeness (political equality) as the main critical lens to examine the case studies. Responsiveness and representativeness are not fixed categories, and the full expression of either of them in the case studies should not be expected. Instead, the two principles are used as a prism to examine the democratic credentials of each of the case studies.

The second main aim of this chapter has been to offer a snapshot of the oscillating role of political participation in democratic theory. The Beetham–Pratchett evaluative framework cannot be separated from normative accounts of the role of civic engagement in competing accounts of democracy. This short survey of some of the main literature on democratic theory exposes a number of tensions and paradoxes that impact on the NSD-influenced Labo(u)r attempts at democratic renewal. A key tension is that inherent to any attempt at invigorating the democratic polity, there is a simultaneous process of idealism and realism. Opening up new sites for public dialogue is both an opportunity and a potential new source of political frustration and disappointment. The emergence of accounts of deliberative democracy also raises the question: how will these new sites of participation fit within the existing structures of representative democracy? The case studies reported in this thesis provide some answers to wider questions about how well NSD-influenced Labo(u)r governments have been able to manage and address these tensions and issues.

This contextual material poses a suite of questions which underpin this thesis:

- How far have the Lab(u)our governments, in their experiments in the democratising of democracy, been able to address the principles of representativeness and responsiveness?
- How ambitious are the case studies as part of a wider program of democratic renewal, and how committed are these Labo(u)r governments to this agenda?
- For NSD-influenced Labo(u)r governments—what is the rightful place of participation, and what type and forms of political participation are they seeking to produce?
- How do these case studies fit in with the existing institutions of representative democracy?

These questions form the core of this thesis. To deepen the understanding of the Labo(u)r governments' attempts at democratic renewal, it is necessary to examine some of the key structural changes in political participation and support in the advanced industrial societies. The case studies are part of much wider and evolving political trends, and they should be located within these patterns. This is the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter 3

### *The Continuity and Change in Patterns of Political Participation*

## **The Changing Patterns of Political Participation and Support**

Political participation is a dynamic process of exchange between the citizen and the state. In Britain and Australia, like many advanced industrial societies, the relationship between the state and civil society is changing. The case studies that form the core of this thesis examine some of the responses initiated by Labo(u)r governments to respond to and shape this changing relationship. In the previous chapter, normative accounts of democratic theory were outlined to contextualise an understanding of the role of political participation and civic engagement. The focus of this chapter is to supplement this with empirical accounts of how citizens in Britain and Australia actually engage with the state.

This chapter examines the issues of political support and political participation in more depth. The first section examines how political participation is defined and outlines some of the main theories for explaining participation. Following this, the main trends in both continuity and change in patterns of political participation and support are outlined. This section indicates how much participation is taking place. The third section focuses on the sociology of participation in Britain and Australia—which sheds light on who is participating. The final section briefly considers the overall patterns and trends in political participation and support, and the implications they have for NSD-influenced Labo(u)r governments.

## **Defining Political Participation and Political Support**

Defining political support and participation is not straightforward, and there have been numerous variations in classifying acts of participation (Almond & Verba 1963; Bean 1989; Birch 1993; Bishop & Davis 2002; Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley 2003a, 2003b, 2004; Verba, Nie & Kim 1978; Verba, Scholzman & Brady 1995). A useful starting point is the demarcation between citizen's attitudes and behaviour. Measuring political attitudes and behaviour is complex, and caution has to be exercised when analysing survey data which aim to capture these dimensions of political participation and support. For example, it is well known that survey respondents tend to over report the amount of political acts they carry out (Parry, Moyser & Day 1992).

In terms of defining and measuring political attitudes, the work of Pippa Norris is insightful. Norris (1999) argues that political support is multidimensional, and she developed a five-fold framework where a citizen's support is pitched at different levels (see Appendix 2). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to outline this work in detail, but the fundamental point is that Norris's work measures citizen's support at different levels in a polity. The most common finding is that most citizens in advanced industrial societies tend to be highly supportive of both the principle of democracy and the quality of democracy in their own countries. However, they tend to take a much dimmer view of the 'regime institutions' and 'political actors' (Norris 1999, pp. 1–11). This chapter focuses on examining attitudes around these two levels.

The benchmark for measuring citizen's attitudes to politics and political participation stems from work done in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s (Almond & Verba 1963; Verba, Nie & Kim 1978). Almond and Verba's (1963, p. 12) landmark study, *The Civic Culture*, argues that underpinning the political institutional framework of each democratic system is a political or civic culture:

The term political culture thus refers to the specifically political orientations – attitudes toward the political system and its variants parts, and attitudes toward the role of the self within the system. We speak of a political culture just as we speak of an economic culture or a religious culture. It is a set of orientations toward a specific set of social objects and processes.

This notion of the civic culture shapes these authors' definition of political participation. Verba, Nie and Kim (1978) make a general demarcation between orthodox and unorthodox participation. Activities, such as political campaigning on behalf of a political party, are conceived as orthodox, while acts, like signing a petition, are considered unorthodox. Verba, Nie and Kim (1978, p. 51) argue that there are distinct 'modes' of political participation and different modes of activity, 'that is, sets of activities that differ systematically in how they relate the individual to his government'.

The four main modes are:

- Voting—an individual act that requires little initiative, and in competitive elections it is an act taking place in a conflictual environment.
- Campaign activity—participation in election campaigns which unlike voting, requires cooperation.

- Communal activity—this combines two types of activity: individual contacts with government officials on a general social issue and cooperative non-partisan activities involving group attempts to deal with some general issue.
- Particularised contacts—a citizen acting as an individual (or with a few family members) contacts a government official about a particularised problem that is limited to self and/or family. (Verba, Nie & Kim 1978, p. 51)

This framework has formed the basis for the study of citizen's attitudes and behaviour since the 1960s. However, political participation and support are evolving and so is the conceptual understanding of these ideas. Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley (2004) outline an updated definition of participation and civic engagement that is built around the concept of citizenship. A feature of their conception of citizenship is to discard the orthodox/unorthodox dichotomy. They argue that acts, such as signing a petition, are no longer usefully considered unorthodox as Verba and his colleagues claim. For Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley (2004, p. 22), their definition is:

Citizenship is a set of norms, values, and practices designed to solve collective action problems which involve the recognition by individuals that they have rights and obligations to each other if they wish to solve such problems.

In turn, they outline a useful three-fold typology of civic engagement:

- individualistic (individual acts such as signing a petition)
- contact (acts such as contacting a public official)
- collective (meetings, demonstrations, etc.).

Pattie and his colleagues also make a distinction between macro political participation and micro political participation. Macro participation refers to the commonly tracked acts of participation, such as attending a political meeting. Micro participation refers to the more localised acts that people engage in, such as contacting a school regarding a child's education or contacting a health official to influence medical treatment.

Most accounts of political participation also tend to focus on the voluntary dimension of political participation, and these accounts treat compulsory acts of citizenship separately.<sup>28</sup> However, in terms of presenting an overall picture of participation and engagement in a given society, they can exclude other trends. For example, in their 'democratic audit' of Britain, Beetham et al. (2002, p. 15) take a broad definition of participation and argue that:

... it would be bizarre ... not to count compulsory jury service in the UK as 'political participation' when it is rightly regarded a key feature of our justice system.

This thesis draws upon the general typology developed by Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley (2004) to describe and measure continuity and change in patterns of political participation. Four key points should be reiterated. Firstly, typologies of participation are evolving, particularly in response to the challenge of capturing modes of electronic political participation. Secondly, measuring the amount of political participation by tallying up the number of particular acts (for example, the number of

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<sup>28</sup> While accounting for compulsory acts of participation seems straightforward on one level, it is worth noting that there is an interesting body of work which points to socio-economic differences in groups who opt out of, or are exempted from, compulsory acts of participation (Beetham et al 2002).

people who signed a petition in any given year), leaves a great deal unsaid about the dynamics and mobilisation of political participation (Skocpol 2003).

Thirdly, there is potentially a huge range of indicators available and this chapter highlights only some of the main trends. Finally, Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley's (2004) typology of participation includes a broad range of activities, and it is apparent that NSD-influenced governments are only interested in some of the different modes of participation. For example, former Prime Minister Blair's New Labour government witnessed two of the largest street demonstrations ever to take place in Britain (the anti-War in Iraq demonstration and the Countryside Alliance march—both in London).<sup>29</sup> On one hand, these are large-scale examples of mass active civic participation—which could be taken as a healthy sign of the democratic policy in Britain. However, on the other hand, it is unlikely that they correlate to the forms of civic engagement that are sought under the New Labour government, where the focus has been on increasing volunteering rates.

Despite the inherent difficulties and constraints in this empirical approach, examining the changing levels of political participation in Britain and Australia allows observation of important facets of political life in both countries. Moreover, since this thesis is a comparative study, it enables a clearer view of how much commonality there is in—to employ Almond and Verba's (1963) concept—the civic culture of both countries. A key assumption in this thesis is that the NSD-influenced Labo(u)r governments are responding to a common set of political challenges. This chapter

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<sup>29</sup> An estimated two million people marched to Hyde Park on 15 February 2003 for the anti-war march. The Countryside Alliance march took place on 22 September 2002, and an estimated 400 000 people attended.

examines the similarity in the patterns of political support and participation in Britain and Australia.

## **Explaining Political Participation**

The focus of this chapter is examining the recent trends in political participation and support. Before proceeding to this discussion it is useful to highlight some of the main theories for explaining political participation.<sup>30</sup> Pattie and his colleagues (2004) usefully summarise the main theories used for accounting for political participation. They make a distinction between structural and choice-based theories, and they outline five main theoretical approaches for understanding participation:

1. Cognitive engagement theory.
2. General incentives theory.
3. Civic voluntarism model.
4. Equity–fairness model.
5. Social capital theory.

These approaches are outlined in Table 8.

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<sup>30</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, it is only necessary to highlight and summarise the main explanations given for why people participate. This thesis is not seeking to test these models directly, but understanding the different accounts for why citizens engage helps contextualise the changing patterns of political participation.

**Table 8: Five General Theories for explaining Political Participation**

Theory	Comment	Weaknesses
Cognitive engagement theory	This theory rests on the idea that participation depends on a person's access to information and his or her ability to make informed choices. Two key trends assist the growth of this model: the growth of education (particularly higher education) and the declining costs of acquiring information. These trends produce a process of 'cognitive mobilisation' (Barnes & Kaase 1979). Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley (2004) argue that at the 'regime, performance' is a key factor in explaining why some are 'good' citizens and others are not.	While the theory has a focus on choice, it is not clear why individuals should be willing to act on the information once they have it. There is an absence of incentives in this theory.
General incentives theory	This model was introduced to explain the incidence of high intensity types of participation involving party activists (Whiteley & Seyd 2002). The core idea is that people need incentives to participate—having similarities with rational choice theories of action. However, the theory argues that—unlike traditional accounts of rational choice theory (Downs 1957; Olson 1971)—incentives are wider than just individual self-interest. The main types of incentives are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• collective (benefits to all individuals whether they participate or not)</li> <li>• selective (benefits for those who participate as opposed to those who do not)</li> <li>• expressive (motivation for those who seek to participate based on their emotional or affective attachments to society)</li> <li>• group (the individual's perception that group benefits are a good reason to support civic values and participate—people act to get benefits for the groups they care about)</li> <li>• social (those who are stimulated to participate enjoy the social benefits of working with others).</li> </ul>	The theory overemphasises the importance of choice on behaviour. Socialisation processes also play an important part in why some are 'good' citizens and others are not. The theory can ignore structural determinants of behaviour.
Civic voluntarism model	Origins in the work of Verba and Nie (1972). People need resources to be able to participate; mainly time, money and skills. Crucially, the socio-economic status (SES) of a person determines, to a large degree, how he or she civically engages. Verba and his colleagues have refined this model over time, and they have argued that one of the weaknesses of the model—the weak theoretical link between socio-economic variables and participation—can be explained by a broader examination of other resources (for example, an individual's leisure time). However, Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley argue that this still does not fully account for why even those from higher SES groups might choose to politically participate, rather than use their leisure time for recreational activities.	While the model shows how people from higher SES groups tend to participate more than those from lower SES groups, it does not adequately explain why large numbers of people from higher SES groups do not participate at all.
Equity–fairness model	Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley argue that, as a theory, it is not a general theory of participation, but rather seeks to account for specific types of participation. The starting point is that society is divided into various groups competing for resources. The core idea is that people compare themselves with others and depending on how favourable these comparisons are, this can lead to aggressive (protest) forms of participation (Gurr 1970). Therefore, the perceived (or real) lack of equity or fairness with peer groups is a stimulus for action.	This model has limits and may not be relevant for other forms of participation. Also, the link between relative deprivation and action is complex, for example, it can lead to increased apathy.
Social capital model	This model argues that features of social organisation, such as trust, norms and networks, can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions (Putnam 2000). Social capital is like other forms of capital, in that it can be used to achieve social objectives. Trust is the key feature, and associational life is central to building trust and networks.	This model tends to neglect incentives as explanations for participation.

*Adapted from: Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley 2004, pp. 138–51.*

As Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley (2004) note, all of the theories have something to offer in terms of illuminating at least some aspects of why citizens participate. No one single theoretical model dominates. The choice-based theories are stronger in emphasising the role of incentives in why some groups of people participate and others do not. Likewise, the structural theories draw more attention to the barriers that some groups face in participating. Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley (2004, p. 184) are adamant that the relationship between citizens and the state is malleable, and it:

... is subject to a continuing negotiation and can change in response to shifting incentives and circumstances.

Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley (2004, p. 183) use the data from their citizen audit of Britain to test the five different explanatory models of political participation.<sup>31</sup> They argue that:

It is clear from the findings that choice-based models are more important than structural based models for explaining certain aspects of citizenship, particularly participation, while the reverse is true for key aspects of attitudes.

Pattie and his colleagues examine how each model accounts for the different types of participation: 'individualistic' (for example, signing a petition), 'contact' (for example, writing to an official) and 'collective' (for example, attending

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<sup>31</sup> A full discussion of the methodology can be found in their book (Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley 2004, pp.152–185).

meetings). They argue that the social capital model contributes to understanding group membership, but it is not particularly clear how far trust plays a part in explaining other forms of participation—a finding confirmed by Newton (1999). Likewise, the equity–fairness model has some relevance for explaining collective forms of action but it has little impact on individual forms. Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley (2004, p. 185) argue that “cognitive-engagement” theory is particularly important in explaining collective participation and the “general incentives” model plays a key role in explaining both individual and collective participation’.

While this thesis does not test these models directly, it is important to ask what implications they have for understanding the reported case studies. If Pattie and colleagues are correct in suggesting that incentive-based models are more important than structural-based models, it then gives rise to ask: what incentives are available in the NSD programs for democratic renewal? What emphasis do the different programs have on identifying structural barriers to participation and overcoming them? By paying close attention to the different reasons why people might engage, then NSD-influenced governments may have a set of principles from which to organise their democratic renewal programs. In developing their CLEAR framework for participation, the work of Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker (2006) may go some way to addressing these issues<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> The CLEAR framework is the set of criteria which Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker argue that consultation initiatives should be shaped around. “According to the CLEAR framework, people participate when they **can**: when they have the resources necessary to make their argument. People participate when they feel part of something: they **like** to participate because it is central to their sense of identity. They participate when they are **enabled** to do so by an infrastructure of civic networks and organisations. People participate when they are directly

Finally, in this discussion of the different theories which try to account for why citizens do participate, it is useful to highlight Hay's recent research. Hay (2007, p.55) suggests that many explanations tend to focus on what he calls the 'demand side' of politics (for example, explaining levels of participation by examining levels of social capital). Hay argues convincingly that political science has tended to ignore the 'supply side' of politics. In Hay's account, the activities of government have been central to explaining increasing levels of political disillusionment (such as falling voter turnout in the United Kingdom). Hay argues that the widespread embrace of neo-liberalism has meant that some areas of politics have been depoliticised (by processes such as privatisation), and this can explain some patterns of non-political participation. Hay (2007, p. 87) argues that there is a growing, dominant political narrative that encourages thinking that—through government—'we no longer have the capacity to manage or steer'. (This links very closely with the 'new governance' narrative outlined in Chapter 1, which is one of the defining characteristics of the New Social Democracy (NSD)). For Hay, the net effect of this political narrative is that it fosters political disillusionment.

The value of Hay's argument is that focusing only on demand-side theories, such as the five models examined by Pattie and his colleagues, has its limitations<sup>33</sup>. Hay's analysis of the supply-side factors includes both short-term

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**asked** for their opinion. Finally, people participate when they experience the system they are seeking to influence as **responsive**". (Lowndes, Pratchett & Stoker 2006, p.281)

<sup>33</sup> Hay's main arguments are also supported by recent research by Li and Marsh (2008). They use the work of Henrik Bang (2005) to re-conceptualise forms of political participation, using data from the 2001 Home Office Citizen Survey. In Bang's work, declining political participation can be better explained by attending to issues of political exclusion rather than

and longer-term reasons for accounting for political engagement. The risk is that a focus on short-term supply-side scandals, such as the furore over the expenses of members of parliament (MPs) in Britain, may mask the longer-term processes of depoliticisation.

This overview of some of the main theories for explaining political participation helps set the context for understanding the case studies reported in this thesis. The following section focuses on outlining the continuity and change in patterns of political behaviour.

### **Patterns of Political Support and Participation**

Dalton (2002), Hay (2007), Marsh (1995), Norris (1999), Nye (1997), and Sawyer and Zappala (2001), among many others, argue that citizen's political behaviour and political support are undergoing a transformation in the advanced industrialised democracies. While there is a great deal of debate to account for these changes, there appears to be widespread agreement that they are taking place. This section focuses on some of the empirical data available to present, as far as possible, a general summary of the overall trends relating to citizen's attitudes and political participation in Britain and Australia.

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the 'free-rider problem' – more closely associated with the work of Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley (2004). (The free-rider problem attempts to explain the lack of political participation by using the logic of rational choice theory – i.e. most citizens do not participate because others will do so on their behalf). The work of Li & Marsh (2008) supplements Hay's work by focusing on the 'demand-side' of political participation.

Sawer and Zappala (2001) highlight the main trends which they argue pose increasingly greater challenges to notions of representation in Australia.<sup>34</sup> It will become evident that most of these trends are also evident in the British context. These main trends are:

- The decline in voter identification with the two major political parties.
- The changing social base of mass political parties.
- The loss by the major political parties of their agenda development role.
- The loss of the capacity of the major political parties to aggregate the ever increasing number of interests given expression through social movements.
- The rise of postmaterialist voting patterns.
- The decline of political party membership.
- The rise of non-traditional political parties, minor political parties and independents.
- The decline of the importance of geography to politics and representation.

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<sup>34</sup> Sawer and Zappala's list of the main trends is not uncontentious. Inglehart's postmaterialism thesis is disputed (Haller 2002). In sum, Inglehart argues that citizens in advanced industrial societies are undergoing a process of value change. Inglehart argues that there is a shift in cultural attitudes, with younger generations tending to value lifestyle issues more highly than older generations (especially those who lived through the Second World War) who tend to value issues such as physical wellbeing and safety (Inglehart 1977, 1990). The broad thrust of his argument has been supported by Charnock and Ellis (2003), Dalton (2002), and Sawer and Zappala (2001). However, Tranter and Western (2003) dispute that postmaterial values have strongly taken hold in Australia.

Among Sawer and Zappala's (2001, p.290) list of other trends, some are difficult to show empirically, such as 'the loss of the major parties of their agenda development role'. This chapter focuses on more clearly measurable patterns of political participation. It does not seek to exhaustively prove all of the possible main trends, instead it has the more modest aim of giving a snapshot of some of the significant patterns in Britain and Australia.

A key trend to add to this list is the argument that during the past 20 to 30 years, there has been a rise in the prominence of interest movements and interest groups (Marsh 1995). A significant trend which should be applied to the British context is the issue of voter turnout.

This section focuses on outlining the empirical evidence for the following indicators of political participation and political support<sup>35</sup>:

- interest in politics
- trust and confidence in government
- satisfaction with the electoral system
- voter identification with main political parties
- membership of political parties and trade unions
- electoral participation
- non-electoral political participation
- participation and the internet.

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<sup>35</sup> The main sources of evidence for these different indicators of participation and support are taken from the Australian Election Study (AES), the British Election Study (BES) and the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey. These are long established social surveys which ask a broad representative sample of the public a range of questions. Datasets for the tables used in this thesis were downloaded from the relevant web sites which host the survey data:

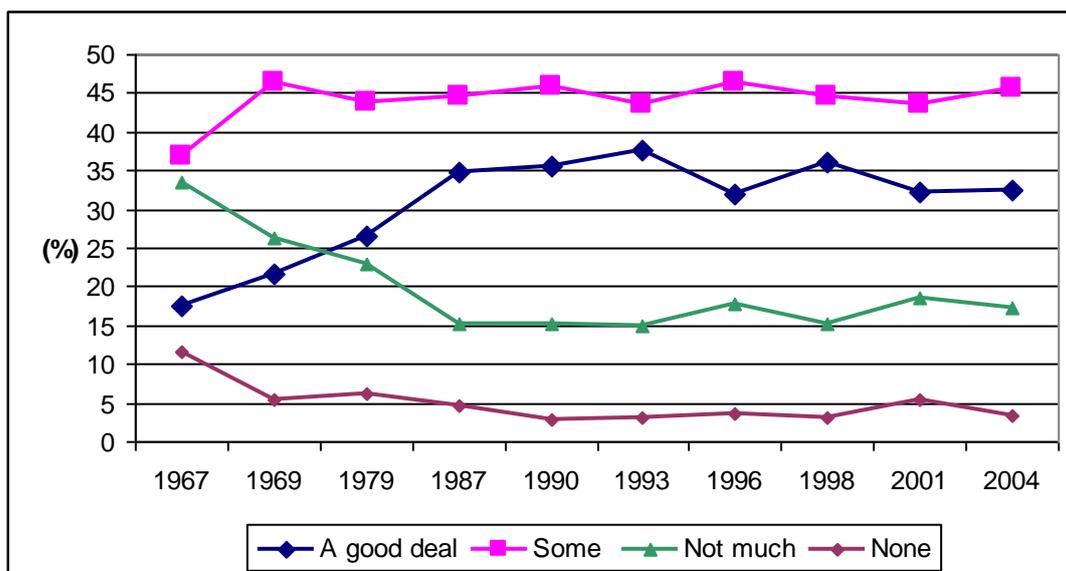
- The Australian Social Science Data Archive <<http://assda.anu.edu.au/data.html>>
- The British Social Attitudes Information System <<http://www.britisocat.com/Body.aspx?control=HomePage>>
- The British Election Studies Information Site <<http://www.besis.org/Body.aspx>>.

More recently, Australian political scientists have established an equivalent to the BSA survey in the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (AuSSA): <<http://aussa.anu.edu.au/>>. While only two surveys have been generated to date, it still provides a source of useful information.

### Interest in Politics

It is a useful starting point to note that overall trends in people expressing interest in politics in Britain and Australia have remained relatively constant over recent years.<sup>36</sup> Goot (2002) argues that about a third of Australians polled between 1984 and 1999 took ‘a good deal of interest’ in politics. Australian Election Study (AES) data confirm this view (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Interest in Politics in Australia (1967–2004)**



Question: In general, how much interest do you have in politics?

Source: AES 1967– 2004.

General interest in politics has stayed at broadly the same levels since the 1967 survey. There has been a slight increase in those expressing a ‘good

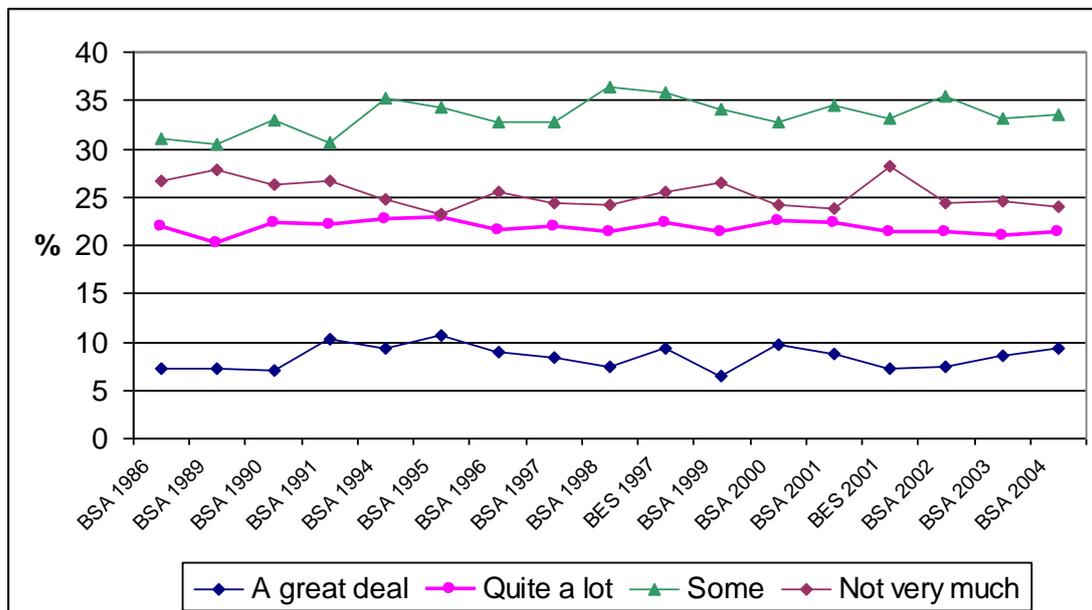
<sup>36</sup> This chapter largely draws on survey data in Britain and Australia to highlight some of the main patterns of political support and political behaviour. The merits and pitfalls in using survey data is outlined in Chapter 4.

deal' of interest and a corresponding slight decrease in those expressing 'not much' interest.

There are similar trends in Britain. Sanders et al. (2005) outline the findings from the British Election Study (BES) and the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey from 1974 to 2005. They found that interest in politics tends to rise in election years, and more significantly, they found that 'the public's interest in politics has been remarkably stable for over thirty years' (Sanders et al. 2005, p. 7).

Figure 2 outlines a more detailed picture of responses to the 'interest in politics' question from the BSA and BES surveys since 1986.

**Figure 2: Interest in Politics in Britain (1988–2004)**



Question: In general, how much interest do you have in politics?

Source: BSA 1986–2004; BES 1997, 2001.

Figure 2 shows that, broadly speaking, levels of interest in politics have remained stable between 1988 and 2004. Comparing the Australian survey data series to the British data, it is evident that, not unexpectedly, there are broadly similar patterns of respondents expressing interest in politics.<sup>37</sup>

So why are these findings important? Public interest in politics is one of a range of useful indicators of how engaged citizens are with the political system. Political apathy and dissatisfaction can be measured in a multiplicity of ways; and this evidence shows that, on the whole, the lack of public interest in politics has stayed at broadly consistent levels during the past 20 to 30 years. Goot (2002) uses this data, along with similar trends (such as tracking the number of people who discuss politics), to refute those who identify a 'crisis' in Australian democracy. As explored later, patterns of participation may be changing but the general interest in politics appears to be holding up in the face of these changes.

### *Trust and Confidence*

There is evidence that trust and confidence in elected officials and political institutions in the advanced democracies have fallen (Dalton 1999; Klingeman 1999; Norris 1999; Nye 1997). Nye (1997), using data from a range of public opinion surveys, argues that confidence in political institutions has fallen across Western democracies and suggests that the marked decline in the

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<sup>37</sup> The question used in the BSA survey offers respondents a slightly larger range of responses, so a direct comparison is difficult.

United States may be prophetic for other established democracies. Nye reports that in a survey of 11 countries, confidence in political institutions fell in six countries, was mixed in five (including the United Kingdom) and rose in one country (Australia was not part of this sample). Norris (1999, p. 26) also agrees that:

... in the established democracies, during the last decades of the twentieth century, growing numbers of citizens have become increasingly critical of the major institutions of representative government.

There seems to be a clear pattern showing that citizens tend to strongly support democratic principles, but they tend to have low confidence in their own governments. Dalton (2004) compares indicators of levels of trust in a wide range of advanced industrial societies, and the findings support this overall picture. There is variance in the amount of declining trust in each country, and in more recent years, the levels of trust have stabilised but still remain relatively low. The trends in Britain and Australia are examined in the following sections.

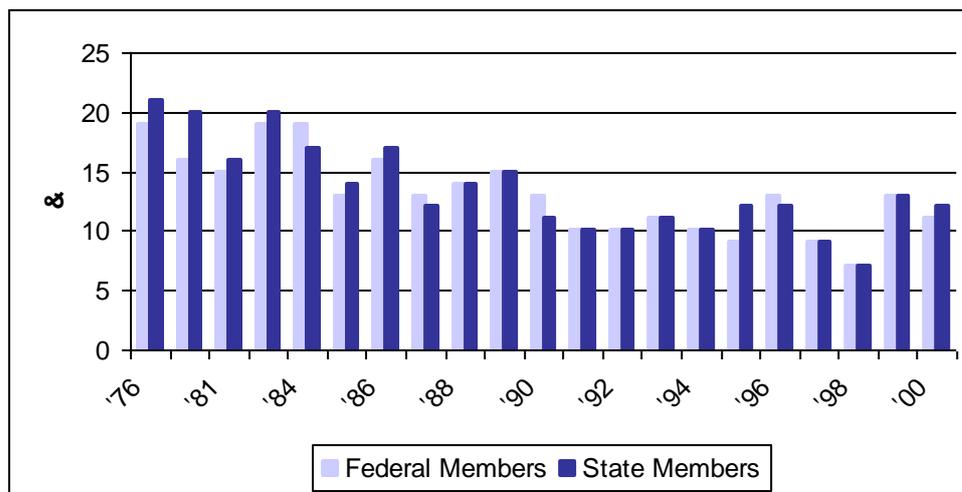
#### *Trust and Confidence in Australia*

Klingeman (1999, p.31) outlines data from the World Values Survey conducted in the 1990s. Australia features in some of these findings but Britain does not. Australia scores relatively highly in terms of overall support for the 'political community' at 73 per cent of those polled (this is much higher

than Japan, Germany and Switzerland). Klingeman's analysis also shows that 83 per cent of Australians expressed support for democracy as an ideal form of government. Klingeman then compares this with how respondents rate the 'regime performance' in each country. Twenty-three per cent of Australians expressed support in this category (the average was 25 per cent).

Goot (2002) looks at survey data where respondents rate the ethics and honesty of Federal and State politicians. The findings are outlined in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Ratings for Australian Federal and State Members' Ethics and Honesty (1976–2000)**



Question: In general, how do you rate your Federal/State representative for their ethics and honesty?

Source: Goot 2002, p. 36 (original data: Roy Morgan 2000).

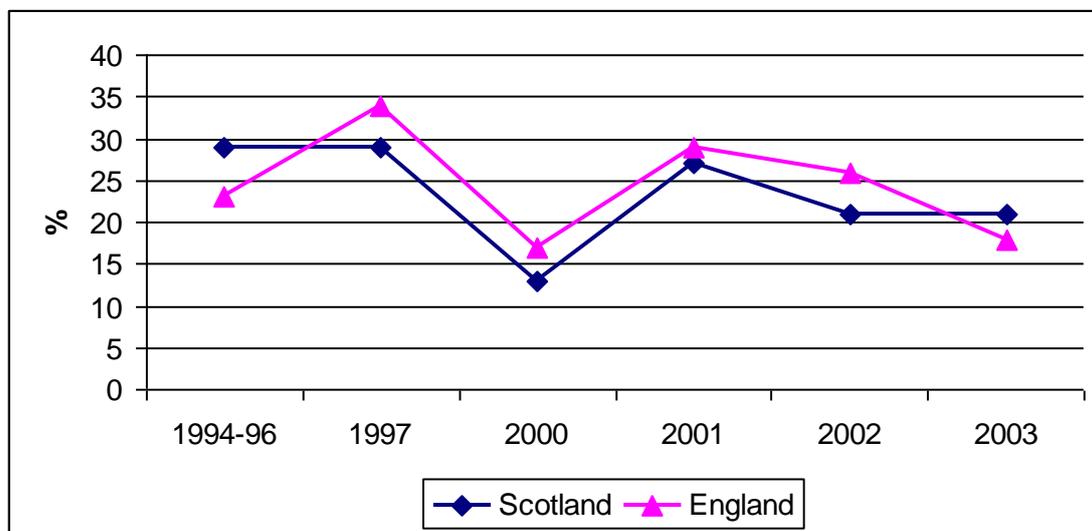
The survey data support this general trend of falling levels of trust in elected representatives from the polled respondents. Papadakis (1999) also supports this overall downward trend. However, Goot (2002, p. 40) cautions against

hasty conclusions, noting that while there is a decline, it does not come from a very high baseline and ratings for other professions have also declined. In addition, Goot (2002, p. 41) argues that levels of trust fluctuate during the election cycle because trust tends to increase after a change of government.

### *Trust and Confidence in Britain*

Bromley, Curtice and Seyd (2004, p. 12) outline data from the BSA and Scottish Social Attitudes surveys which show that public trust in government has fallen (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Trust in British Governments (1994–2003)**

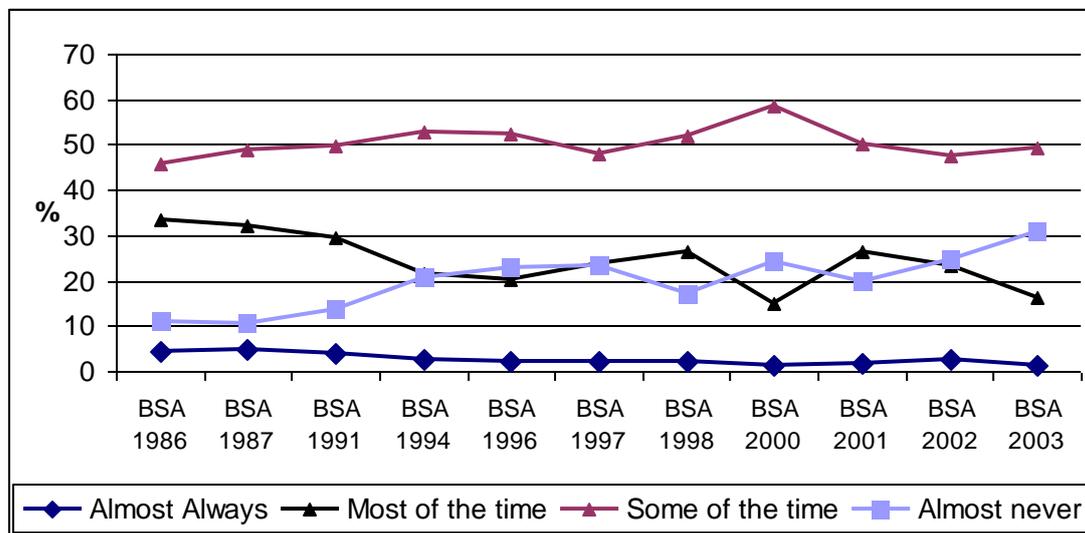


Question: How often do you trust the British Government? (responses above to 'just about always' and 'most of the time')

Source: Bromley, Curtice & Seyd 2004, p. 12 (using BSA 1994–2003).

These trends are also evident from respondent answers to a slightly different question over a longer period of time (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Trust in British Politicians to put the National Interest above Party Interest (1996–2003)**



Question: How much do you trust British governments of any party to place the needs of the nation above the interests of their own political party?

Source: BSA 1986– 2003.

The clearest trend is the decline in the number of respondents who think that MPs will put the national interest above party interest ‘most of the time’. In 1986 this was just below 40 per cent, and in 2003 it was under 20 per cent. As with the Australian data, it is important to interpret these findings with care. However, in common with the wider data, there is an apparent fall in trust and confidence (Nye 1997).

*Trust and Confidence: Britain and Australia in Comparison*

Despite the difficulties in comparing levels of trust in Britain and Australia, a general picture emerges showing that both countries have experienced similar

trends in declining confidence in government. In both countries, confidence in democracy as an ideal remains strong, whereas confidence in government has fallen (Klingeman 1999). Norris (1999) cites data from the World Values Survey which compare Britain and Australia on respondents' 'respect for authority'. There is little difference between the two countries in this analysis. In Britain, 74 per cent expressed respect in 1981 and 72 per cent in 1990. In Australia, 68 per cent of those polled in 1981 expressed respect for authority which increased to 73 per cent in 1996 (Norris 1999, p. 105).

While the decline in trust and confidence has fallen at different rates in both countries—perhaps reflecting the particular local–national issues at play—it seems that Britain and Australia have similarly low levels of trust and confidence. This begs the question: does this actually matter? How much mistrust is 'healthy' for a democracy? Crucially, does declining confidence in politicians affect political behaviour?

Dalton (2004), Norris (1999), and Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley (2004) all argue that falling political trust has important consequences for advanced industrial democracies. Dalton (2004, p. 170) argues that the relationship between attitudes and behaviour is complex. For example, increased disaffection from politicians can lead to an increase in some forms of political activity (such as protests) but a decrease in others (such as voting). Dalton (2004, p. 179) surveys some of the available evidence to investigate the link between falling trust and levels of political behaviour, and he finds mixed results. He adds that

the strongest manifestation of growing distrust is likely to be in the public's changing expectations of government. Dalton (2004, p. 181) notes:

A growing number of contemporary citizens are disenchanted with political parties, and these sentiments are generating support for reforms to ... improve the system of representative democracy...

Dalton's analysis suggests that falling trust and confidence might lead to an increase in calls for democratic reform, and these calls are likely to take different forms reflecting the different political contexts of each political system. While the causes of this decline in trust are disputed, along with the possible implications for the legitimacy of the democratic polities, there is broad consensus that there has been a change.<sup>38</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, the central issue is that the decline in trust and confidence reflects a dynamic and changing relationship between the state and civil society. As discussed in Chapter 1, NSD enthusiasts are seeking to cultivate an 'active citizen', but they are doing so in the face of falling levels of political trust. The positive upshot is that the NSD calls for democratic reform may well be meeting a wider public demand. The difficulty is that NSD-influenced governments may struggle to 'sell' these reforms in the face of low levels of trust.

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<sup>38</sup> A range of explanations for long-term levels of falling trust have been offered (Bromley, Curtice & Seyd 2004; Leigh 2002; Nye 1997). Nye (1997) examines 17 different hypotheses for explaining declining trust in the United States (see Appendix 3). Nye suggests some of the more convincing reasons include the growth of the role of government, cultural change following WWII, the impact of the mass media and changes in the economic base of the advanced industrial societies. Interestingly, the research from Bromley, Curtice and Seyd (2004, p. 13) in the United Kingdom suggests that none of the longer-term sociological trends 'receive much support from our evidence'. These authors suggest that shorter-term issues such as allegations of sleaze are more likely explanations for the decline in trust in Britain.

## **Decline in Voter Identification with the Two Major Political Parties**

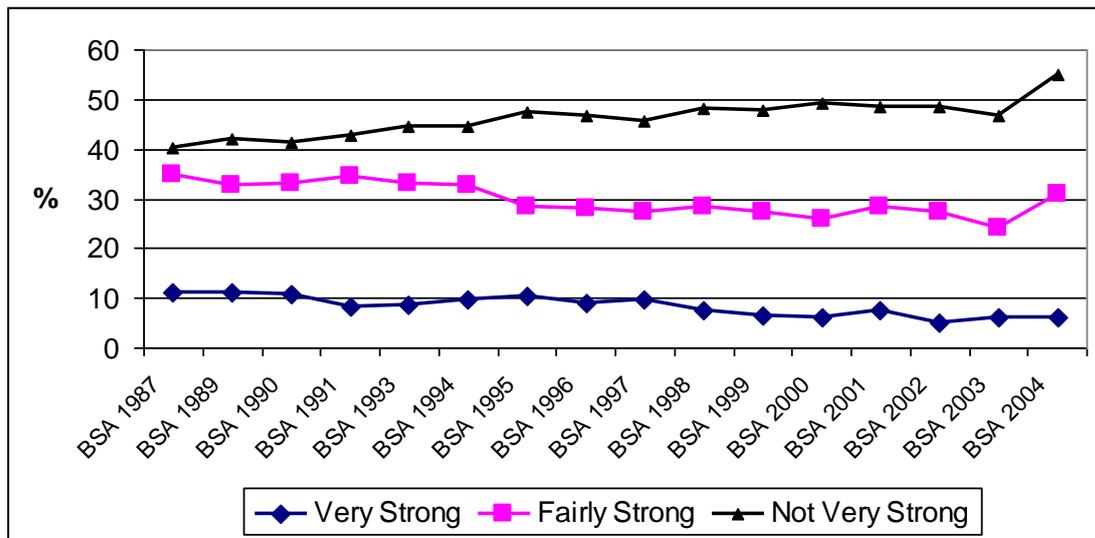
The main political parties dominate political life in both Britain and Australia. An important indicator of political attitudes is voter identification with the two major parties. For a number of years, political scientists have been monitoring the degree to which citizens identify with the major political parties and how strongly they support a particular party. Significantly, a decline in voter identification has been noted in both Britain (Power Inquiry 2006) and Australia (Marsh 2005). Sanders et al. (2005, p. 5) note that the 'intriguing long-term feature of party identification in Britain has been its progressive decline'.<sup>39</sup>

In Britain, the data on party identification has been measured through the BSA surveys (Figure 6). As Figure 6 shows, the proportion of BSA survey respondents expressing 'not very strong' allegiance to a political has increased from approximately 40 to 55 per cent from the period 1987 to 2004. These trends are confirmed by Sanders et al. (2005, p. 5) using BES survey data over a longer period of time. In the 1960s, almost half the British electorate identified 'very strongly' with one of the three national parties. This group of very strong identifiers fell to 29 per cent in 1974 and declined to about 9 per cent in 2005.

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<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, Seyd and Whiteley (2001, p. 35) compare the strength of party identification with Labour party members pre-1997 and post-1997. A clear finding is that members who joined the Labour party after New Labour's victory in 1997 were less likely to identify as 'strong' members of the party compared with the more long-standing members.

**Figure 6: Strength of Party Identification in Britain (1987–2004)**



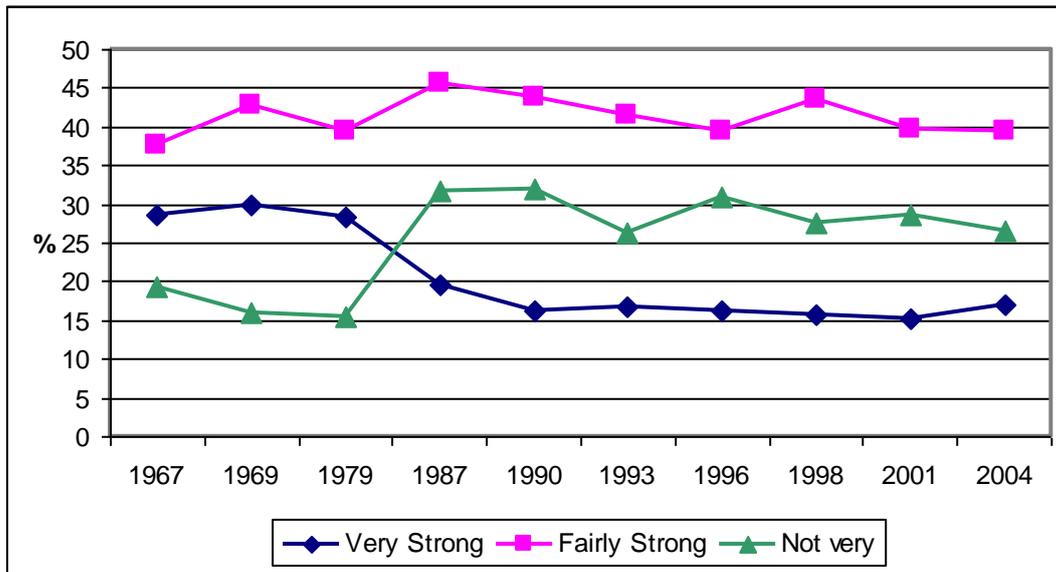
Question: Would you call yourself very strong ... (QUOTE PARTY NAMED) ... fairly strong, or not very strong supporter?

Source: BSA 1987–2004.

This decline in the strength of identification with the main political parties is also evident in Australia (Figure 7). As Figure 7 shows, the proportion of AES survey respondents who express a ‘very strong’ identification with a political party has declined from approximately 30 per cent in 1967 to 16 per cent in 2004.

In Australia, the preferential model of voting in the Federal House of Representatives demonstrates the strength of public identification with the major political parties through the growing support for minor political parties. While the two main political party groupings still clearly dominate, there is some evidence of a decline in their overall support (although this should not be overstated). The combined primary vote of the two main political party groupings is outlined in Figure 8.

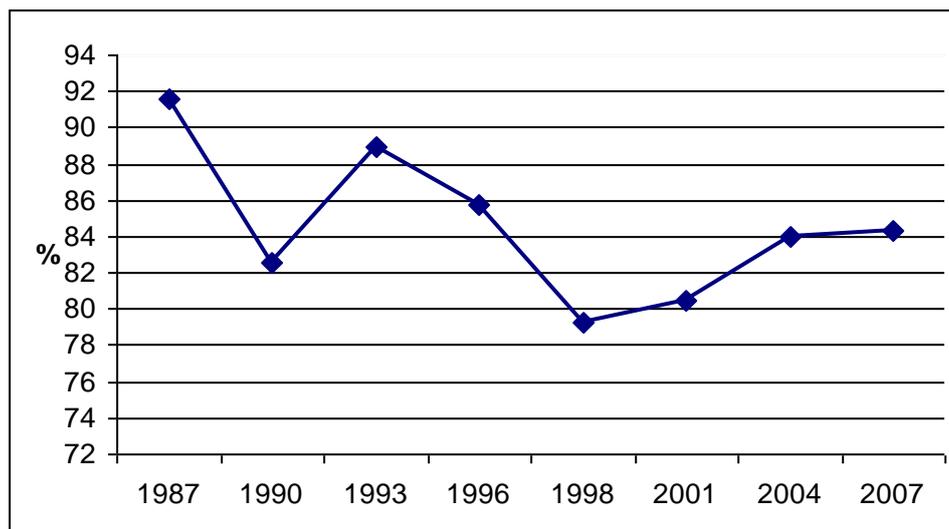
**Figure 7: Strength of Party Identification in Australia (1967–2004)**



Question: Would you call yourself a very strong, fairly strong, or not very strong supporter of (insert name) party?

Source: AES 1967–2004.

**Figure 8: Combined First Preference Vote for Main Parties in Australian Federal House of Representatives (1987–2007)**



Source: Bennett & Barber 2008, p. 147.

Since 1987, there has been some decline in the combined primary vote for the main political party groupings, but since the 1998 election, it has been increasing. There are similar patterns discernible through the first preference votes for minor political parties and independents in the Federal Senate elections. Proportional representation was introduced in 1949. The overall share of the first preference votes for minor political parties in 1949 was about 5 per cent. This share grew and reached a high point of 25 per cent in the 1999 election and was just under 20 per cent at the 2007 election. These trends should not be overstated, and it should be apparent that support for the major political parties still continues to be significant.

In comparison, it seems clear that in both Britain and Australia, the proportion of people who 'very strongly' support a political party is declining. Australia has a higher percentage of those identifying 'very strongly' than Britain (approximately 18 per cent in 2004 compared with 8 per cent). This apparent decline in support should not mask the fact that most people still tend to align with one of the major political parties in both Britain and Australia.

Again, this raises the question: how might these findings impact on the wider questions examined in this thesis? Compulsory voting in Australia means that the political parties do not expend the same energy in encouraging the electorate to vote compared with their British counterparts. However, both of the main political parties have to work hard to attract an increasing number of voters whose allegiance to the party is weaker. This is also likely to have implications for the policy initiatives of the political parties. If loyalty is weaker,

the major political parties may be forced to try different ways to encourage the public to feel that the government is working for their interests. This poses challenges for the NSD enthusiasts because the Labo(u)r parties are crucial vehicles for delivering democratic renewal. Proponents of NSD-influenced democratic renewal have to balance the entrenched support that the two-party system delivers to Labo(u)r parties against a growing public minority that may be increasingly sceptical of the two-party-system.

### **Membership of Political Parties and Trade Unions**

Membership of a political party has long been viewed as a key indicator of political participation. Party membership is notoriously difficult to measure because political parties are usually reluctant to publicise their numbers, so estimates can only be proxy indicators. Mair and van Biezen (2001) show that party membership has consistently dropped significantly across Europe. In the United Kingdom, it was estimated that there were 1 693 156 political party members (4.12 per cent of the electorate) in 1980, which fell to 840 000 members (1.92 per cent of the electorate) by 1998 (Mair & van Biezen 2001, p. 16). In 2005, membership of the British Labour Party was estimated to be under 200 000, and in 2002, membership of the Tories was estimated to be 300 000 (Maloney 2006, p. 99). In 2004, only 2 per cent of the British population—around 880 000 people—were members of a political party (Maloney 2006, p. 99).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> While there is clear long-term evidence that party membership in Britain (and also Australia) has declined, this overall story should not obscure shorter patterns of levels of party membership. The membership of New Labour grew significantly in the run-up to, and beyond, the 1997 general election. Following the 1992 general election defeat, Blair and the party

Similar trends are identifiable in Australia. Jaensch, Brent and Bowden (2004, p. 54) estimate that:

... membership of all Liberal, National, Labor and Democratic Labor Party in the 1960s and Democrats since 1997 has declined, from 4 per cent of the electorate in the 1960s to less than 2 per cent in the late 1990s.

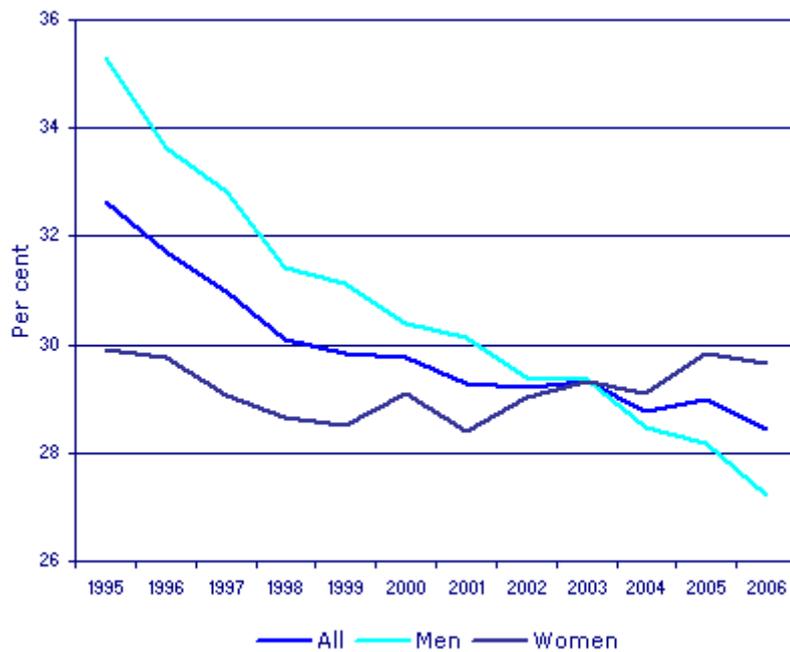
Membership of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) was estimated as 200 000–350 000 (7–10 per cent of the electorate) in the 1950s, dropping to 75 000 in the 1970s and 50 000 in 1993. Membership of the Liberal Party, which declined from 200 000 in the early 1950s to just over 100 000 in the 1970s, was estimated to be 80 000 in 2002 (Jaensch, Brent & Bowden 2004; Marsh 1995). More recent figures, using Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data, indicate that party membership is less than 1 per cent of the adult population in 2008 (Sawer, Abjorensen & Larkin 2009, p. 135).

Similarly, trade union membership has fallen. In the United Kingdom, membership stood at 11.7 million in 1975. In recent years, it peaked in 1979 (at 13.2 million) and was 7.7 million in 2002 (Beetham et al. 2002, p. 212). In December 2006, trade union members made up about 28.4 per cent of the workforce (Figure 9).

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leadership had made the recruitment of new members a significant priority. From 1993 to 1997, it grew from just under 300 000 to 450 000 (Seyd & Whiteley 2002, p. 33). However, despite this boost in numbers of party members, the levels dropped rather quickly to pre-1992 levels.

**Figure 9: British Trade Union Membership (1995–2006)**



*Source: Office of National Statistics 2006.*

In Australia, there has been a similar decline in trade union membership. The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) estimates that in 1970, 51 per cent of the workforce was union members, but by 1996, that figure had fallen to around 35 per cent and to 25 per cent in 2001 (ACTU 2009). According to the ABS (2009), there were 1.786 million employees who were trade union members in August 2006—comprising 20 per cent of the workforce.

So what are the possible implications of these trends for this thesis? These declining levels of party and trade union membership have important implications for the party system and the Labo(u)r governments in particular. While governments derive their main source of legitimacy through their electoral support, political parties derive their legitimacy from a range of

different sources. The Labo(u)r parties are, in theory at least, the political voice for the wider Labo(u)r movement. All parties require 'foot soldiers' to assist with their campaigns. In the 2007 Australian Federal election, the active work of the ACTU in mobilising trade union members through their anti-'Workchoices' campaign was seen as a significant factor in securing a Prime Minister Rudd victory (Sawer, Abjorensen & Larkin 2009, pp. 92–3)<sup>41</sup>.

The traditional sources of Labo(u)r support are changing, and as the parties in Britain and Australia modernise, there is a search to shore up their democratic legitimacy. In Britain, there is evidence that levels of membership activism are dropping to critical levels (Seyd & Whiteley 2002, pp. 108–9). While a political party does not have to be a 'mass party' to be legitimate party, the central question for the Labo(u)r parties in Britain and Australia (and elsewhere) is how to adapt to the different changes in their traditional supporter base. For proponents of the NSD, Labo(u)r governments have a central role in driving the democratic renewal process. To some extent, the falling levels of membership are one of the underlying structural changes which have fuelled these calls for the 'democratising of democracy' (Giddens 1998, pp.70-77, 2000, p.61). Yet, ironically, the traditional bases of legitimacy and support for Labo(u)r parties have been weakened.

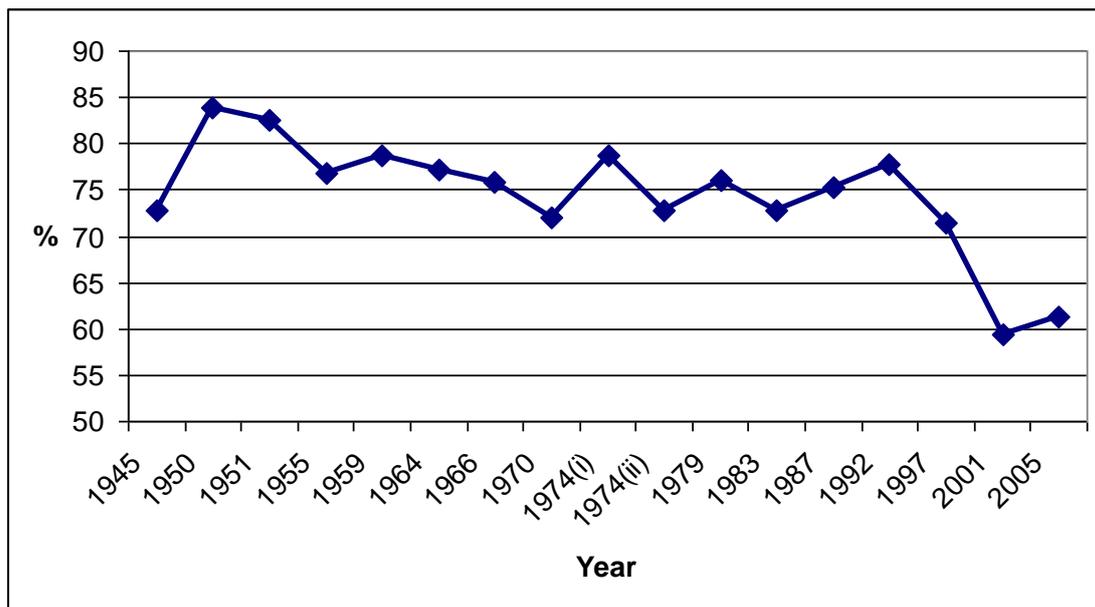
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<sup>41</sup> 'Workchoices' was the name given to the Industrial Relations reforms instigated by John Howard's Liberal Coalition Federal Government. Howard introduced the Workplace Relations ACT in 1996, and subsequently amended it in 2005. Controversially, there was no specific election commitment at the 2004 Federal election by Howard that the latter reforms would take place. The Workchoices reforms involved a concerted attempt to move away from collective bargaining to individual workplace agreements (called Australian Workplace Agreements AWAs), and a down-grading of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. Under Workchoices, smaller employers were allowed to dispense with 'unfair dismissal' protections. In 2007, the Rudd-led Labor opposition pledged to abolish the most radical reforms. (See Wooden 2006).

## Electoral Participation

Particularly in the United Kingdom, voter turnout is seen as the most significant indicator of political participation. Figure 10 shows that voter turnout has been declining since 1945.

**Figure 10: Voter Turnout at British General Elections (1945–2005)**



*Source: Social and General Statistics Section, House of Commons Research Paper 2008, 08/12*

The drop in voter turnout at the last two general elections is stark—with a clear decrease in voter turnout for the national elections that resulted in the election and re-election of the Blair government. The 2001 result, with only 59.4 per cent of the electorate voting, is the lowest turnout since 1918. Turnout has clearly fallen since 1992. However, caution should be exercised when interpreting these figures. Sanders et al. (2005) suggest that turnout was low in both 2001 and 2005, primarily because the results were largely

perceived to be a foregone conclusion (while that may be the case, it could be countered that the 1987 victory was also a foregone conclusion, but turnout was higher than the 1983 election). Bromley, Curtice and Seyd (2004) do not see this as a crisis of democracy given the other patterns of political participation that exist (which are explored later). However, the Power Inquiry (2006) highlights the low turnout as being a result of increased public disillusionment with the main political parties and the current political system.

In Australia, the use of compulsory voting puts a different context on the relationship between voters and the political system. Farrell and McAllister (2006, p. 124) present data showing that voter registration has been largely stable since 1946 (at around 83 per cent), although there is 'relatively high non-compliance by the young'. Farrell and McAllister also cite evidence from the four AES reports conducted between 1996 and 2004 which asked respondents if they would have voted if it were a voluntary act. About 66 per cent stated that they would have 'definitely' voted, while about 17–19 per cent stated they 'probably' would have voted. This would indicate a turnout of about 80 per cent, which is high among the established democracies.

Rodney Smith (2001) argues that a number of factors skew the picture in relation to voting in Australia. He argues that the government makes it hard for citizens not to vote in Federal elections. In 1996, the Australian Electoral Commission spent \$57m to ensure people were correctly listed on the electoral rolls. In addition, voting takes place on a Saturday (while in Britain, voting takes place on a Thursday), and a large number of booths make voting

a relatively quick act to do. He cites evidence which suggests that turnout is significantly lower when voting is a voluntary act. For example, turnout for the voluntary national ballot for the 1998 Constitutional Convention was 45 per cent, turnout was 59 per cent for the voluntary 1996 local council elections in Tasmania, and turnout was 28 per cent in South Australia in the same year. In R Smith's (2001, p. 29) view, compulsory voting is not a mask for a crisis in democracy, but rather part of a picture in Australia where citizens vote as an act of moral obligation underlined by 'the majority view that the government should enforce voting'.

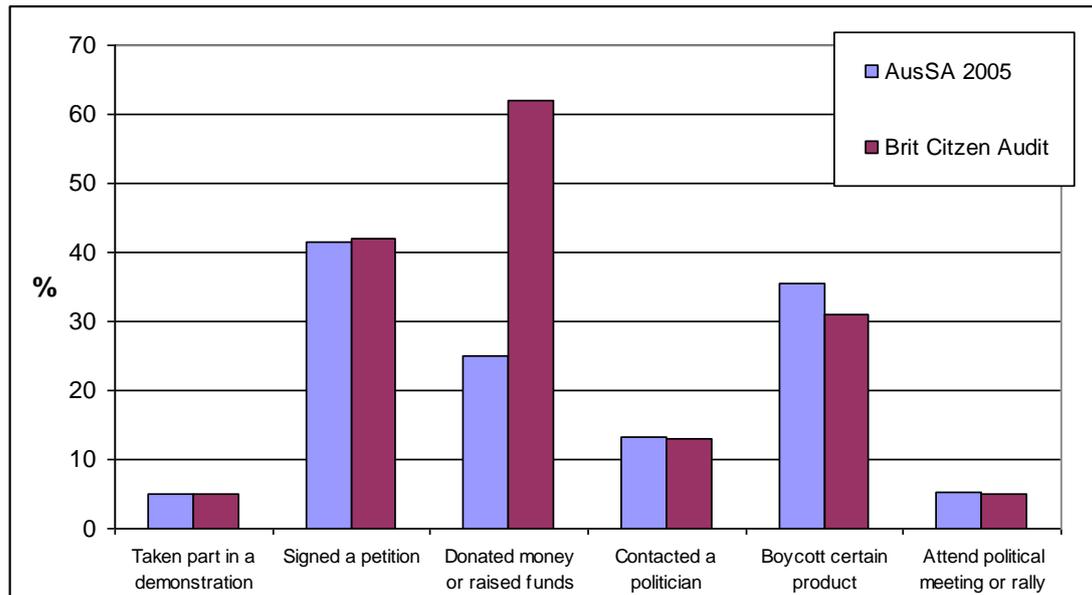
Farrell and McAllister (2006) provide a useful comparison using voter satisfaction with ballot structures. Their analysis shows Australia to have among the highest levels of voter satisfaction with the ballot structure. Farrell and McAllister's data suggest that the United Kingdom has slightly higher levels of voter satisfaction than Australia.

The issue of voter turnout is a much more prominent issue in Britain than Australia, and the falling turnout under New Labour has been a cause of concern and debate for both the party and the wider political commentary. It hints at a wider disillusionment with the two-party system, which although it is not at the United States levels of abstention, it is a strong undercurrent of British politics in particular.

## Non-electoral Political Participation

Political participation is a much wider set of activities and attributes than the act of voting. One of the first comparisons of political participation in Britain and Australia concluded that 'in terms of the participation and involvement of its citizens in national politics, Australia is much like Great Britain' (Aitkin 1978, p. 23). More recent survey data shown in Figure 11, suggest that Britain and Australia share similar patterns of non-electoral forms of political participation.

**Figure 11: Acts of Political Participation in Australia (2005) and Britain (2001)**



Questions: AuSSA 2005. Question: Which of the following actions have you taken in the past year? British Citizen Audit 2004: Question: During the past twelve months have you done any of the following to influence rules, laws or policies?

Source: AuSSA 2005; Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley 2004.

From this survey data, it is apparent that Britons are more likely to donate money to political organisations than their Australian counterparts.<sup>42</sup> As the trend data in the next section confirm, the overall hierarchy of acts of non-electoral participation has remained relatively stable. The most commonly practised acts of participation are those that require the least effort and resources.

#### *Trends in Non-electoral Participation in Britain*

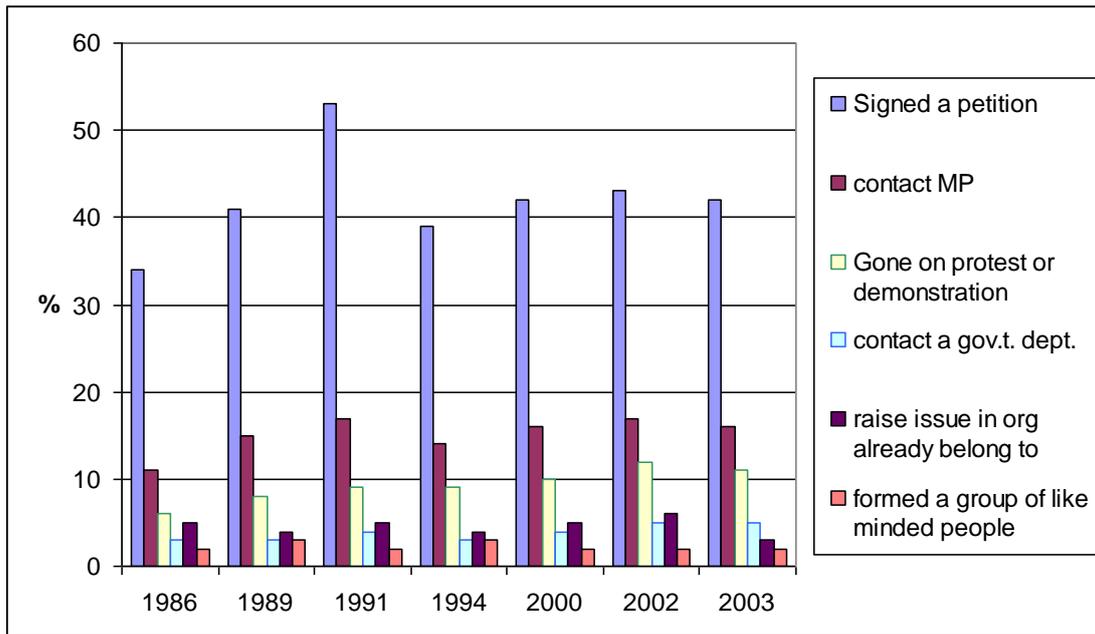
In Britain, there is some evidence to suggest that non-voting acts of participation have increased (Bromley, Curtice & Seyd 2004). For example, BSA surveys show that in 1986, 34 per cent of respondents indicated that they had signed a petition, compared with 42 per cent in 2003 (Figure 12).

These trends are reinforced by comparing the most recent results of the two largest scale audits of political behaviour in Britain (Table 9).

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<sup>42</sup> Care needs to be taken when making comparisons because the wording in the two surveys is different. In the British survey, the wording is 'donate to an organisation', whereas the Australian wording has a narrower political and voluntary focus.

**Figure 12: Acts of Political Participation in Britain (1986–2003)**



Question: In the past twelve months, which of the following activities have you undertaken ...?

Source: BSA 1986–2003.

**Table 9: Changes in Political Participation in Britain (1984 & 2000)**

Act	1984 (per cent)	2000 (per cent)
Stated that they voted in general elections (not actual turnout)	83	72
Stated that they voted in local elections (not actual turnout)	69	50
Signed a petition	63	42
Boycotted certain products	4	31
Contacted a public official	25	25
Contacted a politician	30	13
Attended a political meeting	9	6
Attended a demonstration	5	5
Taken part in a strike	7	2
Taken part in an illegal protest	1	2

Source: Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley 2004, p .81.

Pattie and his colleagues argue that the trends, particularly the increase in the use of boycotts, show an increase in individualistic participative acts at the

expense of more collective forms of behaviour. These findings were reinforced by the Power Inquiry into Britain's democracy, which examined data from the Home Office citizenship surveys that have been conducted annually since 2001. The authors of the Power Inquiry report argue that while electoral participation has decreased, other forms of participation have either remained constant or increased (Power Inquiry 2006, p. 16).

### *Trends in Non-electoral Participation in Australia*

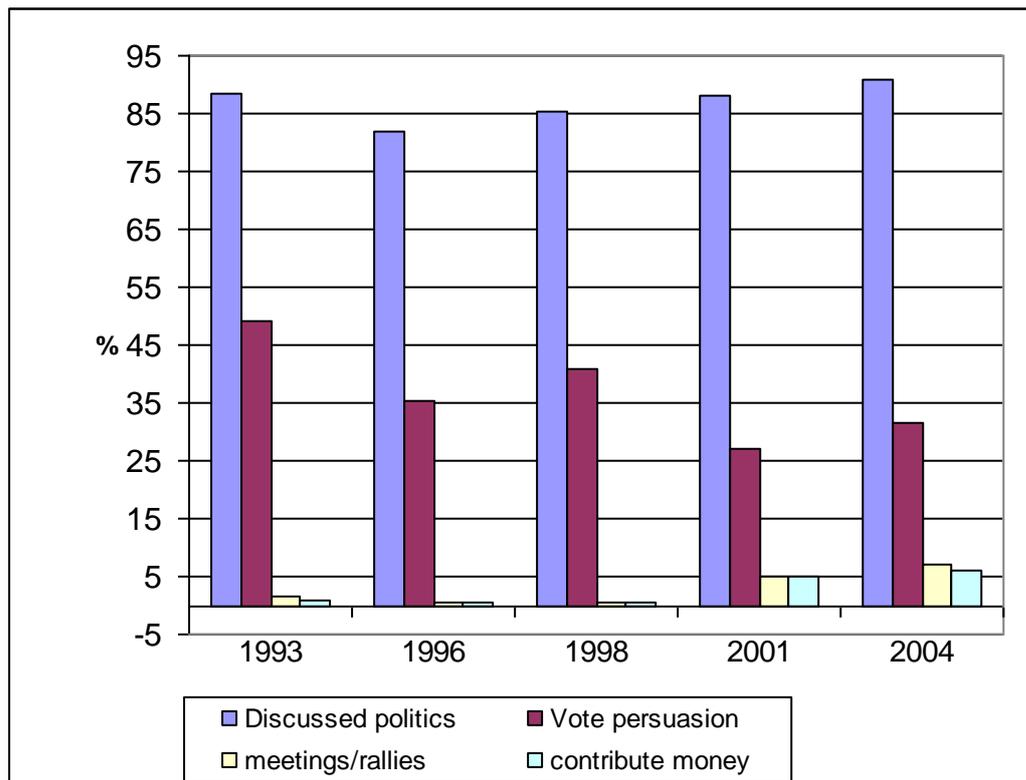
It is difficult to get an accurate picture of the patterns of continuity and change in political participation in Australia over time because most of the relevant survey data tend to focus on patterns of voting and party support. In addition, although the AES surveys feature questions on political participation, there are significant gaps across the time series, and different questions were asked which make comparison difficult. Furthermore, where political participation has been analysed in Australia, there has been a tendency to focus on the current levels of participation (or some cross-national comparison) rather than surveying patterns over time.<sup>43</sup>

Figure 13 provides a snapshot of acts of non-electoral participation using AES data from 1993 to 2004.

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<sup>43</sup> Appendix 4 compiles a range of survey data to show trends in acts of non-electoral participation in Australia. However, caution has to be exercised in reviewing this data because not all of the questions are directly comparable, and different survey sets use different sampling methodologies. At best, the appendix gives a snapshot view of trends in non-electoral participation. The more limited table presented in this chapter—collated by Bean and Denmark (2007)—is preferred because it allows a more direct comparison even if the time period is shorter.

**Figure 13: Acts of Political Participation in Australia (1993–2004)**



*Adapted from: Bean & Denmark 2007, p. 63 (using AES 1993–2004 data).*

Given the limited acts being compared by Bean and Denmark (2007), it is hard to draw a direct comparison with Britain. Nonetheless, it is clear that like Britain, the overall hierarchy of participation remains stable in Australia. Perhaps the most interesting recent development is the increase in the number of Australians who have attended a political meeting or rally and/or contributed money. Yet, these still remain activities undertaken by a very small number of people. Papadakis (2001) argues that between 1983 and 1995 certain acts of participation in Australia increased; for example, the number of people who signed a petition. Papadakis (2001, p. 47) identifies a 'growing willingness to participate in extra parliamentary activities'.

While it is difficult to discern clear trends, some of the previous research helps shape the overall contours of non-electoral participation in Australia. The first cross-national benchmark study was conducted by Bean in 1989. Bean (1989) compared data in Australia with the classic study by Almond and Verba in 1963. Bean argues that communal activities (acts of political participation where individuals work together to achieve a given goal) are more common in Australia. In Australia, 39 per cent of survey respondents worked with others to solve a communal problem, compared with 30 per cent of survey respondents in the United States and 16 per cent in the Netherlands. Furthermore, 13 per cent of Australians contacted a government official about a community problem, compared with 11 per cent in the United States and 12 per cent in the Netherlands.

More recently, McAllister (1997, p. 248) argues that 'Australia, by any standards, is a politically conventional society'. McAllister (1997, p. 265) identifies a 'political culture that is conservative, largely apolitical, and encompassing an English working class distrust of politics and politicians', and he also finds a degree of stability not found in other Anglo-Saxon countries.

A similar judgment is made by Rodney Smith (2001, p. 39) in his observation, 'Compulsory voting aside, almost no political participation is widely practised in Australia'. Overall, Rodney Smith argues that Australia does not fall within the 'participative' typology as defined by Almond and Verba (1963). He argues that the majority of Australians are tolerant of others making a peaceful

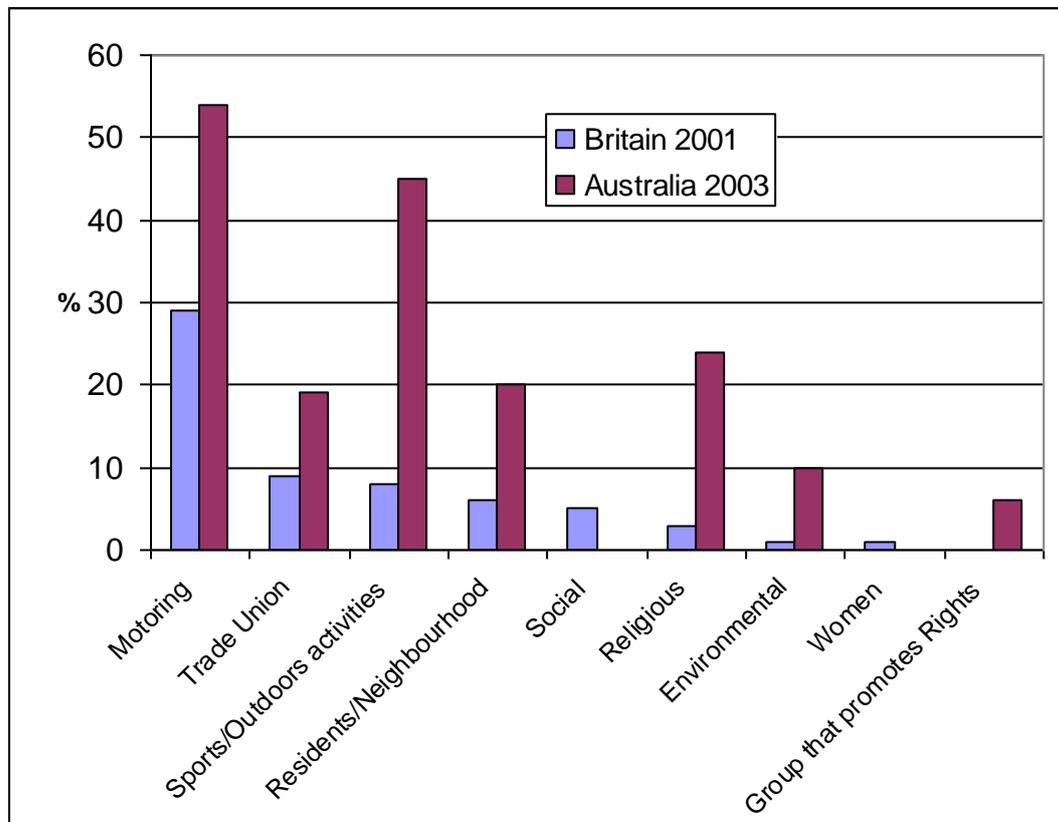
protest but they are not likely to do so themselves. Rodney Smith also emphasises that this does not mean that Australians cannot be, or are not mobilised, but rather the net effect is that most Australians look to their political institutions rather than personal involvement to resolve issues of conflict.

### **Organisational Membership in Britain and Australia**

A key facet of non-electoral participation is organisational membership. Voluntary and civic organisations play a vital intermediary role in liberal democracies. Active and diverse voluntary organisations have long been seen as a key ingredient in a healthy democracy: a view stemming from de Tocqueville's classic 19th century study of democracy in America (de Tocqueville 1954). The extent of current organisational membership in Britain and Australia can be directly compared (Figure 14).

What is clear is that membership of voluntary organisations is much higher in Australia compared with Britain. In all the categories outlined in Figure 14, Australians are more likely to be a member of the relevant organisation than their British counterparts. As Passey and Lyons (2005, p. 78) note, 'Australians are joiners – the rate of membership in voluntary associations in Australia is much higher than for many other developed nations'. Overall, approximately 86 per cent of Australians belong to at least one group compared with 45 per cent of Britons.

**Figure 14: Membership of Voluntary Organisations in Britain (2001) and Australia (2003)**



Adapted from:

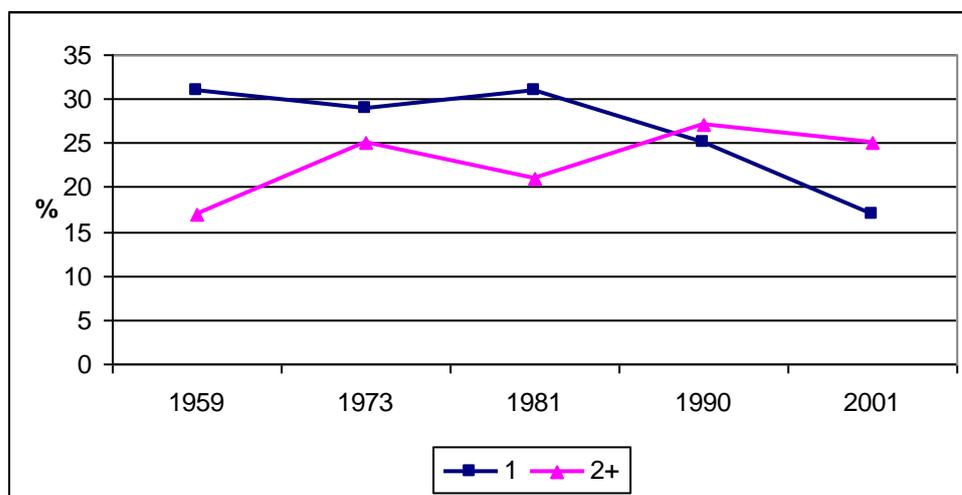
*Britain: Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley 2004;*

*Australia: Passey & Lyons 2005 (using AuSSA 2003 data)<sup>44</sup>*

Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley (2004) compare trends in organisational membership in Britain over time, and they observe a decrease in the number of people who are members of at least one organisation. While there are some fluctuations in the (smaller) amounts of people who are members of two or more groups, there has been a decline in membership of voluntary associations since the 1990 survey (Figure 15).

<sup>44</sup> The AuSSA survey does not include membership of 'social' groups (these are incorporated in the 'recreational activities' category), and 'women's groups'. British survey data does not include 'groups that promote Rights'.

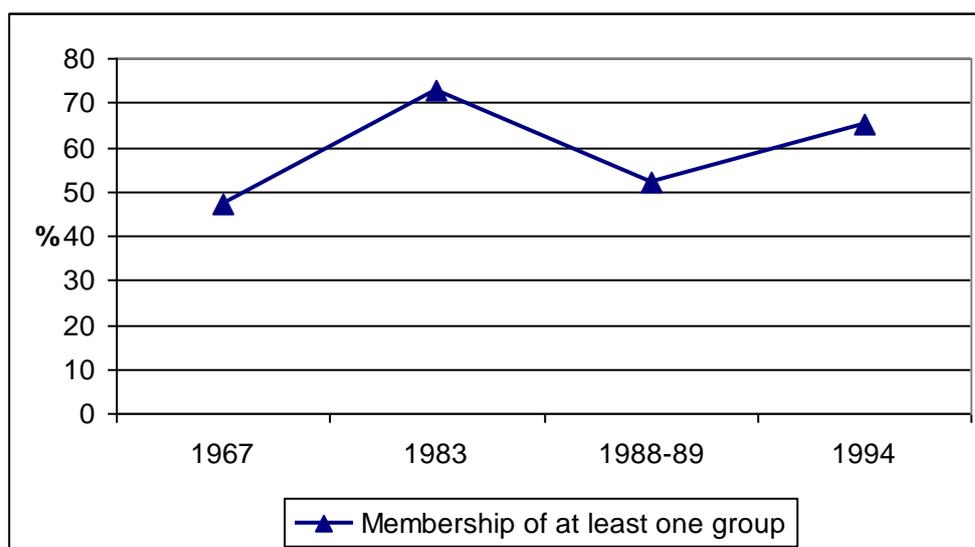
**Figure 15: Membership of Voluntary Organisations in Britain (1959–2001)**



Source: *Pattie Seyd & Whiteley 2004, p. 102.*

Rodney Smith (2001) uses survey data which shows an increase in group membership in Australia in Figure 16 (although the most recent data he cites is for 1994).

**Figure 16: Members of at least one group in Australia (1967-1994)**



Source: *Smith, R 2001, p. 41.*

What is also apparent is that while Australia may be a nation of 'joiners', membership of overtly political or campaigning groups is still a marginal activity in both countries. Rodney Smith (2001) argues that membership of political groups was about 2–3 per cent in 1983, and it rose slightly in 1994, largely as a result of the growth of environmental groups.

So what are the wider implications of these trends in group membership for this thesis? How important are levels of organisational membership for democratic politics in Britain and Australia? Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley (2004) show a clear, positive correlation between levels of group membership and levels of political action. These findings are supported by Passey and Lyons (2005) in the Australian context. They argue that 'active membership increases three-fold the likelihood of political activity, ordinary membership has a positive impact too, more than doubling the chances of political action' (Passey & Lyons 2005, p. 78). The key issue is that the amount of organisational membership has an important link with wider civic and political engagement.

For proponents of the NSD, a vibrant and active civil society is a desirable part of their overall plans for democratic renewal. The NSD account of a vibrant democracy presupposes relatively high levels of group membership. As the case studies presented in the later chapters of this thesis report, NSD-influenced Labo(u)r governments have set targets for volunteering and

organisational activity because it links with their overall vision for fostering active citizenship.

In the case of Britain, the decline of group membership is more marked, and this decline is a potentially worrying trend. However, as already noted, other non-group forms of participation have increased in Britain. In Australia, the concern about the decline of associational life—as evinced by Putnam's (2000) description of American citizens' 'bowling alone'—is not empirically supported. However, there is some evidence that some traditional groups in Australia may be losing members (Lyons 2001).

### **Political Participation and the Internet**

So far, the main focus has been on traditional or orthodox forms of political participation, such as signing a petition and attending political rallies. Increasingly, the growth and use of the internet are impacting on patterns of political participation and engagement, and this section briefly considers this issue (Norris 2001). However, the use of the internet as a tool for civic engagement is a relatively new phenomenon, and accordingly, the research is still evolving.

Most political parties and significant interest groups have a dedicated online presence. In theory, the expansion of the internet offers new possibilities for political and civic engagement through the use of e-petitions, cheap ways of informing a membership base and online discussion forums. Increasingly,

governments are developing e-government strategies (for example, New Labour's focus on technology in the 1999 White Paper on Modernising Government). In Australia, the Victorian Government has been leading the way on this agenda with a wide-ranging Parliamentary Inquiry into e-democracy in 2005 (Scrutiny of Acts and Regulation Committee 2005). 'Information Victoria' is a dedicated government team with the remit to open up the democratic conversation through the use of 'new media' (Information Victoria 2009).

#### *Access and Use of the Internet*

According to Maloney (2006), around 70 per cent of the British population have access to the internet—which equates to 30 million people. Computer access and home ownership of personal computers have grown rapidly. There is a similar trend in Australia. According to ABS (2006) data:

In 2001, 35% of Australian dwellings had access to the Internet in the week prior to the Census date. In 2006, 63% of Dwellings had access to the Internet.

In both Britain and Australia, use of the internet is, like traditional forms of political participation, highly stratified. People from higher socio-economic groups are much more likely to own computers and have access to the internet (Norris 2001). In Australia, ABS (2006) data confirm that younger people, more-affluent people, people with more formal education, non-

Indigenous Australians, able-bodied people and employed people are all more likely to have access to broadband technology.

In one of the earliest studies of the impact of the internet on political participation in the United Kingdom, it is reported that:

... the internet reinforced some existing biases and simultaneously expanded the participation of other under-represented groups: almost one third of e-participants were 'educated upper middle-class' citizens (the 'usual suspects'), while manual workers comprised only 16 per cent of those that participated via the internet. (Ward, Gibson & Lusoli 2003 cited in Maloney 2006, p. 111)

In the same study by Ward, Gibson and Lusoli (2003), it was found that those aged between 15 and 24 years (although a relatively small group in the survey sample), were among the heaviest users of the internet—'outsurfing' those in the 45–54 years age range. A common trend is that younger people tend not to engage in traditional forms of political participation as much as older groups. For example, voter turnout for younger people is consistently lower. This is instructive because it offers hope to those who seek to use the internet as a new way of engaging disenfranchised groups with the political process, but it also simultaneously reproduces commonly found patterns of inequality.

### *Using the Internet for Civic Purposes*

Increasing use of the internet does not necessarily mean that the public are using it for political or civic purposes. The 2003 study by Ward, Gibson and Lusoli suggests that use of the internet for civic reasons is still relatively low. They did find evidence that some interest groups used the internet to help mobilise their members and supporters. For example, they found evidence that some interest groups effectively used the internet to mobilise demonstrators against the Iraq War. It was reported that 31 per cent of Countryside Alliance members cited the internet as an important part of their reason to go on the march in London in September 2002, mostly to protest against the proposed ban on hunting with dogs. (Maloney 2006, p. 111).

In overall terms, Ward and his colleagues report that the internet makes:

... a modest contribution to participation and mobilisation. Whilst the internet does not universally lower the costs of participation, it may bring some new individuals and groups into the political process – notably younger people ... it seems most likely to assist the increasingly prominent development of protest networks, flash and single issue campaigns. (Ward, Gibson & Lusoli 2003, p. 667 cited in Maloney 2006, p.111)

At this stage, how the internet is impacting upon overall patterns of political engagement still remains an open question. To some extent, this is an interesting but peripheral issue for this thesis. Only three of the case studies

of innovative consultation reported in this thesis made use of the internet as part of the overall initiative. Indeed, it is only the last case study—the 2020 Summit (see Ch. 9)—which made significant use of the internet as a tool for engagement. The impact of the internet on civic engagement is developing and evolving.

### **Political Participation and Political Support—Summary**

Before this chapter proceeds, it is worth reiterating and summarising some of the main trends in patterns of political participation and re-asserting how these trends have relevance for this thesis. At the heart of this thesis is an examination of some of the different ways that Labo(u)r governments have sought to use innovative processes of consultation as part of their wider programs for democratic renewal. These case studies have to be contextualised in the changing and dynamic relationship between the state and civil society. Some of these changes, such as declining levels of trust in politicians, have been a reason for NSD-influenced governments to seek to reinvigorate the democratic polity. The main trends include:

- Both Britain and Australia have seen a decline in trust in politicians, although trust in other professions has also fallen.
- The amount of the public's general interest in politics remains largely unchanged and generally rather low.
- There has been some decline in voter identification with the major political parties.

- Political party membership and trade union membership have been declining in Britain and Australia.
- Falling voter turnout is a key feature of recent general elections in Britain, and there is some loss of support for the major political parties in Australia.
- There is an increase in other forms of non-electoral participation in Britain (particularly individualistic acts); although there is some evidence of similar trends in Australia, they are not as pronounced as they are in Britain.
- The impact of the internet on patterns of political participation is still an open question. Governments in Britain and Australia are placing their hopes on e-government strategies to invigorate the public realm.

The first observation from this brief survey of aspects of political support and participation in Britain and Australia is the striking, if not too surprising, similarities between the two countries. The second observation is that most of the patterns of political support and participation in Britain and Australia are also reflected in many of the other advanced industrial societies (Dalton 2002; Norris 1999; Nye 1997). There appear to be clear patterns of falling citizen trust and confidence in the political institutions in both Britain and Australia (albeit from relatively low baselines).

The third observation is that none of the main trends outlined above show a crisis in either British or Australian democracy. However, an overriding theme is that there is clearly a changing relationship between the state and civil

society which some of these trends capture. Citizens are engaging with the state in different ways, and there is some evidence that, although the main parties still dominate the political system, their dominance is weaker. Richardson (2002, p.23) argues that all democratic governments have a 'burden of legitimation'. The overriding argument presented here is that the form of this burden is changing, and to some extent the burden is increasing on the Labour governments that are at the heart of this thesis. In the British context, one of the apparent dangers of the detachment of the main political parties from wider civil society is that far-right parties, such as the British National Party (BNP), are filling this democratic 'void'.<sup>45</sup>

The fourth observation is that, to some extent, some of the main changes have been more pronounced in Britain than in Australia. While there are clear parallels in some trends, such as falling party and trade union membership, and falling political trust, others have had less impact in Australia. In the discussion on the comparative differences between Britain and Australia (see Ch. 4), it is argued that Australia has a more open political opportunity structure than Britain and factors, such as compulsory voting, have helped maintain political stability.

Interestingly, the declining levels of trust in both countries have not affected overall patterns of participation, or even interest in politics. Levels of non-

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<sup>45</sup> In Britain, the BNP has aggressively and strategically worked to gain electoral support with effective local campaigning, often targeting already disengaged white working-class voters. In Burnley (a Lancashire city where a race riot took place in 2001), the BNP doubled its seats on the Council to eight at the May 2003 local elections, and its vote increased elsewhere (Ward & Watt 2003). In 2009, the BNP secured two seats in the European Parliament, linked in part, to expenses scandals which engulfed the main political parties at this time (Wainwright 2009; Yaqoob 2009).

electoral participation in both countries seem to be either constant or indeed slightly increased in Britain. The Power Inquiry—a loose coalition of activists and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) in the United Kingdom—argue that this increase in activity reflects the growing frustration with the party system and dominance of the main political parties (Power Inquiry 2006).

Voter turnout in Britain tends to be used as a prism for viewing wider political participation issues in the United Kingdom, and arguably this has made the wider issue of disaffection with the party system more prominent in Britain. Sanders et al. (2005) do not see falling voter turnout as inevitable. Even if there is no crisis in democracy, it does pose key problems for the New Labour government. At the 2005 general election, nearly 17 million people (out of just over 44 million registered voters) did not vote. The Blair government only secured about 35 per cent of those who did manage to vote (Electoral Commission 2005). In the context of electoral politics, it is a legitimate government with a mandate to govern, but the 'first-past-the-post' electoral system conceals the weaker base of the Blair government's support. In Australia, while this debate is not as high profile, it is apparent from recent survey data that Australians have, at best, a problematic relationship with their political parties:

One striking finding is that problematic status of political parties in Australia: political parties are seen by a majority of respondents to provide no real policy choices...

...citizenship and the responsibilities attached to being a good citizen remain highly valued in Australian society. That many Australians nonetheless feel government is unresponsive suggests that the fabric between citizens and government is not without its loose threads. (Bean & Denmark 2007, pp. 77–8)

Fundamentally, the changes in patterns of political participation are increasing the burden of legitimation on the main political parties and the two-party system itself (Richardson 2002, p.23). Labo(u)r, or indeed all of the major political parties, are no longer the mass parties. The additional burden for Labo(u)r parties is the falling trade union membership. This does not mean that a legitimate government has to be a mass party, but what it does mean is that the traditional sources of Labo(u)r support are undergoing substantive change. Democratic legitimacy in an advanced industrial society involves more than just electoral support, even if that is usually its starting point. Therefore, if the wider public are at a greater distance from the main political parties, it poses searching questions for the Labo(u)r governments in order to maintain their democratic legitimacy and secure mass appeal. Or put another way, the changing relationship between civil society and the state has put pressure on the state to be more responsive. The case studies in this thesis focus on how Labo(u)r governments have attempted to become more responsive and their search for support outside traditional bases.

While the overall trends outlined earlier are crucial for understanding the social and political changes taking place in advanced industrial societies, they

neglect a crucial aspect of political participation and support: the issue of *who* participates.

### **The Sociology of Participation**

The origin of the study of political behaviour and participation is largely due to the ground-breaking work of Sidney Verba and Gabriel Almond (and their colleagues) from the 1960s onwards in the United States. These benchmark studies on civic culture show that participation is highly stratified. In their surveys of political participation, these researchers showed how rates of participation are skewed by factors such as age, gender, occupation, religion, class, income, ethnicity, etc.

In Almond and Verba's (1963, pp. 320–1) analysis of the civic culture, they argue that educational attainment is the most significant predictor of participation. The more highly educated people are more knowledgeable about, and active in, politics. They also argue, not unsurprisingly, that income, occupation and education are closely bound together. Almond and Verba (1963, p. 330) found that, on average, men tend to participate more often than women. They observed differences between the five countries they surveyed and argue that women are generally more politically active in the United States and the United Kingdom compared with Italy, Germany, and Mexico (Almond & Verba 1963, p. 340).

These general patterns of the sociology of participation in the United States were confirmed by Milbrath (1965). The more political stimuli received by a person, the more likely he or she is to participate. Crucially, the groups who are more exposed to this factor than others are men, the middle classes, those people with more formal education and those people who live in urban areas (Milbrath 1965, p. 17). Milbrath also contends that participation increases with age, peaking with those people in their 50s and then dropping for people older than 60. In terms of gender, men are more likely to participate in politics than women, although this gap between men and women closes for those people who have received more formal education.

In terms of ethnicity, black Americans tend to participate at lower levels than white Americans. Milbrath (1965, p. 25) argues that black Americans are more likely to engage in protest forms of participation. This is an important observation because not only do different socio-economic groups participate more or less than other groups, but they also participate in different ways.

These patterns have broadly been supported in other advanced industrial societies, and these trends have tended to hold up over time. Verba, Scholzman and Brady updated their seminal study from the 1960s in 1995. This study confirmed that affluent people are more likely to participate than those who are less affluent. They also observed differences between types of participation; the affluent (as might be expected) tend to give more money; the poor are more likely to participate on issues relating to basic human need; and there is not a great deal of difference between different socio-economic

groups in terms of giving time. Significantly, they concluded that the voices of citizens 'may be loud and clear, but they are decidedly not equal' (Verba, Scholzman & Brady 1995, p. 511).

While this evidence from the United States forms the benchmark for much of the analysis of who participates in advanced industrial societies, the evidence for Britain and Australia is now examined.

### *The Sociology of Participation in Australia*

As McAllister (1997, p. 9) notes, the study of political behaviour came later to Australia and its intellectual impact has been weaker. Consequently, there is less empirical data and research about political participation in Australia.<sup>46</sup> The focus of much Australian political science has been electoral behaviour. One of the first studies of political behaviour (predominantly electoral) in Australia was undertaken by Aitkin.<sup>47</sup> Aitkin (1978) focuses mainly on the different socio-economic characteristics of political party identification, which is a useful (if limited) picture. Aitken finds differences in levels of political party support by gender, age, migration–ethnicity and religion. Aitkin (1978, p. 135) suggests that 'the broad socio-economic differences within the community are

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<sup>46</sup> A detailed examination of the sociology of participation is also absent from more recent research including Denmark et al. (2007), R Smith (2001) and Wilson et al (2005). While some aspects of the demographics of participation are considered, they are limited. R Smith (2001) only focuses on gender and class. Passey and Lyons (2005) only focus on group membership.

<sup>47</sup> For the sake of brevity, Aitken's findings are not outlined in detail. Suffice to say that they broadly correlate with the most common patterns of inequality outlined in Almond and Verba's (1963) work.

more useful in explanations of political behaviour than of short-term political change'.

One of the earliest studies of orthodox political participation in Australia was carried out by Bean (1989). This study is valuable in that it is the first to comprehensively measure the sociology of participation in Australia, and Bean directly compares it with Almond and Verba's *The Civic Culture* to gain a comparative perspective. Using data from the 1984–85 Australian National Social Science Survey, Bean shows that participation in Australia broadly fits with well-established patterns in other advanced industrial societies.<sup>48</sup> Bean (1989, p. 466) argues that:

In fact age has the largest direct effect of any variable (.22), while Trade Union membership (.10), occupation (.09) and residential location (-0.7) have independent effects as well, whereby union members, white collar workers and rural residents are more likely to engage in voting than non-unionists, blue collar workers or city dwellers respectively.

Interestingly, Bean (1989, p. 471) observes, 'Ethnic background is somewhat surprising for its lack of effect (on participation) ... It may be that barriers to political participation felt by immigrants to Australia in a previous era have largely been eroded by the 1980s'. Overall, Bean (1989, p. 471) concludes:

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<sup>48</sup> Bean (1989) uses multivariate regression analysis to outline the correlation between various acts of participation and other variables such as sex, gender and so on. A more detailed explanation of this methodology and the full list of variables examined by Bean are contained in his article.

Political participation by the mass citizenry in Australia reflects patterns found in many other parts of the world to a very considerable degree.

McAllister (1992) confirms the patterns of inequality of participation. Using survey data from 1988, McAllister (1992, pp. 58-9) reports that in both campaign and communal activity, the level of participation of university graduates is twice that of people with secondary education. Furthermore, around twice as many high-income citizens engage in communal activity compared with people on a low income.

Rodney Smith (2001) provides a useful survey of patterns of gender participation. While participation rates for men were higher in the 1960s, this is now changing. Rodney Smith finds that at the level of political attitudes, such as an expressed interest in politics, the gender gap is negligible. In more active forms of participation, Rodney Smith argues that the gap has also closed. Rodney Smith (2001, p. 211) reports that 'by the 1996 AES, gender differences in active election campaigning had completely disappeared'. The main gender imbalance appears to be in workplace political participation. In 1993, 41 per cent of male workers and 34 per cent of female workers were trade union members (Smith, R 2001, p. 212). There are gender differences in different types of community activity. In a 1994 survey, 27 per cent of men compared with 19 per cent of women reported involvement in a sporting club, while 28 per cent of women compared with 18 per cent of men were involved in voluntary community work (Smith, R 2001, p. 214). According to R Smith, the proportions 'were relatively even' in other voluntary activities.

Finally, familiar patterns of inequality are seen if the sociology of membership of voluntary organisations is examined (Table 10).

**Table 10: Membership of Voluntary Organisations by Demographic Group (2003)**

Characteristic	%
<b>Sex</b>	
Female	86
Male	87
<b>Age</b>	
18–34	86
35–49	88
50–64	88
65+	82
<b>Education</b>	
Year 12 or less	80
Trade/Cert or diploma	90
Bachelors degree +	95
<b>Occupation</b>	
Manager/Professor	94
Associate Professor/trades	87
Advanced/intermediate clerical	86
Elementary clerical and labourers	79
<b>Income</b>	
\$0–\$31 199 per annum	79
\$31 200–\$77 999 per annum	90
\$78 000+ per annum	93
<b>Total</b> N = 2057	86

Note: membership includes all respondents who are members of one or more organisations.

Source: Passey & Lyons 2005, p. 67.

In this research, it is striking that there are negligible differences in rates of membership by age and gender. However, people from higher socio-economic groups, with formal education, higher incomes and in professional occupations are all more likely to be a member of a voluntary organisation than people from lower socio-economic groups.

In summary, this snapshot of patterns of inequality of participation in Australia gives rise to a number of observations. Firstly, the sociology of participation in Australia is not strikingly different to other advanced industrial countries. Inequality of participation is a persistent feature of Australian politics. Secondly, the differences between rates of participation for some social groups should not be overstated. Levels of membership of voluntary organisations are still relatively high for low-income earners, as it is for higher-income earners. Thirdly, some inequalities in participation have decreased over time, particularly differences in rates of participation between men and women.

### *The Sociology of Participation in Britain*

Like Australia, Britain suffers from a lack of regular time-series survey data on political participation. This makes a comparison between the patterns of inequality of participation in the two countries difficult. Britain has been included in comparative studies of participation which have confirmed some of the overall trends identified by Almond and Verba (1963) and Milbrath (1965).

In recent years, major surveys of participation in Britain have been carried out in 1984 and 2000–01 (Parry, Moyser & Day 1992; Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley 2003a). Further analysis has been carried out in a democratic audit in 2002 (Beetham et al. 2002). Since 2000, the Home Office has initiated a series of citizenship surveys.

A useful comparison of the main types of characteristics of political participants and non-participants is outlined by Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley (2003b). Table 11 outlines these characteristics.

**Table 11: Characteristics of Political Participants and Non-participants in Britain**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Number of Political Actions: 0 (%)</b>	<b>Number of Political Actions: 1-4 (%)</b>	<b>Number of Political Actions: 5+ (%)</b>
All	14	49	37
<b>Age</b>			
25 and under	12	52	35
26–45	12	47	41
46–65	13	47	40
66+	21	54	25
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	14	50	35
Female	13	48	39
<b>Class</b>			
Professional	7	44	49
Clerical	13	52	35
Manual	18	54	28
<b>Household income</b>			
Under £10 000	20	52	28
£30 000–£39 000	9	46	45
£70 000+	6	40	54
<b>Education</b>			
15 years and under	19	53	28
16–18	14	49	37
19 years +	6	42	52
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
White/European	14	49	38
Asian	18	52	31
Black African	16	52	32
East Asian	19	52	30

Note: number of respondents N=3120

Source: *Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley 2003b, p. 628.*

The findings of the British citizen audits confirm the general trends of participation found in other advanced industrial societies. Affluent people, better educated people, older people, people from the dominant ethnic group

and men all tend to participate at higher levels (to varying degrees). These patterns are confirmed by Beetham et al. (2002).

The Beetham et al. (2002) survey also includes voluntary and non-voluntary acts of political participation. The authors observe that professional and managerial workers are more likely to be appointed (on a voluntary basis) to a local board. In contrast, compulsory jury service tends to be more socially representative in the United Kingdom, although interestingly, 'many of those in professional occupations find plausible reasons to opt out' (Beetham et al. 2002, p. 218).

In terms of age groups and levels of participation, as might be expected, those people in the 18–25 age group express less interest in politics and are less likely to participate in voluntary activities. When they do participate, it tends to be for more instrumental benefits, such as learning new skills (Beetham et al. 2002 p. 219).

Research into ethnicity shows the differences in the types of participatory acts undertaken by various ethnic groups. Beetham et al. (2002, p. 219) cite the 2000 Home Office citizenship survey which shows that black Britons and Asian Britons are equally as likely to be involved in helping groups and organisations as white Britons. The authors cite other sources which show—perhaps unsurprisingly—that people from ethnic minority groups are more likely to be involved in organisations and groups which represent the interests of their own ethnic background. Given the persistent social and economic

inequalities experienced by most ethnic minority groups in the United Kingdom, it is not surprising that their priorities may be to build up the infrastructure for their own communities.

Recent evidence on gender participation in Britain reveals a gap in levels, but this has diminished over time, and like Australia, in many areas the differences between men and women are negligible (Childs 2004; Norris, Lovenduski & Campbell 2004). The Childs (2004, p. 422) report found no gender gap in voting turnout at national, local or regional elections. Women are more likely to be involved in 'cause-orientated' activities, such as signing a petition, but they are significantly less likely to be involved in campaign activities. Women are also less likely to join voluntary organisations than men.

### **The Sociology of Participation— Overview**

Surveying the available evidence, the overall patterns and trends in those people who participate in politics in Britain and Australia are roughly comparable. One of the traditional gaps in political participation—gender—has declined to almost negligible levels in both countries. While the ethnic compositions of Britain and Australia are different, there are similarities in the differential rates of participation. In both countries, there is still a discernible pattern of older people being more likely to express an interest and being more active in politics than younger people. What is striking is that the patterns of inequality identified by Almond and Verba (1963) and Milbrath (1965) still resonate in more contemporary studies of political behaviour. In an

otherwise temperately worded survey, it is notable that Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley (2003a, p. 633) warn that:

There is a very real danger that the voice of the less privileged and the less resourced is becoming excluded from the participative, consumerist, atomised politics of the twenty-first century.

These longstanding patterns of inequality of participation—particularly the tendency for people from lower socio-economic groups to be less civically engaged—have important consequences for NSD-influenced Labo(u)r governments. Equality remains a defining feature of Labo(u)r politics, even in its recent incarnation in the NSD. While more traditional goals of Labo(u)r governments were focused on economic inequality, the NSD has a broader focus on social inequality—particularly through its conception of ‘social inclusion/exclusion’. Moreover, the NSD seeks to cultivate a form of active citizenship which redresses some of the long-standing inequalities of political and civic participation. As Labo(u)r politics has shifted from a more class-orientated project to a broader social one, so the subject of Labo(u)r politics has moved from the ‘working class’ to the ‘citizen’. As a policy goal, broader social equality supplants narrower forms of class equality. In this respect, these trends and patterns of inequality of voice and participation take on greater significance in NSD politics. As the case studies in this thesis show, NSD-influenced governments have set specific policy targets for reducing inequality of citizenship.

## **Political Participation and the NSD**

This chapter provides a more empirical focus for the understanding of patterns of political and civic participation. As the first section of this chapter shows, a number of discernible trends, such as falling trust, an increase in individualistic acts of non-electoral participation, a decline in strength of party identification and falling trade union membership, pose challenges to the traditional bases of Labo(u)r support. In part, some of these longer-term trends have been driving the NSD program of democratic renewal. In the United Kingdom at least, the focus on falling voter turnout has been a particularly difficult issue for the legitimacy of the New Labour government. In addition, the NSD espouses a more diverse conception of equality than more traditional class-based accounts of Labo(u)r politics, and subsequently, the inequality of civic engagement has become a higher policy goal.

These overall patterns set the context for this thesis. Political participation remains unequally practised by people from different social groups, alongside an attendant weakening of support for the party system. However, these trends do not represent a crisis of democracy, but rather they pose new sets of challenges for Labo(u)r governments in Britain and Australia. The appeal of the NSD calls for the democratising of democracy is underpinned by these wider social trends. The case studies in this thesis provide some clues as to how Labo(u)r-driven 'top-down' innovative attempts at consultation might address some of these wider issues, such as fostering active participation and countering low levels of trust. Moreover, a number of the case studies show NSD-influenced Labo(u)r governments seeking to define and set specific

targets for addressing some of these wider trends, such as inequality of voice. As outlined in Chapter 2, the Beetham–Pratchett criterion of representativeness provides a critical lens for seeing how far the specific case studies have sought to tackle the persistent patterns of inequality of voice.

Chapters 1–3 set the wider contextual issues for this thesis; however, before plunging into the case studies in detail, it is important to outline a much narrower set of contextual issues, namely the methodology, methods and main concepts that inform this thesis. This is the focus of the next chapter.

## Chapter 4

### *Methodology and Methods*

## **Introduction**

This thesis examines five case studies of Labo(u)r governments' attempts at innovative and new forms of consultation and community engagement. As outlined in the previous chapters, the influence of the New Social Democracy (NSD) can be detected, which is an attempt to reinvigorate and modernise social democracy (Giddens 1998, 2000). A key strand of the NSD is a call for democratic renewal and some experimentation to enhance the relationship between the state and civil society (Giddens 2000, p. 61). As outlined in the Chapter 2, drawing upon the work of Beetham (1994) and Pratchett (1999) it is feasible to use the principles of responsiveness and representativeness to comparatively evaluate the case studies reported in this thesis.

As this thesis falls within the broad tradition of comparative politics, it is important to set out the underpinning methodology and methods. The main part of the chapter discusses the comparative methodology used in this thesis. The case for comparing Britain and Australia is outlined. The merits and limitations of the comparative case study approach are then examined in detail. This thesis also uses the framework of policy transfer to understand the links and influences between the different Labo(u)r governments reported in this thesis. The final section of the chapter examines the different methods used in collating the evidence and material for the five cases of Labo(u)r government's attempts at innovative forms of consultation.

No methodological approach is without its limitations, nor are any particular methods without their problematic aspects, and this chapter discusses these

issues in more detail. This chapter is not an exhaustive study of all of the related issues in the diverse and complex field of conducting comparative social research, but rather it shows that the multiple case study approach taken in this thesis is valid and viable.

### **Methodology-The Comparative Approach**

This thesis uses a comparative case study approach to highlight and understand how effectively NSD-influenced governments in Britain and Australia have sought to introduce new consultative processes. The multiple case study approach falls within the broad field of comparative politics, and the overall strengths and limitations of this approach are considered.

Blondel (1990, p. 5) suggests that any general statement about a political phenomenon implies a comparative element. For example, an observation about a political institution might imply how it rates against a given ideal or its historical performance. As Blondel (1990, p. 5) notes:

Any judgement on the workings of a government or of an institution of that government is based in reality on some underlying notion of how similar governments or similar institutions of government work in other circumstances.

Comparative methodology can encompass a wide range of techniques, and the wider body of knowledge about conducting comparative research is evolving (Blondel 1969; Bryman 2004; Lijphart 1977). The main concern about

using the comparative approach is whether the subject of each case study is directly comparable.

### *Problems in the Comparative Approach*

Blondel (1990), Bryman (2004), Lijphart (1977), Macridis (1969), and Przeworski and Teune (1970) highlight the potential problems with the comparative approach. The main problems can be summarised as follows:

- Some social and political phenomena are unique, so they are not comparable (Przeworski & Teune 1970).
- Some studies claim to be comparative in their analysis, but rather they focus on describing the different cases instead of critically evaluating them in a comparative context (Macridis 1969).
- Access to information can be limited, which limits the analysis of the comparison (Blondel 1990).
- Comparative studies can often be static where the focus on comparing institutions (or other political phenomena) at a snapshot moment can fail to capture wider dynamic political and social processes. The risk is that comparative analysis is reified (Macridis 1969).
- Comparative studies can raise cross-cultural problems with data sources (Bryman 2004).

Not all of these limitations apply to this thesis. The following section addresses the most relevant issues and outlines the strategies used to mitigate their impact to ensure the methodology is robust and sound.

### *The 'Most Similar Systems' Approach*

The study of consultation initiatives developed by Labo(u)r governments in Britain and Australia falls within Przeworski and Teune's (1970) framework of 'most similar systems' design. Przeworski and Teune (1970, p. 29) describe this as a 'maximum strategy' because it operates 'on the belief that systems as similar as possible with respect to as many features as possible constitute optimal samples for comparative inquiry'.<sup>49</sup>

Working within Przeworski and Teune's framework, this thesis compares a limited number of case studies in Britain and Australia which operate within broadly similar systems. A systematic comparison of the most similar systems of Britain and Australia (and also the Labo(u)r parties in both countries) is outlined below to support this approach.

The comparative approach of the most similar systems design has a specific outcome. Przeworski and Teune (1970, p. 4) argue that the aim is to 'lead to general statements about social phenomena'. Therefore, it needs to be stated that the overall aim of this comparative study is to make general evaluative statements about the innovative consultation exercises initiated by Labo(u)r governments in Britain and Australia. By comparing case studies in Britain

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<sup>49</sup> The alternative strategy suggested by Przeworski and Teune is the 'most different systems' approach, where 'the starting point is the variation of the observed behaviour at a lower level than that of systems' (Przeworski & Teune 1970, p. 48). They suggest that most often this will be at the level of individual actors but it can be at the group level, local communities or social classes. In this approach, the researcher devises a hypothesis and then increasingly adds variables to test the validity of the proposition.

and Australia, it is possible to identify common themes and barriers in the attempts to foster democratic renewal.

The statements arising from the comparison are not universal, but they are set within the bounds of the most similar systems design. In this respect, this thesis follows other studies which make similar limited claims. For example, Binzer-Hobolt and Klemmensen (2005) have undertaken a study of policy responsiveness in Denmark and Britain, and they draw indicative findings that proportional representation (PR) systems may be more responsive than majoritarian systems—but only in the context of their methodology.

The limited scope of this thesis means that other factors or research may account for the phenomena, but these factors would complement the main findings rather than overturn them. Whatever the lessons learned from the case studies may be, they are certainly not the final word on either the case studies themselves or the wider NSD programs for democratic renewal. For example, it should be reiterated that the two New Labour case studies reported in this thesis (see Ch. 5 and Ch. 6) do not describe the full range of initiatives in democratic renewal undertaken by the Blair/Brown New Labour governments. It is not suggested that the strengths and weaknesses of either the 'People's Panel' or the 'Big Conversation' can be generalised to all of New Labour's endeavours on this agenda.

The main value of this thesis is that most of its case studies have not been subject to previous detailed scrutiny, and where there has been some limited

examination (for example, New Labour's Big Conversation), the case studies supplement the existing literature. Caution has to be exercised when making generalised claims arising from the comparison of the case studies. While New Labour's People's Panel (see Ch. 5) was beset with a number of difficulties, it does not mean that a national citizens' panel could not be established elsewhere, or that some of the problems that are inherent in the British context cannot be addressed or remedied.

The central question to ask of this thesis is whether it is comparing unique political phenomena which are, in fact, intrinsically incomparable. Are the cases so different that they cannot be compared? Or to pose the same question in the language of social science research: are the case studies idiographic rather than nomothetic (Przeworski & Teune 1970; Ruane 2005)? Ruane (2005, p. 76) argues that the nomothetic approach in social science research 'adopts a generalist or a "macro" approach to causal analysis – it is interested in finding general causal patterns that exist over and above any one individual, case, or event'. Conversely, the idiographic approach has a micro focus in 'thoroughly explaining the sequence of events that lead to one particular outcome' (Ruane 2005, p. 77).

There are specific measures a researcher can take to enhance the case for nomothetic comparative research. Lijphart (1977, p. 55) argues that that 'the intensive comparative analysis of a few cases may be more promising than a superficial statistical analysis of many cases'. Lijphart's insight helps reinforce

the validity of the approach undertaken in this thesis which examines five cases in detail.

The idiographic case against the validity of the research methodology adopted in this thesis rests on two potential areas of criticism. The criticisms that might be levelled at this thesis are that it is not feasible to compare different consultation initiatives where:

- (1) The consultative mechanisms are all different from one another.
- (2) Three of the cases are national in scope and two are regional in scope.

The first potential criticism is that the case of the People's Panel (see Ch. 5) is so different from the 2020 Summit (see Ch. 9) that comparison between the two is meaningless. An alternative strategy would be to compare much more similar programs, such as the use of Community Cabinets in different Australian States. However, the premise of this potential criticism is unconvincing. As outlined in Chapter 2, this thesis uses the Beetham–Pratchett framework to evaluate the case studies which employs two main principles—responsiveness and representativeness—to provide a critical lens to critique broadly similar initiatives (Pratchett 1999). In Pratchett's original analysis, he compares and evaluates a range of different consultative techniques including citizens' panels and citizens' juries. A strict comparativist approach might reject Pratchett's research. However, from the outset it is clear that Pratchett does not intend to make a strict comparison: instead his purpose is to use a flexible and relative set of evaluative criteria to audit what

might be seen as a family of different techniques. In this respect, the validity and viability of his research is upheld.

This thesis builds upon Pratchett's research to critically evaluate a new family of consultation initiatives. The Beetham–Pratchett framework allows for a flexible critique of a range of broadly similar programs, as it is not a strict 'tick-box' exercise in auditing and comparison. The point is that the People's Panel is not a better case study because it is more representative than the 2020 Summit; but rather this framework allows observation of how broadly similar programs, designed to enhance new ways of decision-making in government processes, deal with the twin criteria of responsiveness and representativeness.

The second potential criticism is that comparison between a national government initiative and a regional–state government initiative is not valid, given their different remits and sizes. There are some obvious differences (for example, the British government has a much larger domestic policy remit than the Australian State governments). As Merkel (2001, p. 38) notes, 'of all the social-democratic governments in Europe, Tony Blair's Labour government (1997-) enjoys the most resources and the fewest constraints in implementing policy'.

However, it is argued here that comparing a consultative initiative from a regional–state government and a national government is viable. Firstly, it is apparent that all of the Labo(u)r governments considered in this thesis

operate in countries which fall within the most similar systems schema. Secondly, there are common themes and issues which affect governments at both a national and regional level. As explored in Chapter 3, both Britain and Australia are experiencing broadly similar changes in patterns of political support and participation. Thirdly, all of the case studies focus on Labo(u)r governments which are seeking to introduce ‘top-down’ responses to promote democratic renewal. They all share broadly similar ideological outlooks where the influence of the NSD is evident. Fourthly, while there is ‘vertical fiscal imbalance’ between the two tiers of Australian government (Summers 2006, p.141), the Australian State governments have significant powers and control in relation to education, health and other domestic policy areas. At first sight, comparison between a national government and the State governments may not seem particularly fruitful, but this is not the case.

Finally, and most significantly, as it has been shown, the Beetham–Pratchett evaluative framework is relative and flexible. This means the criteria can be expanded and contracted to fit the relevant policy setting. The consultations reported in this thesis target a range of different population groups. Not unsurprisingly, the nationally focused consultation initiatives seek to engage the key national stakeholders and population groups that are more broadly representative of the national demographics (for example, the 1 000 of Australia’s ‘brightest and best’ involved in the 2020 Summit—see Ch. 9). Likewise, the Australian State-based initiatives engage broadly within and across the region (for example, the 1 600 South Australians consulted on South Australia’s Strategic Plan–SASP—see Ch. 6).

In this respect, when examining each case study through the prism of representativeness, the criteria can be expanded and contracted depending on the demographic and population base in question. It might seem obvious, but under the Beetham–Pratchett framework, a State-based initiative is not penalised for failing to engage at a national level.

The relative and flexible criteria mean that it is possible to ask:

- Who are the main population groups or types of citizens being engaged?
- What was the rationale for engaging with these groups?
- How successful have the initiatives been in securing the engagement of these groups?
- What other groups or publics could have been engaged?

This approach means that the comparisons made are multilayered and dynamic rather than simplistic and static. For example, the South Australian case study (see Ch. 8) is not a better initiative than the 2020 Summit (see Ch. 10) because more people were consulted. Instead, this flexible approach means that common themes and barriers can be identified across the cases while still respecting the specific circumstances within which they operate. This approach resists suggesting that one case is more ‘tokenistic’ than another, but it enables a more detailed discussion about how, for example, the outcomes from the consultations were linked to the decision-making processes.

In addition, a key theme of each of the case studies is that they attempted either a national or wide-ranging consultation within their polities. Both the Victorian and South Australian case studies are consultative activities which attempted to engage at a State-wide level rather than just at a local population level. What links the case studies, and the main reason they were selected, is that they all attempted to engage widely within their own polities and to consult on a large number of 'big picture' issues. The Big Conversation was reportedly the largest consultation ever undertaken in the United Kingdom, likewise the South Australian consultation was reportedly the largest ever State-wide consultation. Single-issue consultations, even large-scale ones, were deliberately excluded from the research frame used in this thesis for this reason.

To recap, it is feasible to compare the State governments and national governments because they are broadly similar governments; operating in broadly similar countries; aiming to achieve broadly similar things; albeit, working with different population sizes.

It is also worth reinforcing that this thesis is more than just a direct comparison of the different initiatives. This thesis also examines the policy-transfer processes which have taken place (Dolowitz & Marsh 2000; Evans & Davies 1999). Policy transfer is a key concept—discussed later in this chapter—which allows observation of how far the NSD has influenced each government. This approach means that it is possible to compare a national government with a

State government because policy transfer can take place between different levels of government. As this thesis documents, there is clear evidence of policy transfer of NSD ideas between all of the case studies.

## **Comparing Britain and Australia**

As noted above, this thesis falls within the schema of most similar systems design (Przeworski & Teune 1970). This section outlines the main similarities and differences between Britain and Australia. These commonalities and differences need to be made explicit for the ensuing comparative inquiry. Comparing Labo(u)r parties and governments in Britain and Australia is a valid enterprise, and the viability of this approach has been confirmed by a range of recent research (Berger & Patmore 2005; Kirk 2005; O'Reilly 2007; Patmore & Coates 2005; Scott 2000). It is also worth noting that Australian politics has often been excluded from international debates about advanced industrial societies, and to a small extent, this thesis makes a contribution to developing the links between Britain and Australia.<sup>50</sup>

### *Similarities between Britain and Australia*

Both Britain and Australia operate within the framework of 'responsible government' and within the Westminster tradition (Parkin & Summers 2006).<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Johnson and Tonkiss (2002) provide a useful example of how Australia tends to be excluded from some wider international academic debates. Another common issue is that non-Australian political scientists sometimes presume that Australia follows other trends, which under closer scrutiny, does not appear to be the case (Goot 2006; Tranter & Western 2003).

<sup>51</sup> The section on governance in Chapter 1 outlines how, to a varying extent, in Britain and Australia there has been a move away from the Westminster tradition. The NSD actively

Notably, the British Monarch is also the Queen of Australia.<sup>52</sup> At a national level, the following comparable political institutions can be identified: two houses of parliament, the offices of the executive, legislature and the judiciary are all broadly similar. The British Constitution was a guiding principle in formulating the Australian written Constitution. The formal political structures of the Westminster model are clearly identifiable in both countries, although there are crucial structural differences which are explored in the next section.

Britain and Australia are also clearly linked by the dominance of the two-party system.<sup>53</sup> At a national and local–State level, the cleavage between the Labo(u)r party and anti-Labo(u)r parties is a significant and enduring feature of the political systems. Interestingly, throughout most of the 1980s and early 1990s there were long periods of Conservative rule in Britain and Labor rule in Australia. This situation reversed itself with the unbroken governments of Tony Blair’s New Labour (elected in 1997) and former Prime Minister John Howard’s Liberal–National coalition (elected in 1996). The recent timescales for the Labo(u)r governments are outlined in Table 1. The section on policy transfer in this chapter, in tandem with the discussion of the NSD in Chapter 1, outline how the different Labo(u)r governments have influenced each other

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seeks to create new institutional forms to meet its policy goals, particularly through the use of networks and partnerships.

<sup>52</sup> The British Monarch, while also the Monarch in Australia at the federal level, is separately the Queen of each of the six states (and through her federal role, she is also Queen of the mainland and minor outlying territories). The Queen’s representatives in Australia are the Governor-General and the six Governors in each of the states.

<sup>53</sup> Britain is marked by the Conservative–Labour party divide. In Australia, the situation is more complicated as the ‘anti-Labor’ ruling party grouping consists of the Liberal party and the National party which have traditionally worked together in coalition. In many respects, the Australian Liberal–National coalition has operated in much the same way as the Conservative party worked with the Ulster Democratic party in the United Kingdom, particularly during the Thatcher–Major (former Prime Ministers) era. However, as Heffernan (2003) notes, in the British context, the dominance of the Tory–Labour parties has been weakened by the influence of the Liberal Democrats. Heffernan (2003, p. 119) argues that Britain is not a multi-party state but rather a ‘two-party-plus one’.

and how the links between them have been enhanced in recent years (O'Reilly 2007; Scott 2000).

Both Britain and Australia are advanced industrialised nations operating a form of liberal democracy. As explored in Chapter 3, there are a number of similar trends in citizens' political behaviour and demographic changes in both countries, such as the decline of membership of the major political parties. There have also been interesting developments in both countries with respect to the blurring of the boundary between the private and public sectors. In both countries there have been similar developments, which include outsourcing, 'marketisation', privatisation of formerly public-owned utilities and the growing use of 'public-private partnerships'. The Thatcher-Major (former Prime Ministers) governments took an avowedly neo-liberal approach to questions of state ownership, for example, introducing a process of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) for local government. In Australia, and to some consternation for those on the Left, the Hawke-Keating (former Prime Ministers) governments instigated a range of privatisations. In 1995, Keating introduced the National Competition Policy to induce the States to introduce competition into the provision of public services. In Britain, the 'post-Thatcherite' New Labour (Driver & Martell 1998) developed this agenda further by extending the use of Private Finance Initiatives (PFIs) and Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) (for example, the current arrangement of the London tube system). PFIs were introduced as a policy under the Conservative government led by John Major; however, New Labour promoted and accelerated the use of PFIs as its preferred method for building public

infrastructure. The salient point is that in both countries, policies of privatisation and marketisation have been actively adopted by the Labo(u)r governments.

This is not an exhaustive list of the similarities between the two countries, but rather it aims to reinforce the historic links and commonalities between Britain and Australia. A useful and detailed comparison of the Labo(u)r parties conception and the role of the state—which emphasises key commonalities—are offered by Patmore and Coates (2005).

#### *Dissimilarities between Britain and Australia*

In terms of political systems, the main difference between the two countries is the federal structure of Australian politics. Australia has been described as having a 'hybrid form of government' (Emy 1978). This model combines the British Westminster parliamentary system and the American federal system. State governments in Australia have a much more significant and enhanced role than local government in Britain.<sup>54</sup> The State government powers are reflected, in part, in the written Constitution. The relationship between the Commonwealth Government and State governments is complex and has changed over time. A useful overview of these complexities and changes is provided by Parkin (2003b) and Summers, Woodward and Parkin (2002).

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<sup>54</sup> However, it should be noted that local government in Britain has a significant role in delivering local services, such as policing and schools, within a framework set by the national government. Australian state governments do have significantly more powers than local authorities in Britain, although this should not to be overstated.

Federalism in Australia operates optimally as a system of dual sovereignty. While there is tension between the State governments and the Federal government, there is also a good deal of cooperation. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) plays a key facilitative role between the different tiers of government. When Prime Minister Rudd's Labor government was elected in 2007, it adopted a strong reform agenda for COAG. Rudd was faced with Labor governments in all of the States and Territories (except Western Australia)<sup>55</sup>, and there was a clear expectation that there would be enhanced levels of cooperation and goodwill between the Commonwealth Government and the State governments.

There is a degree of autonomy afforded to the States which allows them to stamp their own political character on the delivery of local services. As noted above, this significant role in policy-making afforded to the Australian States (particularly in health and education), despite the growing the role of the Commonwealth Government, does make a comparison between the Australian State governments and the British national government more meaningful.

The Blair government has also been characterised by a willingness to devolve power. The establishment of the Scottish Executive and the Welsh Assembly are significant achievements in this respect. Attempts have also been made to establish assemblies in England. Crucially, Westminster retains a significant number of reserved powers over the new assemblies. Given the range of

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<sup>55</sup> Correct at the time of writing—September 2009.

constitutional changes made by New Labour, there has been an argument that Britain is moving towards a 'quasi-federal constitution' (Bogdanor 2003, p. 222).

The other significant difference between the two political systems is the differing electoral systems. Britain is a majoritarian system, where members of parliament (MPs) are elected to the House of Commons (Lower House) on a 'winner takes all' basis. This tends to produce governments with large working majorities (as explored in Chapter 3, this has the potential to mask the weakening support for the two-party system). The House of Lords (Upper House) is unelected, although this has been subject to reform under New Labour, not least in 1999 when all but 92 Hereditary Peers were expelled. The House of Lords has the power to delay, and to some degree, it has the power to amend legislation. In Australia, the House of Representatives (Lower House) is elected by a form of preferential voting, which also tends to produce majoritarian outcomes. The Senate (Upper House) is elected by a form of proportional representation. There are commonalities between the two countries as constitutional convention dictates the largest party to form the government. The electoral systems in the Australian States vary to some degree, but with the exception of Queensland, all have two Houses of Parliament. In South Australia, a preferential voting system is used in the Lower House, and a form of proportional representation is used in the Upper House. Victoria uses the Alternate Vote (AV) system in the Lower House, and a form of proportional voting is used in the Upper House.

Historically, an additional difference between the two countries has been the introduction of compulsory arbitration of industrial disputes in Australia. Patmore and Coates (2005) argue that compulsory arbitration is a factor in the different way that the Australian welfare state developed. This has also meant that the Australian Labor Party (ALP) has, at times, taken a different approach to industrial disputes than its British counterpart.

Finally, one of the most significant features of the Australian political system is the use of compulsory voting in Federal and State elections. This is a significant difference between Australia and other advanced industrial societies in terms of the wider debate about political participation. While it is argued that similar changes in citizens' behaviour have taken place in Australia, the locus of the debate has not been voter turnout—a pre-eminent concern in countries like Britain.

### *Britain and Australia—Political Opportunity Structures*

It is worth summarising this discussion of the differences between the political systems in the context of the concept of the political opportunity structure (POS). The concept of the POS is a useful frame for discussing the commonalities and differences in the interaction between government and civil society and the role of political participation in Britain and Australia.<sup>56</sup> The value of the POS is that it helps explain political action (Reising 1998). A

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<sup>56</sup> POS is not an unproblematic concept. Some critics argue that it can be defined too widely or narrowly and that it neglects the role of agency at the expense of a focus on structural factors (Koopmans 2005; Meyer 2004).

political system with a limited POS is likely to foster different types of participation (or non-participation) than a more open system.

The comparison of the two political systems suggests that Australia has a more open POS than Britain. The concept of the POS helps identify the number of entry points for the citizen to engage with the state. At least theoretically, it has been argued that a federal system has the potential to be more accessible democracy than a purely majoritarian one (Parkin 2006). Furthermore, there is some evidence that PR systems may be more responsive than majoritarian systems (Binzer-Hobolt & Klemmensen 2005). There is also some suggestion that compulsory voting might be a bulwark against the wider trend of falling confidence in government (Goot 2002; Smith, R 2001). These factors all suggest a more open POS in Australia.

While there may be a greater number of entry points in the Australian political system, it is evident that wider concerns about democracy in advanced industrial societies have also included Australia (Burchell & Leigh 2002; Dalton 2002). What should be emphasised is that while there are significant differences between the British and Australian political systems, they still fall within the most similar systems schema. In this respect, these differences do not undermine the comparison between consultation initiatives by Labo(u)r governments in Britain and Australia.

### *Similarities, Differences and Links Between the ALP and the British Labour Party*

The previous section outlined the main similarities and differences between the political systems that operate in Britain and Australia. This section focuses on the links between the ALP and the British Labour Party and sets the historical context between the two political parties. Along with the discussion of the NSD in Chapter 1, this examination provides insight into how the NSD has renewed the relationship between the two political parties in recent times.

One of the earliest comparisons of the ALP and British Labour Party is outlined by Jupp. As Jupp (1966) points out, the ALP is older and came to power before the British Labour Party.<sup>57</sup> Jupp (1966, p. 231) points out that between 1890 and 1914, 'every British Socialist of note' came out to Australia to observe the ALP, including Keir Hardie, Ramsay MacDonald, Tom Mann and HH Champion. Writing in the 1960s—when the ALP's prospects were looking rather bleak—Jupp argues that in the early stages of the two political parties their fortunes were reversed. According to Jupp, the ALP was more vigorous at the outset than the British Labour Party, but this gradually reversed.

A more detailed account of the historical links between the two political parties is outlined by Scott (2000, p. 11) who argues that:

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<sup>57</sup> The ALP was formed in 1891 and the British Labour party was created in 1900.

... when viewed in a world wide context, the British and Australian Labour parties stand out as essentially similar.

Both political parties are trade-union based, and unlike other European socialist parties, they grew out of the Labo(u)r movement. In the formative years, Scott identifies similarities between the governments of former Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald in Britain in 1924 and 1929–31, and the ALP government led by former Prime Minister Billy Hughes in 1915–16. Scott also notes commonalities between the governments led by former Prime Ministers Ben Chifley (Australia) and Clement Atlee (Britain) in the 1940s. Both political parties can trace their ancestry to Britain, for example, most of 1891 Labor government in New South Wales consisted of recently arrived British-born immigrants.

Both political parties share a number of features. Jupp (1966, p. 230) argues that both political parties have broad ideological bases which have allowed left-wing members to work with conservative leaders. By and large, both political parties have been headed by leaders committed to gradualist social change through constitutional means.

There are also some significant differences between the two political parties. In Australia, there has been a stronger influence of Catholicism (Scott 2000). Scott also argues that the radical wings in both political parties are different. In Australia, this has tended to come from the trade unions, while in Britain this comes from the local parties.

There are also differences in the organisational structures in the two political parties. The British Labour Party was created as a formal federation of the Labour movement including trade unions, constituency parties, socialist societies, the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the Cooperative Party. In Australia, the ALP was born out of the coming together of trade unions and individuals. Union affiliations only occur at the State level in the ALP, but in Britain this happens at both a national and local level. British unions sponsor more MPs than their Australian counterparts (Scott 2000, p. 11).

There is a higher degree of caucus control in Australia, and Scott argues that the large number of MPs in Britain makes this harder to achieve. A key difference is that in the ALP, the full caucus chooses the ministry, whereas in Britain, the Prime Minister chooses each Minister. Scott adds that since the 1960s, there have been moves in both political parties to reduce the trade union bloc vote, which reflects both the declining trade union membership and an increasing middle-class party membership. Finally, Scott (2000, p. 15) argues that, in his analysis, individual membership in the ALP is both proportionately and absolutely lower than the British Labour Party.

Historically, the links between the ALP and British Labour Party have been limited (Pierson & Castles 2002). As Scott (2000, p. 7) notes:

Although the Labour parties of Britain and Australia are close relatives, share most things in common and have a long history of interaction which has

recently been resumed, there has not always been regular contact between the parties in recent decades, nor a detailed mutual knowledge of one another's affairs.

However, the links between the two political parties have been strengthened through the influence of NSD thinking and practice on them (O'Reilly 2007; Scott 2000).

One other recent development in both political parties worth noting is how internal reforms of the ALP and the British Labour Party have enabled the leadership in both parties to exert greater control over the policy direction. The details of the internal reforms are outlined elsewhere, but it is striking that modernisation reforms under Hawke–Keating and those initiated by Blair (building on the reforms of former Party leaders Kinnock and Smith) led to a significant increase in power for the Party leadership. In the Australian context, Jaensch (cited in Marsh 2006, p.32) notes that 'Labor's participatory ethos has been changed to something akin to an oligopolistic control'. Internal reforms under Hawke–Keating eroded internal democratic structures, and it is argued that the emergence of the national factions in the 1980s meant that power increased at the leadership level in the Party:

State and national Conferences of the Labor party are still in principle the policy making bodies of the party, in fact the parliamentary leadership has now much greater independence in interpreting and applying broad principles set down in the platform. To some extent, the parliamentary leadership has

shifted from being delegates of the working class to being 'trustees' of party policy. (Sawer & Zappala 2001 cited in Marsh 2006, p. 33)

This view is reinforced by Parkin and Warhurst (cited in Marsh 2006, p. 35) who argue that 'the traditional Labor notion of control of the parliamentary party by the party organisation took a particularly heavy battering during the period of the Hawke government'. The internal changes anticipate those made by New Labour under Blair in Britain where national conferences tend to retrospectively support changes in policy imposed by the party leadership. The internal reforms made by Blair, outlined in more detail in Chapter 6, were made under the 'Partnership in Power' (PiP) process. The PiP process introduced forms of plebiscitary democracy to formulate internal party policy. Seyd and Whiteley (2002, p. 175) argue that:

The plebiscitary model appears ideal for the leadership, since it enables them to force through unpopular policies. But it comes at a price, and this price is often not immediately apparent to a leadership preoccupied as it is with short-term issues.

Heffernan (2003, p. 130) concurs:

Plebiscitary democracy is often encouraged because it empowers leaders. As a result, older style forms of party democracy that could challenge them, based around the Annual Conference and the Party Executive, have been significantly downgraded.

In Britain and Australia, these internal reforms were an essential component of the modernisation of both political parties. The downgrading of the membership's role in formulating policy (although that role before these reforms should not be overstated) was a precondition for the political parties to accept and adopt broad NSD assumptions, particularly a stronger embrace of the market economy.

To recap, while the Labo(u)r parties in Britain and Australia have a common history, it is only since the Hawke–Keating era that the links have been more substantial—particularly around the nexus of NSD ideas and party modernisation processes. It is precisely because of these links and commonalities that the case studies in this thesis are examined.

### **The Comparative Case Study Approach**

While the previous sections locate this thesis in the comparative field, this section explores the methodological implications of the comparative or multiple case study approach.

The methodology of the 'case study' has a rather ambiguous place in social science research (Stark & Torrance 2005; Yin 2003). Critics of the case study approach are often uncomfortable with the apparent wide-ranging nature of what can constitute a 'case'. Case studies can seemingly cover all manner of political and social phenomena. Yin (2003) and Punch (1998) argue that the

methodology of case study research is best conceived to be a strategy or an approach, as opposed to a precise methodological technique.

### *Defining the Case Study Approach*

Given this broad-ranging approach, definitions of case study research are rather general. Punch (1998, p. 150) argues that 'the case study aims to understand each case in depth, and its natural setting, recognising its complexity and its content'. Punch emphasises the holistic focus of case study and suggests that it aims to understand the 'unity' and 'wholeness' of the phenomena. Yin (2003, p. 13) offers a more technical definition:

A case study is an empirical inquiry that:

- investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.

Punch (1998) outlines the four main characteristics of the case study:

- A case study is a bounded system.
- It is a case of 'something'. That is, the case study has a specific focus on a particular (or set of) political or social issue(s)—Punch argues that this may seem obvious but it needs to be stated to ensure focus.
- There is an explicit attempt to preserve the wholeness and unity of the case.

- Multiple sources of data collection are likely to be used.

Stake (1998) argues that there are three main types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental and collective case studies. Many of the debates about the methodology of case studies tend to be based on the assumption that the researcher is primarily examining a single case, either to find out more detail about the case (intrinsic) or to give insight into a better issue or refine a theory (instrumental). The collective case study approach examines several cases using a more instrumental basis.

#### *The Case Study Approach Versus Other Research Strategies*

It is useful to highlight what the multiple case study approach can offer in terms of insight and empirical validity compared with other research strategies. Lijphart (1975) argues that there are three main basic strategies open to the comparative researcher: the experimental, the statistical, and the case study. There are not always clear boundaries between these methods. Given the focus of this thesis, the experimental approach is not particularly suitable—it lends itself more readily to the natural sciences and more qualitative sociological research (where the researcher can set up control groups). This thesis is focused on governmental programs to foster civic renewal, and as such, it uses the case study approach, along with some statistical comparisons in Chapter 3.

Lijphart (1975) goes on to argue that there are a number of strengths in using the case study approach over the statistical (or survey) approach. The central limitation of the statistical approach is that it cannot capture the wholeness or unity of the phenomenon under study.

Yin (2003) outlines the conditions which can determine the research methods employed: the type of research question, the extent of control of the investigator and the degree of focus on contemporary issues (as opposed to historical events). Given the remit of this thesis, the multiple case study approach fits Yin's (2003, p. 9) criteria of research where:

... a 'how' or 'why' question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control.

### *Strengths of the Comparative Case Study Approach*

The main strength of case study is that it offers an in-depth critical examination of complex political or social phenomena (Lijphart 1975; Punch 1998; Yin 2003). Punch (1998, p. 156) argues that 'it maybe that too much research has tried to go straight to measurement and qualitative mapping, without the fuller understanding of the phenomena and processes that is best achieved by case studies'.

Another strength of the case study approach is the use of multiple data sources and methods. This can be useful for finding correctives to prevailing

or dominant views on key issues. The main sources of data used for this thesis are government documents and academic research, supplemented by interviews with key individuals. Yin (2003, p. 86) offers a useful summary of the main strengths and weaknesses of the types of evidence sources available to researchers (a brief discussion of the strengths and limitations of the methods used in this thesis concludes this chapter).

### *Triangulation of Data Sources*

The strength of using a range of research methods is underpinned by the notion of triangulation. Yin (2003, p. 87) outlines four types of triangulation:

- of data sources
- of different evaluators
- of perspectives to the same dataset
- of methods.

Using a number of different sources enables a fuller picture of the issue to be developed and different 'readings' of the issue to be examined, challenged and corroborated. The case study approach does not attempt to gain a definitive or official account of the phenomena under scrutiny. As evident in the case studies that follow in this thesis, there is often a range of diverse and, at times, conflicting views about each case. Using a range of data sources enables a more rounded view. For example, the interviews with a number of the main practitioners provide insights in this thesis which are not available in official government documents and records.

## Criticisms of the Multiple Case Study Approach

The multiple case study approach is not without its difficulties, and these issues are now considered.<sup>58</sup> The main criticisms of the case study approach are:

- Case studies provide little basis for scientific generalisation (Lijphart 1975; Punch 1998; Stark & Torrance 2005; Yin 2003).
- It is difficult (if indeed at all possible) to compare between cases (Lijphart 1975; Przeworski & Teune 1970).
- Case studies lack rigour and are not systematic: or it is not clear where to draw the boundaries of the case (Stark & Torrance 2005; Yin 2003).
- There is a danger that case study research suffers from the issue of selection bias (Lijphart 1975; Yin 2003). This involves weighting the case studies to either downplay or ignore a finding which challenges the overall empirical results. For example, excluding a 'deviant' case from the research or overgeneralising from an 'atypical' case.

Yin (2003) argues that while these criticisms pose important challenges to the approach taken, they can be addressed. The first and most common criticism is that it is not possible to generalise from a single case study. To some extent, the dangers in this approach are mitigated in this thesis which considers five case studies. The multiple case study approach increases the

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<sup>58</sup> Some of the main criticisms of the comparative case study method also dovetail with those levelled at the wider comparative approach. To avoid repetition, this section focuses on the relevant criticisms that are not already addressed in this chapter.

chance of enhancing the quality of the findings because 'not all your eggs are in one basket' (Yin 2003, p. 84).

As noted in the section on the wider comparative field, this thesis aims to make only limited claims. It may well be that these case studies have something to offer to other governments in different advanced industrial societies regarding the challenges of political support and participation, but at best, this remains speculation. However, it is still contended that the case studies do offer important insights into how NSD-influenced governments in Britain and Australia have been successful in implementing innovative mechanisms for consultation.

Stark and Torrance (2005) offer an important insight with respect to generalising from case studies. They suggest that advocates of the approach, such as Yin, tend to gloss over the epistemological implications. They argue that the case study approach is rooted in the social constructivist tradition which stresses social interaction and the social construction of reality. A case study cannot present a definitive picture of the subject: rather, at best, it offers a series of possible readings of the situation or issue (Stark & Torrance 2005, p. 33). Good case studies can appeal to 'naturalistic generalisation' (Stake 1995). In this argument, readers see something of themselves and their own prejudices in the case study and intuitively generalise from the case.

This is an important insight. In one respect, some of the shortcomings of the approach are addressed by the triangulation of data sources. Moreover, it has

already been stated that this thesis is not seeking to make definitive accounts of either the case studies or the wider programs for democratic renewal. For example, if further research was conducted on the case studies, explicitly from the perspective of race or ethnicity, this would offer further insights. Additional research might ask how the consultations delivered specific outcomes for groups from black and ethnic-minority backgrounds. Further readings of the case studies are likely to supplement rather than overturn the main findings from this thesis.

It might also be charged that the evidence from the case studies is more skewed from the perspective of state officials; since these are the main sources of data about each case (this is, of course, an issue that is not unique to this thesis). However, as shown in the case studies, government sources of information have been supplemented by alternative accounts, not least from the print media. Moreover, the Beetham–Pratchett framework used in this thesis has two main criteria which critique the case studies without seeking to privilege either the state or the participants. This framework also enables identification of areas where evidence is lacking. For example, participant evaluation is often seen as a hallmark of good consultative practice. The summary evaluation of each case study will highlight if participant evaluation has taken place.

The second criticism is that it is difficult, if not impossible, to compare between cases. This criticism has been dealt with in the section on the wider comparative approach, along with the third criticism that the multiple case

study approach can lack rigour and systematic analysis. The detailed comparison of the political systems in Britain and Australia and the discussion of the two Labo(u)r parties are important contextual material to ensure that the methodology of this thesis is valid and viable.

The fourth criticism is that case study research can suffer from selection bias. The criteria for selecting the cases should be made clear. An example of selection bias is where 'deviant' cases might be excluded from the research if they threaten to challenge an overarching hypothesis. Britain and Australia were chosen as the principal countries for the reasons stated in Chapter 1, and that the forms of NSD politics in both countries have strong similarities.

The cases were then selected on the following criteria:

- There is likely to be sufficient evidence for a detailed examination.
- They are wide-ranging consultations seeking input on a range of 'big picture' issues, rather than a single issue.
- They are wide-ranging in seeking either State-wide input or national conversations.

There were a number of other specific reasons for selecting individual cases. A number of Australian State governments have undertaken wider strategic consultations, but Victoria was chosen because it kick-started the process by being the first State government to develop a whole-of-State strategic Plan. South Australia lent itself to selection, not least on the grounds that it was the home of the author during the period of research! Perhaps more significantly, to date there has been no other formal evaluation of the 2006 consultation of

South Australia's Strategic Plan. Some research had already been conducted about the whole-of-State consultation initiative in Tasmania (Crowley & Coffey 2007) and Queensland (Reddel & Woolcock 2004). Western Australia was also the site of a potential case study, not least given the range of innovative consultative activity that took place under the leadership of former Premier Geoff Gallop—especially the 2003 *Dialogue with the City* initiative (Department of Transport–WA 2004). However, space limitations have meant that it was not included.

The two New Labour case studies were selected because they represent interesting processes of consultation in New Labour's first term (the People's Panel) and second term (the Big Conversation). The People's Panel was a world first, and the Big Conversation was reportedly the largest ever consultation undertaken in the United Kingdom. These were compelling reasons for their appeal and inclusion. Finally, the Rudd government's 2020 Summit was a late addition to this thesis. Initially, a third Australian State government initiative was to be selected, but Rudd's announcement to hold a national conversation was most timely for this thesis. It means that there is an Australian nationwide consultative initiative to compare with the British cases, and there are many commonalities between the 2020 Summit and what New Labour attempted with the Big Conversation.

From the outset of the thesis, the case studies have been selected on the basis that they provide a broad variety of governmental responses to the central political issues raised in the main research questions. The success of

the initiatives was not known at the time of selection. Where there was some prior anecdotal knowledge about a particular initiative, this was used to frame the detailed analysis of the case study. For example, in the case of the People's Panel, there was some media speculation about why it was closed down at the outset of New Labour's second term in 2001. This speculation invited the author to make a detailed case study to uncover the reasons why the Panel was closed.<sup>59</sup>

In sum, it is argued that while there are a number of objections to the multiple case study approach, these issues are adequately addressed in this thesis. The multiple in-depth case study approach sheds light on a range of innovative attempts by Labo(u)r governments in Britain and Australia to consult and engage more widely. This thesis continues and operates within a well-established and widely recognised methodological tradition.

### **The Policy Transfer Framework**

The comparative case study approach is the main conceptual framework for understanding the Labo(u)r governments' initiatives of innovative consultation. In addition, this thesis draws upon the policy transfer framework to contextualise the influences, links and relationships between the case studies. As outlined in Chapter 1, the nexus of ideas that underpin the politics of the NSD has strengthened the links between the ALP and the British Labour Party (Johnson & Tonkiss 2002; O'Reilly 2007; Pierson & Castles 2002).

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<sup>59</sup> As Chapter 5 makes clear, the reasons and factors for closing the People's Panel were more complex and nuanced than those given in the media at the time.

Policy transfer appears to be a relatively straightforward concept and yet in truth it remains a rather slippery one. Dolowitz and Marsh (2000, p. 5) define policy transfer as:

... the process by which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions, and ideas in one political system (past or present) is used in development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political system.

Dolowitz and Marsh have been instrumental in developing a model for studying policy transfers; building upon the work of Rose (1991). Dolowitz and Marsh pose a series of questions to examine the policy transfer process in detail (Table 12). This is a useful starting point for understanding policy transfer. However, as in any area of evolving social theory, there are complexities, tensions and criticisms (Carroll 2006; Dolowitz & Marsh 2000; Evans & Davies 1999). Dolowitz and Marsh argue that policy transfer can be both a dependent and an independent variable, and this can make it difficult to quantify the transfer with precision. In addition, they argue that it cannot be assumed that just because a similar policy is introduced in one place; it is the result of a transfer from another. They also argue that it is important to examine the motivations of the actors involved as most only act with limited information and within the confines of 'bounded rationality' (Dolowitz & Marsh 2000, p. 14).

**Table 12: Dolowitz and Marsh's Policy Transfer Framework**

Question	Element of the Policy Transfer
Why is the policy transfer taking place?	This is continuum from voluntary (where rational actors operate from a position of perfect rationality) to coercive transfer (where external pressures, such as direct imposition, pressure groups and policy entrepreneurs, are the main causes of the transfer).
Who is involved?	Elected officials, bureaucrats, institutions, ideologies, think-tanks, non-government organisations (NGOs), epistemic communities <sup>60</sup> , etc.
What is transferred?	Policies (this could include any of component of policy including goals, content or instruments), programs and negative lessons.
From where is it transferred?	State governments, city governments, local authorities and international organisations.
Degree of transfer?	Ranges from copying, emulation, mixtures and inspiration.
Constraints on transfer?	Policy complexity, past policies, structural institutional feasibility, ideology, technology, language, etc.
How to demonstrate policy transfer?	Media, reports, conferences, meetings, visits and statements.

*Adapted from: Dolowitz & Marsh 2000, p. 9.*

The question of rationality is important. As Eccleston (2006) notes, early analyses of policy transfer tend to see transfer as a positive, rational development in the policy process and the normative implication is that policy transfer opens up, rather than constrains the policy process. The problem is not with the process of policy transfer per se, but rather that it encourages one elite agenda to be replaced with another.

<sup>60</sup> Epistemic communities is a concept developed by Haas (1992). These communities are networks of 'professionals with recognised expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy relevant knowledge within that domain or issue area' (Haas 1992, p. 3).

A more robust set of criticisms of policy transfer are outlined by Evans and Davies. They argue that policy transfer does not yet have full explanation and theory status, but it can be a useful approach for examining two similar entities (Evans & Davies 1999, p. 364). Their overriding concern is that policy transfer research often lacks precision in explaining what was transferred and how it took place. They argue that a key problem is to actually prove that transfer took place. Evans and Davies (1999) suggest that conferences, government reports and the media are more likely to be sources of learning, than actual sources of evidence that the transfer took place.

### **The Policy Transfer Framework and the NSD in Britain and Australia**

Despite the theoretical and methodological complexities connected with policy transfer, it is a useful prism for understanding the links between the Labo(u)r governments in this thesis. Carroll (2006) maps the long history of policy transfer between Britain and Australia and argues that Britain continues to exert an influence on policy-making in Australia. Carroll argues that policy transfer has increasingly taken place across Australian States—which has direct bearing on the case studies reported in this thesis.

While Australia has historically looked to Britain for transfer, Britain has tended to look elsewhere. Dolowitz, Greenwold & Marsh (1999) argue that Britain has tended to seek policy inspiration from the United States rather than its European neighbours. As noted in Chapter 1, it is widely assumed that

inspiration for the NSD came from former president Clinton's administration: not from Australia.

Building on the work of Dolowitz, Greenwold & Marsh (1999) and Carroll (2003), it is possible to identify a number of common factors which account for the transfer of NSD-related ideas between Labo(u)r governments in Britain and Australia:

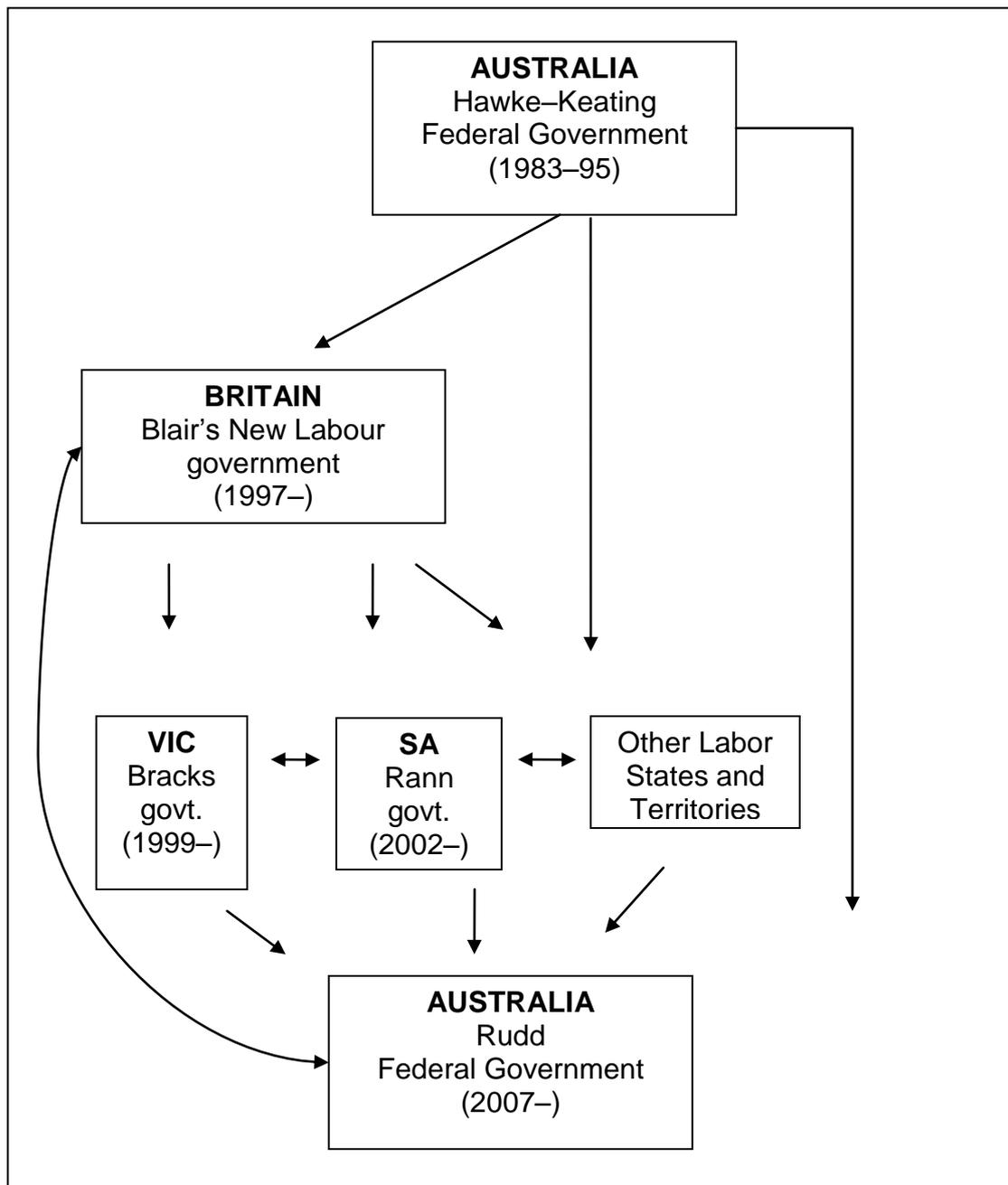
- Common language. There is a history of transfer and influence between Britain, New Zealand, Australia, Canada and the United States. Dolowitz, Greenwold, and Marsh (1999) argues that this is a key factor in why Britain has tended to look to the United States rather than Europe (particularly the Nordic social democracies) as a source of potential policy transfer.
- Shared ideology. As outlined in Chapter 1, both the ALP and New Labour adopted a broadly shared ideological position.
- Personal relations. O'Reilly (2007) has extensively documented the relationships which facilitated ideas of policy transfer between the Hawke–Keating governments and New Labour.
- The role of think-tanks and policy entrepreneurs. As noted in Chapter 1, Patricia Hewitt's role at the Institute of Public Policy Research was also a key factor in facilitating ideas between Australian Labor and New Labour. This facilitative role continues to date. Geoff Mulgan, former head of the No.10 Strategy Unit, now Chair of the Young Foundation, met with Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd a number of times

during 2008. Mulgan was also appointed by South Australian Premier Mike Rann to the 'Thinkers in Residence' program in 2008.

A crucial issue from the Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) framework is to clearly identify what has been transferred. Using the Dolowitz and Marsh typology (2000), it is apparent that the policy transfer of the NSD between Britain and Australia has been mostly at the level of 'inspiration', although O'Reilly (2007) cites some cases of 'policy emulation'. A key factor for this is the structural constraints between the two countries. The Australian Federal political system means that adopting programs from unitary political systems is problematic. Policy transfer between Britain and Australia has not been direct copying or wholesale importing of a specific policy to foster democratic renewal. The transfer has been far less direct, and as explored in the case studies, only specific elements of the NSD have been transferred (Geddes 2005). For example, New Labour's focus on social exclusion has been adopted by some Australian Labor States (for example, South Australia's Social Inclusion Unit), and it was also an influence on the Rudd government's proposal to develop a social inclusion strategy following the 2020 Summit (the change of emphasis from exclusion to inclusion reflects policy learning from the New Labour experiment).

The general framework for the policy transfer of the NSD between Britain and Australia is outlined in Figure 17.

**Figure 17: Policy Transfer of the NSD between Britain and Australia**



*Note: abbreviations used for Victoria (VIC) and South Australia (SA)*

The specific examples of policy transfer are outlined in more detail in each of the case studies reported in this thesis. In much more general terms, the Hawke–Keating governments are one of the original sources of policy transfer for the subsequent governments considered in this thesis. The New Labour government has gone on to be a source of policy transfer for both the Australian States and the later Rudd government. The relative longevity and electoral success of both the Hawke–Keating and New Labour governments helped position them as candidates for policy transfer (Geddes 2005).

An added dimension is that there has been policy transfer between the Australian State governments. For example, South Australia's Strategic Plan was directly influenced by the Victorian State Plan. Importantly, there has also been some feedback from the Australian States back to the New Labour government. For example, Bentley and Halpern (2003) identify community engagement policy initiatives by the Victorian Government in their broader assessment of the role of citizenship in the NSD. This does not represent a strict transfer, but it is argued that it has a legitimating function for the wider propagation of the politics of the NSD. There is also some evidence that policy transfer is now taking place between the Rudd Labor government and Gordon Brown's New Labour government. In 2009, Brown instigated the first British Community Cabinet modelled on the versions introduced by a number of Australian States and adopted nationally by Rudd (Hernon 2008).

In sum, the policy transfer framework is not unproblematic, but it is used to help contextualise the understanding of the influences and links between the Labo(u)r governments scrutinised in this thesis.

## **Methods**

This chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the different research methods used in this thesis. The main methods used are:

- Documentary analysis: state and official documents, 'grey literature' and media reports.
- Semi-structured interviews.
- Secondary statistical analysis.

### *Documentary Analysis*

This thesis uses documents, such as government reports, speeches by key figures, and items, such as Labo(u)r Party reports, manifestos and party programs, as the main sources of evidence. These are supplemented by other grey literature—publicly available reports and documents—which are not from academic sources (for example, the use of the Office for National Statistics' evaluation of the People's Panel in Chapter 5). A further source of evidence is media reports.

Scott (1990) cited in Bryman (2004, p. 381) suggests four main criteria for assessing the quality of documents:

- Authenticity—is the evidence genuine and of unquestionable origin?
- Credibility—is the evidence free from error and distortion?
- Representativeness—is the evidence typical of its kind, and if not, is the extent of its untypical character known?
- Meaning—is the evidence clear and comprehensible?

These questions are not dealt with directly for each document cited in this thesis, but where issues arise they are highlighted in the text. For example, in the discussion of the People's Panel (see Ch. 5), the use of government newsletters is a key source of information. A formal evaluation of the project found that these newsletters tend to downplay negative findings from the Panel (Gregory 2002, p. 24).

The key problem with the use of government documents for this thesis is not that they are unauthentic or lack credibility, but rather there is a risk that they are biased from the point of view of the government. An additional concern is what the government documents may omit, in that are there aspects of the consultation initiative that might reasonably be discussed, but are not included. Yet, it should be re-stated the reason government documents are used is precisely because a detailed understanding of the government agenda and discourse is sought.

Fairclough (2000, p. 9) argues that the Third Way is:

... ongoingly constituted and reconstituted as a discourse in the documents, speeches, interviews, etc of New Labour.

To understand the discourse of the Third Way–NSD, the use of government documents is essential. However, this thesis treats them in a critical way, where other data sources can enhance and contextualise the understanding of them.

It is also worth briefly highlighting the strengths and limitations of mass media sources (Bryman 2004, p. 389). In all of the case studies, mainly print media articles have been cited to supplement the understanding of the initiative. Often, these articles provide a useful corrective to the government version of events. However, media articles are not free of bias, so they have to be contextualised. For example, in the United Kingdom, *The Daily Mail* and *The Sun* have run longstanding campaigns against New Labour.<sup>61</sup> The perceived (and real) anti-Labour bias of the press was a key issue for New Labour, and it is the source of the ‘spin’ reputation of key New Labour figures, such as Peter Mandelson and Blair’s press secretary, Alistair Campbell (Wring 2006). This is not to argue that certain criticisms of the initiatives are unfair or illegitimate because they come from right-leaning newspapers, but rather the criticisms should be located in the wider right–conservative critique of the New Labour project. Where these issues arise in the case studies, they are

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<sup>61</sup> Most notably, on 11 April 1992 *The Sun* ran with the headline, ‘The Sun wot won it’, when the Conservatives, rather unexpectedly, won the general election. *The Sun* ran a vigorous campaign against former leader Neil Kinnock’s Labour party, and its final headline before polling was, ‘If Kinnock wins today will the last person to leave Britain please turn out the lights’ (*The Sun* 10 April 1992, p.1). *The Mail* is also hostile towards New Labour. At the 2005 election, its editorial urged its readership to give Tony Blair a ‘bloody nose’ (*The Mail* 5 May 2005). *The Mail* is also the journalistic home of Peter Hitchens and Richard Littlejohn—two noted right-wing commentators.

highlighted. The general point is that the media sources are treated as critically as the other documentary sources.

### *Semi-Structured Interviews*

A major source of information about the case studies is derived from a number of semi-structured interviews with key figures associated with the relevant case studies. These interviews were conducted between 2006 and 2009, and in most cases, they were conducted face-to-face with the interviewee. A smaller number of interviews were conducted via the telephone. Ethics approval for the interviews was granted by the Flinders University Ethics Committee. All interviews were semi-structured and based around key themes of the consultation initiative. A copy of the broad agenda was sent to each interviewee in advance of the interview, and all quotes used in this thesis have been checked and approved for accuracy by the interviewees. Broadly speaking, interviewees were asked about:

- their involvement and role in the case study
- their views of the strengths of the initiative
- their views of any weaknesses of the initiative.

The main types of people interviewed were those who worked closely on setting up the consultative initiative examined. These interviews enabled a deeper understanding of some of the challenges of setting up the consultations, which were not highlighted in more official documents. They are a valuable source of information about the case studies.

However, it should be noted that semi-structured interviewing is not without its difficulties (Bryman 2004, p. 321). The main strength of the method—its flexibility—can also be a weakness. While ostensibly a one-way process of information extraction, semi-structured interviews can lead to ‘contamination’, where in effect, the interview becomes a more rounded discussion and the researcher’s agenda can overly influence the respondent’s answers. At the outset of each interview, the principal themes of this thesis were introduced to facilitate the interview. It should be stated that all of the interviewees were highly experienced professionals in their field, and it is highly unlikely that there was contamination resulting from the author asking leading questions and so on.

The other key issue with semi-structured interviewing has less to do with the interview itself, but rather it relates to the selection of quotes. The risk is that overly positive or negative quotes are chosen, which leads to a misleading account. One of the main criteria for the inclusion of particular quotes in this thesis has been that the interviewee’s insights covered issues and topics that were not evident in official accounts. To mitigate the impact of selection bias in the use of quotes, all interviewees were sent transcripts of the relevant section and only approved quotes have been used. In a number of cases, quotes were amended by the interviewees to better reflect their thinking and views.

To recap, the use of semi-structured interviews is not unproblematic, but it remains a valuable and viable research method. Semi-structured interviewing has certain key advantages over other techniques, such as participant observation, particularly because the consultation processes had already taken place in most of the case studies.

### *Secondary Statistical Analysis*

The third main method used in this thesis is secondary statistical analysis—particularly the discussion of trends and patterns of political behaviour in Chapter 3. The advantages of using secondary statistical analysis are that it:

- saves cost and time
- provides high quality data
- gives an opportunity for longitudinal analysis
- allows for cross-cultural comparison (Bryman 2004, p. 202).

Chapter 3 draws largely from British Social Attitudes (BSA), British Election Study (BES) and Australian Election Study (AES) datasets. These are well-established and highly credible data sources. All the advantages cited above are evident in the use of these sources for this thesis. There are, invariably, limitations in using secondary analysis (Bryman 2004, pp. 205–6). Perhaps the most relevant one cited by Bryman is the lack of familiarity with the data.

The use of secondary statistical analysis in this thesis does raise other potential limitations. Firstly, looking at long-term trend data tends to shift the

focus away from contextualising the levels of political participation in their specific historical setting. As shown in Chapter 3, political trust can be linked to specific events, such as the recent MPs expense furore in the United Kingdom. A focus on long-term trends can obscure short-term changes (see Ch. 3—section on political party membership).

Secondly, social patterns and trends do not immediately prove causality. Declining political trust might not directly cause political participation to decline. When interpreting the AES and BES datasets it can be difficult to show the difference between causality and correlation. The claims made in Chapter 3 are therefore limited and tentative.

Thirdly, as Goot (2002) rightly observes, social trends do not begin just at the point when they start being measured. Chapter 3 covers the post-WWII period, and the lack of relevant survey data before the AES and BES surveys were established may mask other important trends.

Fourthly, in some cases, the wording of some survey questions has altered, which makes direct comparison difficult. The strength of using AES and BES data is that it can enable cross-cultural comparison, but as a number of the questions are not identical, it means that direct comparison can only be tentative (Bryman 2004, p. 55).

Finally, as shown in the discussion in Chapter 3, while some trends are clearer than others (for example, falling party membership), the data

presented from the surveys need to be viewed with caution. At best, Chapter 3 provides a snapshot picture of overall patterns and trends.

### **Summary of Methodology and Methods**

This concludes the discussion of the methods and the overarching methodology used in this thesis. To recap, this thesis draws upon the well-established field of comparative politics and uses a multiple or comparative case study approach to examine in detail five cases of innovative Labo(u)r consultations in Britain and Australia. This thesis falls within the most similar systems schema (Przeworski & Teune 1970). This thesis also draws upon the evolving field of policy transfer to understand the influences and links between each of the case studies.

Data and information about the cases are drawn from a range of different methods including documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews. None of these methods is without difficulties and limitations, but the range of techniques used means that a triangulation of data is used to form a detailed account of each case. The flexible Beetham–Pratchett evaluative framework (see Ch. 2) enables a robust and viable comparative analysis of how the different governments have responded to the two criteria of responsiveness and representativeness. Overall, this chapter demonstrates how the thesis operates within a viable, robust and well-established methodological tradition.

This chapter concludes the first section of this thesis which sets the underpinning context for the examination of the case studies. The second part of the thesis examines each case study in turn. The first case study, and next chapter, is an examination of New Labour's People's Panel.

## Section 2

### Chapter 5

*Case Study 1 - New Labour's Responsive Government: 'The People's Panel' (1998–2002)*

## **Introduction**

The first section of this thesis outlines the wider context for this comparative study of five cases of Labo(u)r governments' attempts at innovative forms of consultation. The first chapter explores the politics of the New Social Democracy (NSD). The NSD is a project seeking to update and modernise social democratic politics (Giddens 1998, 2000, 2002). The ideas of the NSD are mainly derived from Giddens' (2000) Third Way project. A key strand of the NSD is the call for democratic renewal or the 'democratising of democracy' (Giddens 1998, pp. 70-7, 2000, p. 61). All the Labo(u)r governments considered in this thesis are broadly influenced by the NSD, and they have made attempts to institute new forms of consultation and dialogue with wider civil society. The first section of the thesis sets the context and underpinning methodology for understanding the five cases. The second section examines each of the five cases in detail, followed by a final chapter (see Ch. 10) which examines all cases in a comparative context.

As outlined in Chapter 1, New Labour can be seen as the purest form of the NSD (Callinicos 2001). Giddens' Third Way–NSD program is most closely associated with the New Labour government, and it has been the most energetic in its efforts at democratic renewal (Beech 2006; Bevir 2005). New Labour also produced one of the most systematically developed accounts of how it sought to modernise government and introduce new mechanisms for consultation (Cabinet Office 1999a). For these reasons, the first case studies considered in this thesis are the British ones.

The 'People's Panel' was a consultation initiative which ran for the first term of former Prime Minister Tony Blair's New Labour government. Touted as a world first, the People's Panel consisted of 5 000 members of the public and was broadly representative of the British population (Cabinet Office 1999a). While panels have been used at the level of local government in the United Kingdom for a number of years, this is the first instance of a panel being run at a national level. The Panel was part of New Labour's 'modernising government' agenda, which had a specific focus on making government more responsive (Cabinet Office 1999a).

This chapter sets the context for the two New Labour case studies in this thesis. The first section examines the democratic renewal agenda and the key policy goals set out in the 1997 party manifesto. The case studies should be understood as part of this wider package of reforms.

This chapter examines the effectiveness of the People's Panel and the reasons why it was wound up in 2002. Informally it has been suggested that the Panel was disbanded because the Panel members were becoming increasingly disillusioned with New Labour's reform of the public services (McHugh 2002).<sup>62</sup> In effect, the accusation is that New Labour shut down a consultative forum which was increasingly telling it news it no longer wished to hear. The aim of this case study is to evaluate the truth of this claim.

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<sup>62</sup> This claim was made under the condition of anonymity to the author by a senior figure involved with the People's Panel.

## **The Democratic Renewal Agenda and New Labour**

The People's Panel was part of a package of initiatives introduced by New Labour as part of its democratic renewal agenda. This section briefly sketches the evolution of this agenda. From 1979 until elected government in 1997, the Labour Party lost four consecutive general elections and was in opposition for 18 years. During this time the Party underwent significant rebuilding and modernisation. To understand the complexities of New Labour, it is important to understand the processes which led to its creation (Smith, M 2001).

The modernisation of Labour was initiated and carried out under the leadership of Neil Kinnock throughout much of the 1980s and 1990s (Driver & Martell 1998; Hughes & Wintour 1990). Kinnock resigned as leader after the 1992 defeat, and under former Labour leader John Smith, the modernisation process was consolidated until his untimely death in 1994. The modernisation agenda was given fresh impetus when Tony Blair was elected Labour leader in 1994, and oversaw the emergence of New Labour.

Following its poor showing at the 1987 election, Kinnock instituted perhaps the most wide-ranging policy review in British Labour's history. A key strand of this policy review included issues related to governance and the renewal of British democracy. During this time, Kinnock initiated campaigns, such as 'Labour Listens' (see Ch. 6), as part of an attempt to reconnect Labour with the wider public. The citizens and consumers strand of the policy review dealt with such touchstone issues as devolution, reform of the House of Lords, and replacing the British majoritarian electoral system with a more proportional

one. The proposals in the policy review were, on the whole, measured and cautious. Throughout the 1980s, Labour had been dogged with the 'loony left' tag-line, and the policy review pushed Labour onto more centrist ground.<sup>63</sup> The policy review gave fresh impetus to the democratic renewal agenda without making sweeping changes to the political landscape.

Jack Straw and David Blunkett—who both went on to have stints as Home Secretary when New Labour subsequently gained power—chaired the consumer and community strand of the policy review. At the time, there was much discussion that Labour should rally around one big overarching idea. Hughes and Wintour (1990, p. 65) report that:

Blunkett's personal preference was that Labour should rally around the notion of a participatory democracy – the approach he adopted with considerable success as leader of Sheffield City Council.

...

[In Blunkett's view] that meant, simply put, that socialism sought to involve every individual in those decisions which affect his or her life.

For New Labour, framing its political narrative around the notion of the 'citizen' was a technique for shifting away from a more overtly class-based discourse. New Labour, much more explicitly than its predecessors, wanted broader electoral appeal than its traditional working-class base. While the citizen and consumer strand of the policy review was infused with Blunkett's zeal for

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<sup>63</sup> The 'loony left' label was used by the Conservative party and the right-wing press to undermine a number of the dominant Labour local councils. Liverpool City Council was the most prominent of these, where Derek Hatton, the deputy Leader of Council, was eventually expelled from the party in 1986 for his membership of the group, 'Militant Tendency'.

participatory ideals, the overarching theme of the review became modernisation.

Following the defeat at the 1992 general election, the modernisation process continued under the new leadership of John Smith (Cronin 2007; Seyd & Whiteley 2002). At the 1993 Labour conference, Smith committed Labour to establishing the Scottish Parliament. Perhaps even more significantly, Smith charged the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) to set up the Commission on Social Justice.<sup>64</sup> The Commission was an independent policy review of key areas for a progressive agenda. The Commission published its final report, 'Strategies for National Renewal', in 1994, and it was one of the main influences in determining Labour's suite of policies for the general election three years later.

'Strategies for National Renewal' reinforced Labour's democratic renewal agenda. The Commission was keen to see an incoming Labour government reinvigorate the relationship between the state and civil society. Perhaps one of its most radical proposals was a call for a national volunteering service. Many of the themes of the report, if not actual policy proposals, were to find expression in Labour's manifesto for the 1997 election. The People's Panel was one of a range of initiatives and policy proposals that emerged from a long, and often arduous, evolution in Labour's democratic renewal agenda.

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<sup>64</sup> The IPPR was established in 1988, by Lord Horlick. The IPPR has close links with the Labour party, especially from 1989 to 1994 when Patricia Hewitt, the former communications secretary for Neil Kinnock, and later, the Minister for Health under Tony Blair, was deputy director.

## **New Labour's Democratic Renewal and Modernisation Programs**

New Labour's democratic renewal agenda had two main strands: constitutional reform and modernising government. Both of these strands were designed to entail a new consultative and dialogic engagement with the public. New Labour cast this broad agenda as transcending the traditional left–right divide (Labour Party 1997, p. 1). The 1997 manifesto outlines an apparent 'new politics' which New Labour recognises as necessary to counter general cynicism with the political elites:

... over-centralisation of government and lack of accountability was a problem in governments of both left and right. Labour is committed to the democratic renewal of our country through decentralisation and the elimination of excessive secrecy. (Labour Party 1997, p. 4)

In its 1997 manifesto, New Labour committed to the sweeping range of proposals shown in Table 13. Some of these commitments fared better than others, and notably, the attempt to set up regional chambers floundered badly. However, New Labour's intent was clear: to try and integrate a greater degree of dialogue with the public and begin a process of democratic renewal.

**Table 13: New Labour's 1997 Manifesto Commitments**

<b>1997 Labour Manifesto Commitments for Democratic Renewal</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Devolution in Scotland and Wales.</li><li>• Ending the hereditary principle in the House of Lords.</li><li>• Reform of political party funding.</li><li>• A referendum on reform of the electoral system.</li><li>• Elected mayors for London and other cities.</li><li>• Freedom of Information and Human Rights legislation.</li><li>• Review of the House of Commons procedures.</li><li>• New statutory duties to local councils to promote wellbeing (with consultative measures attached—'We will encourage democratic innovations in local government' (Labour Party 1997, p. 33).</li><li>• Establishing regional chambers.</li><li>• Establishing a range of new partnership bodies, such as 'Education Action Zones' and 'Employment Zones'.</li></ul>	

*Adapted from: Labour Party 1997*

Throughout the first term and beyond, New Labour was ambivalent about how far it wished to promote this agenda. It has been widely commented that Blair did not share John Smith's passion for constitutional reform (Cronin 2007). There was an inconsistency in the approach to devolution, with the Welsh Assembly not having the same powers as the Scottish Parliament. In the process of devolution, the New Labour leadership was still keen to exert some central control (Fitzpatrick 2003). The party leadership made clumsy attempts to impose New Labour candidates as the leader of the Welsh Assembly and the London mayorship.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> New Labour leadership succeeded initially in securing Alun Michael as First Minister of the Welsh Assembly, beating the popular figure of Rhodri Morgan, Member of Parliament (MP). After a largely uninspiring turn as Leader, Michael was forced to resign after a vote of no confidence in his handling of securing European Union funding in 1999. Morgan then succeeded Michael as First Minister of the Welsh Assembly.

In London, New Labour was reluctant to endorse the widely popular London-based Labour MP, Ken Livingstone, as Mayor. Livingstone stood as an independent and won two successive terms. The New Labour mayoral candidate, former Health Minister Frank Dobson,

This ambivalence in New Labour's democratic renewal agenda is also exemplified in its proposed reforms to Britain's electoral system. Blair established the Jenkins Commission to examine reform of the United Kingdom's majoritarian general electoral system. Lord Roy Jenkins favoured the Alternate Vote Top Up system (AV+). New Labour did not pursue this, and indeed its commitment to a referendum was dropped and did not feature in the Party's 2001 manifesto. The central issues for this case study of the People's Panel are that it is part of a wider package of reforms, and that this democratic renewal agenda is underscored by New Labour's ambivalence about how far to devolve power to new mechanisms of dialogue and consultation.

### *New Labour's Modernising Government Agenda*

The People's Panel was part of New Labour's modernising government agenda (Cabinet Office 1999a). This agenda evolved over time, and while the focus during the first term was on the reform of central government, the focus of the second term was on delivery (Fawcett & Rhodes 2007, p. 80). The central plank of the modernisation agenda was the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). This review led to a series of Public Service Agreements

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was pushed reluctantly to stand against Livingstone and finished behind the Conservative candidate. In both cases, the New Labour leadership made high profile attempts to impose candidates sympathetic to its agenda in these new roles. Both attempts were ultimately unsuccessful, and they added further credence to the perception of New Labour's inability to devolve power. Davies (2001) provides an interesting insight into the attempts of Labour's National Executive Committee (NEC) to control the process. Marquand (2004, p. 24) cites the example of the London mayorship as a case where New Labour talks the language of democratic renewal, but its interference diminishes the public realm.

(PSAs), which were designed to create a tighter linkage between public spending and policy outcomes.<sup>66</sup> The salient feature of the PSA agenda was that public spending and control was highly centralised which, to some extent, stood at odds with the devolutionary flavour of New Labour's renewal agenda.

The fullest expression of this modernising government agenda is embodied in the 1999 *Modernising Government White Paper* (Cabinet Office 1999a). The White Paper expands upon New Labour's thinking about the changing role of government. In the introduction to the White Paper, Blair, in a similar vein to Giddens, outlines the changing role of the state:

... the old arguments about government are now outdated, big government against small government, interventionism versus laissez-faire ... The new issues are ... modernising government, better government, getting government right. (Cabinet Office 1999a, p. 1)

Jack Cunningham, Minister for the Cabinet Office (1998–9), outlines New Labour's focus on 'joined up government' and 'better integrated government' (Cabinet Office 1999a, p. 3). For New Labour, modernisation is for a purpose: 'to make life better for people and businesses' (Cabinet Office 1999a, p. 3). A key theme of the agenda is to make government more responsive. The main raft of policy proposals in the White Paper is summarised in Table 14.

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<sup>66</sup> PSAs are agreements between each government department and the Treasury, with an agreed three-year funding cycle tied to measurable policy goals.

**Table 14: New Labour's Policy Proposals (1999)**

<b>Key Proposals from the Modernising Government White Paper (1999)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Commitment to make relevant public services available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.</li><li>• Regulatory Impact Assessments (to reduce the regulatory burden on business).</li><li>• New target on opening access using e-government.</li><li>• New focus on delivery.</li><li>• Setting up the Social Exclusion Unit—a cross-departmental team for tackling disadvantage.</li><li>• Setting up the Women's Unit for addressing gender inequalities.</li><li>• The cross-departmental 'Foresight' programme to identify key future challenges.</li><li>• 'Better Government for Older People' programme.</li><li>• A 'Listening to Women' initiative.</li><li>• Setting up new 'one-stop shops' for public services.</li><li>• Local government authorities have to draw up a 'community plan'—a statutory measure in consultation with the people living in their local area.</li></ul>	

*Adapted from: Cabinet Office 1999a*

The theme of responsiveness underscores many of these initiatives. New Labour's stated aim is to 'deliver public services to meet the needs of citizens, not the convenience of service providers' (Cabinet Office 1999a, p. 4).

Responsiveness can reconnect the state and the citizen:

... although the public can express its dissatisfaction with its public service through the ballot box, this can be a blunt instrument, removing whole local or central governments intermittently and often not addressing the underlying reasons why things are wrong. The risk is that particular parts of the public sector can therefore be left to fail too long. (Cabinet Office 1999a, p. 8)

Along with responsiveness, New Labour promoted the greater use of consultation processes throughout the public sector. Consultation was the

third stage in its model for continuous improvement across central government and was also integral to its 'Service First programme' (Cabinet Office 1999a, p. 35). The Cabinet Office (1999c) drafted a code of practice on consultation in the same year that the White Paper was published.

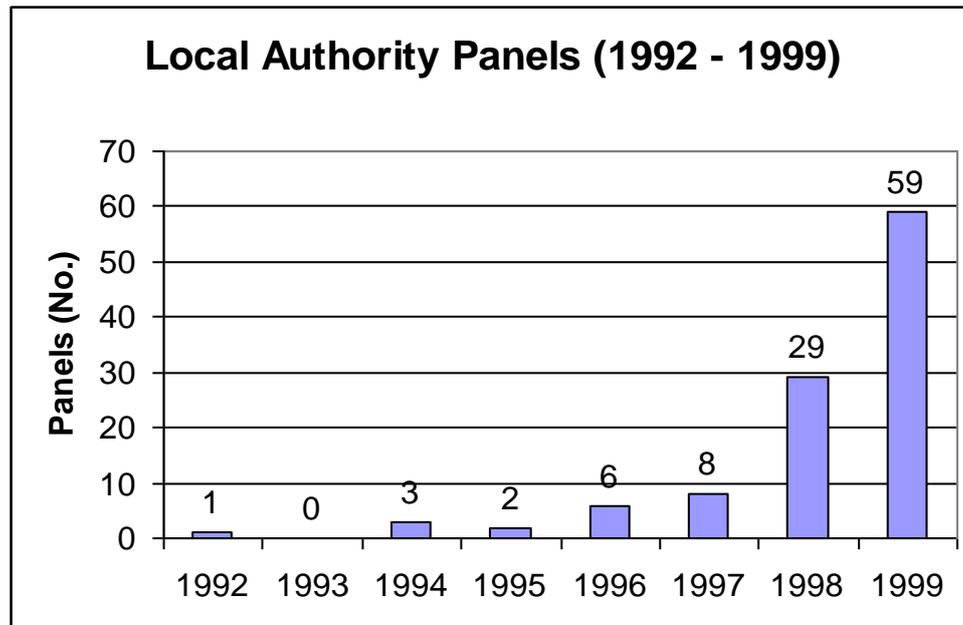
Responsiveness, along with a greater promotion of consultation techniques were the hallmarks of the modernising government agenda. Yet, like the constitutional reform strand of its democratic renewal agenda, there was an underlying tension between wishing to exert centralised forms of control and devolving power. The People's Panel fits within this early, embryonic reform agenda. Fawcett and Rhodes (2007, p. 103) suggest that in this wider agenda 'there was no consistent vision and it was a recipe for, and a classic example of, muddling through'.

#### *Growth of Panels and Participatory Methods*

An additional impetus for the People's Panel was the growth of new participatory methods, particularly at the level of local government. As Pratchett (1999) argues, this was partly driven by New Public Management (NPM) reforms associated with the Thatcher–Major (former Prime Ministers) Conservative governments. In the discourse of the NPM, public service providers deliver their services to fit the needs of consumers of public goods. This new consumer focus was characterised by an uptake of strategies usually associated with the private sector, such as focus groups, to gain reliable market information about the needs of the consumer–citizen (Clarke

2005). The growth in the use of citizens' panels by local authorities, as shown in Figure 18, was a result of the influence of the NPM agenda.

**Figure 18: Local Authority Panels (1992–9)**



Source: *Evaluation Associates 2000, p. 23.*

At the level of local government, there was increasingly greater use of these 'new' participatory forms of government. New Labour was keen to expand this agenda, particularly with a willingness to place statutory requirements on the public sector to consult on its services (for example, the 2000 amendment to the *Race Relations Act 1976*. The 'Best Value' regime of measurement indicators for local government has a statutory requirement for councils to consult with their local communities.

In part, the impetus for this agenda came from New Labour's suspicion—a hangover from its time in office in the 1970s—that the bureaucracy would be

reluctant to implement a reformist Labour agenda. For this reason, New Labour's modernisation agenda meant that many of the NPM reforms initiated by Thatcher and Major were left in place (Driver & Martell 2006).

### **The People's Panel**

From the outset, the People's Panel was lauded as a key initiative in New Labour's reform agenda:

If public services are to serve people better, the government needs to know more about what people want. Rather than imposing solutions we must consult and work with people. That is why we have set up the People's Panel: a 5,000 strong nationally representative group – a world first – to tell us what people really think about their public services and our attempts to make them better. (Cabinet Office 1999a, p. 19)

In 1998, the Cabinet Office commissioned Market and Opinion Research International (MORI) and Birmingham University's School of Public Policy to establish the Panel.<sup>67</sup> The idea for the Panel came from Lord David Clark, who was appointed to the junior ministerial post of Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in 1997.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> MORI are now called IPSOS MORI.

<sup>68</sup> This rather antiquated title is a junior level ministerial post with cross-cutting responsibilities. When Blair came to power, this post was located in the Cabinet Office.

The main reasons and advantages for establishing the Panel were:

- Meeting a need to find a mechanism to get the public's views about public services.
- Enabling public views to be tracked over time.
- Enabling the Cabinet Office to identify specific groups of the public and to track their views.
- Enabling cross-sectoral research.
- Raising the profile of consultation across government (Public Administration Committee 1999).

#### *Governance and Overview of the Panel*

While the Cabinet Office had oversight of the People's Panel, it was run on a day-to-day basis by the market research company, MORI. Minister of State at the Cabinet Office, Ian McCartney, and (initially) David Clark, were the two key ministers in charge of the Panel. Within the Cabinet Office, the Modernising Public Services Group (MPSG) managed the Panel. At the outset, steering and advisory groups were set up; comprising research and statistical experts both within and outside government.<sup>69</sup>

The Panel comprised 5 000 members of the public and had a profile that represented the key demographics of the United Kingdom including gender, age and region. MORI recruited between June and September 1998 from a

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<sup>69</sup> In July 1999, the steering and advisory groups were merged to form the People's Panel Support Group. At that time, the support group had 19 members; with external members drawn from an external research institute, one from the Local Government Association, one from the National Consumer Council and two from MORI.

random sample of addresses across the United Kingdom (Cabinet Office 1998). From 1998 to 2002, the Panel was topped up with an extra 1 000 members to replace those who had left and to ensure that it broadly reflected the wider population. In addition, a booster of 830 Panel members was recruited from ethnic minority groups. The detail of the recruitment to the Panel is outlined elsewhere (MORI 1998, p. 3), but it is noteworthy that it initially proved challenging to recruit younger people and people from lower socio-economic groups to the Panel. A technical report confirmed that ‘the proportion of C2s and full time workers is lower than ideal’ (MORI 1998, p. 10).<sup>70</sup>

### *Use of the People’s Panel*

The aim of the Panel was to poll Panel members at periodic intervals on various issues relating to New Labour’s reform of public services, in order to track trend data and use it to inform policy-making on the modernising government agenda. The Panel was set up on a business model, which meant that while it was located within the Cabinet Office, it was designed to be financially self-sufficient as different government departments and agencies would pay to access the Panel. Over the course of the life of the Panel there were six main waves of research. In between each main wave, smaller discrete research projects used the Panel, which were usually

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<sup>70</sup> Most social researchers in the United Kingdom use a well-known A–E grading system for occupations as a proxy for social-class measures. Details of all grades are contained in MORI’s technical report. C2s include skilled manual workers and craftsmen who served apprenticeships; and manual workers with specialist qualifications, such as long-distance lorry drivers.

commissioned by other public bodies or government departments (the full list of the uses of the Panel is outlined in Appendix 5).

Different sample sizes were used for the different main waves of research. In the first wave, all 5064 Panel members were polled, and this was used as the main benchmark data. In subsequent waves, only about one-fifth of the Panel was polled. Of the six main waves of research carried out by the Cabinet Office, only the first (June 1998), fifth (September 2000) and sixth (March 2002) waves of research were directly comparable. These were the main waves used to track changes in the Panel members' views on public services.

### **Main Findings from the People's Panel**

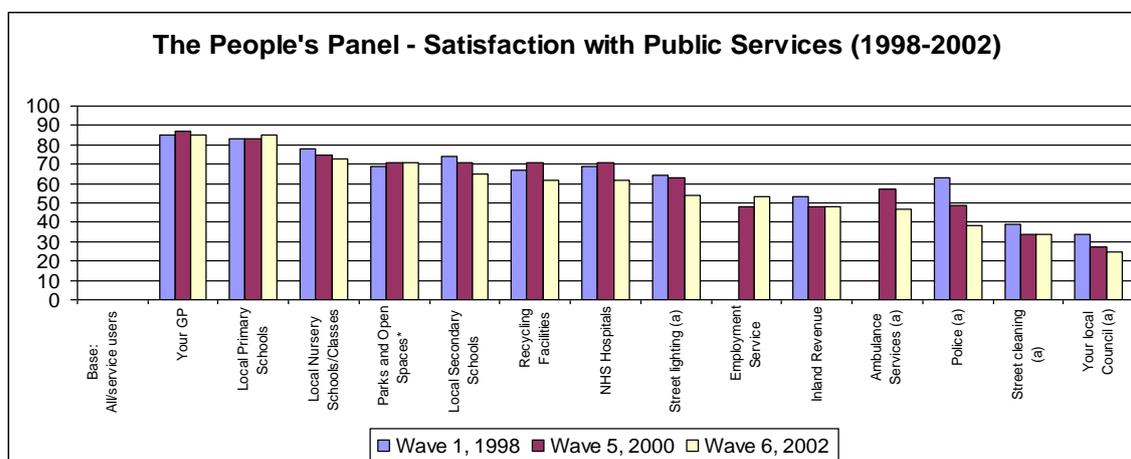
Given the wide range of uses of the Panel, this section focuses only on the three comparable waves of the research (waves 1, 5 and 6). The main (informal) allegation made about the Panel was that it was discontinued because Panel members were increasingly dissatisfied with public services under New Labour's reform agenda. By focusing on the three waves of data, it is possible to compare results and see the extent to which Panel members' attitudes changed (or remained stable) from 1998 to 2002.

So, did the Panel members become increasingly dissatisfied with public services during New Labour's first term? The results are mixed. In their analysis of the comparable waves of research, the researchers from MORI state that:

For most services there has been no overall change in satisfaction since 2000. GPs, primary and secondary education remains highly rated by users; road and pavement maintenance have still got the lowest scores. The Passport Agency has recovered, in the public's view, from its well-publicised problems in 2000; museums seem to have benefited from free entry; and satisfaction with bus services has improved. Satisfaction has declined with respect to some universal services e.g. the police, train companies, street cleaning and street lighting. (MORI 2002, p. 3)

Figure 19 summarises net satisfaction with a selected range of key public services (the full list and table are outlined in Appendix 6).

**Figure 19: Satisfaction with Public Services (1998–2002)**



Question: 'How satisfied are you with the quality of ... ?' (the net response combines responses for 'fairly' and 'very'—see report for more detail)

Source: MORI 2002, p. 4.

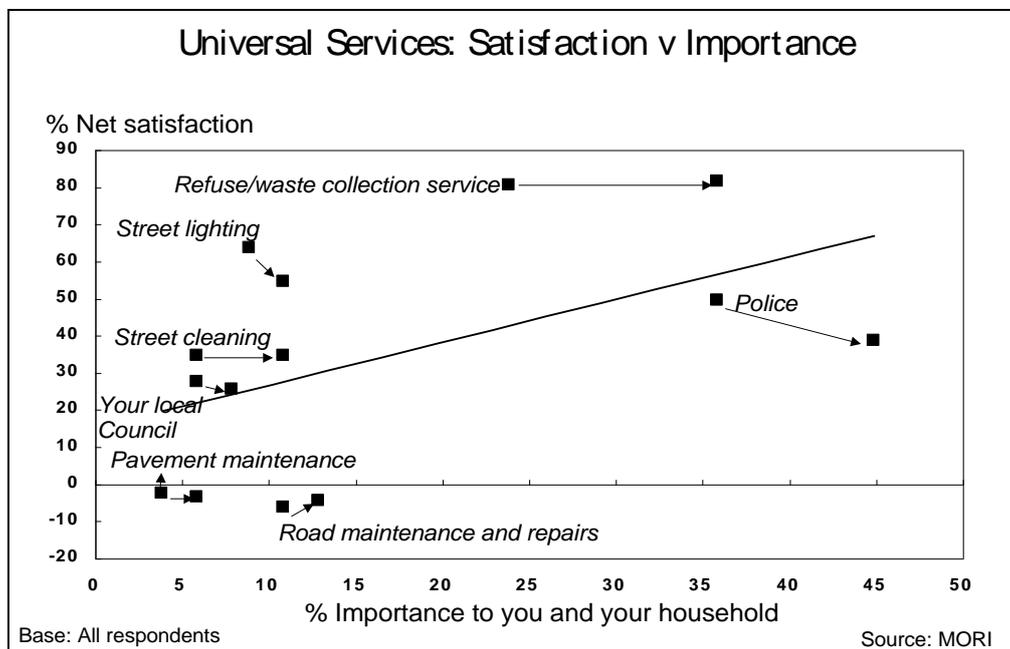
Over the course of the People's Panel, there were clear changes in satisfaction levels for some key public services (MORI 2002). Of the 28 different services that Panel members were polled on, satisfaction levels remained constant for 2 services, increased for 11 services and decreased for 15 services. Satisfaction with local General Medical Practitioners (GPs) remained high and constant, and satisfaction with local primary schools increased by 2 per cent. However, satisfaction with the following range of key services did decrease over the four-year period: local secondary schools (-9 per cent), National Health Service (NHS) hospitals (-7 per cent), Inland Revenue (-5 per cent), local councils (-9 per cent), and significantly, the police (-25 per cent).

### *Importance and Satisfaction in Public Services*

In its analysis of the findings from the People's Panel, MORI also examined the relationship between the importance the public attach to particular public services and how highly they rate their satisfaction with these services. From 1998 to 2002, the three most important public services rated by the public were local GPs, NHS hospitals and the police. Dissatisfaction levels increased significantly for NHS hospitals and the police, and this was a particularly troubling finding for New Labour's public service reform agenda.

These findings are outlined in Figure 20 which shows the relationship between importance and satisfaction for key services (the size and direction of the arrow illustrates the change of ratings between 2000 and 2002).

**Figure 20: Importance and Satisfaction for Universal Services<sup>71</sup>**



Source: MORI 2002, p. 10.

As MORI (2002, p. 10) states:

For most of the services, the line is short, illustrating little change over the last two years. Nevertheless, Panel members now attach more importance to these services.

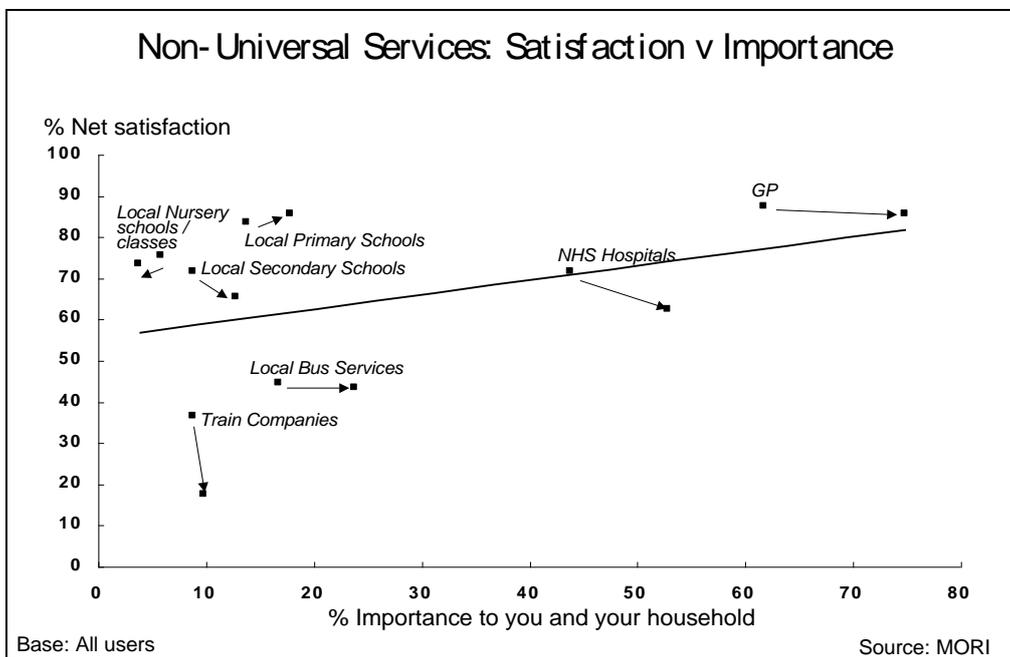
Figure 20 shows that the two most significant changes are connected with refuse collection and the police. For Panel members, these services became

<sup>71</sup> In their analysis, MORI make a distinction between universal and non-universal services. Universal services are based on all respondents, while all other services (non-universal) are based on users only. The importance of this distinction is explored further in the chapter on the difficulties in analysing public satisfaction with public services.

more important over the period of time polled, and in the case of the police, satisfaction dropped significantly.

As part of the research, MORI demarcates between universal and non-universal public services. A key difference here is that responses are based on actual usage rather than just the respondent's perception of the quality of the particular service. Figure 21 shows that in most cases, the importance of non-universal services increased, and the two main increases in dissatisfaction were for NHS hospitals and the train companies. Given the importance New Labour attached to NHS reform, it is striking how the satisfaction levels fell.

**Figure 21: Importance and Satisfaction for Non-Universal Services**



Source: MORI 2002, p. 11.

### *Information Provision*

Panel members' views were also sought on how they rated the quality of information provided by the relevant service. Information provision is seen as a good indicator of public sector performance. Of the 24 public services polled, only 6 services saw an increase in the number of Panel members who felt that the service kept them well informed (MORI 2002, p. 11). All the other 18 services showed a decrease in satisfaction with the provision of information; although for many of these services, the decrease was small (the full list is outlined in Appendix 6). There were some striking increases in dissatisfaction with information for some providers, such as local primary schools (-19 per cent), secondary schools (-18 per cent), libraries (-12 per cent) and council housing services (-21 per cent). As MORI (2002, p. 12) notes, what is striking is that satisfaction with information provision declined significantly, even while overall satisfaction with many of the services remained constant.

### **Summary of the Panel's View of Public Services from 1998 to 2002**

Caution should be exercised in interpreting the findings from the People's Panel. The period covered from 1998 to 2002 is a relatively short period of time and the risk is that trend data is overstated. In addition, the sample of Panel members polled was quite small. Moreover, for the purposes of this thesis, what is at stake is not whether public attitudes to public services declined (although this is important), but rather it is whether the results from

the People's Panel showed a decline.<sup>72</sup> If there was a decline in satisfaction by the Panel, then it lends credibility to the argument that this was a key factor as to why the initiative was discontinued.

Overall, in a number of public services, it does seem that the Panel's net satisfaction did decline, and for a number of key services, such as NHS hospitals and the police, this decline was significant. In most public services, there was also a marked decline in satisfaction with information provision. However, it should be noted that while a number of services showed a decline in net satisfaction, to some extent this can be explained by a fall in number of those members reporting being 'very' satisfied, with the number reporting being 'fairly' satisfied remaining the same or increasing slightly (MORI 2002, p. 13). More significantly, MORI (2002, p. 14) argues that the drop in satisfaction levels was highest among Labour's traditional core support (unskilled and skilled workers, and those supporters living in the North). MORI (2002, p. 17) suggests that this 'perhaps reflects raised expectations among core Labour voters after the election, which have yet to be met'.

### **Other Findings from the People's Panel**

As noted from the outset, there were over 30 different uses made of the People's Panel from 1998 to 2002. The comparable waves (1, 5, and 6) were only a small part of the overall research uses made of the Panel. While the

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<sup>72</sup> Nor is it the aim of this case study to show if the actual quality of public services declined, and certainly there is good evidence to show that from 2000, public spending on public services increased significantly (Shaw 2007, p. 146).

main focus of this thesis is to see how the views of Panel members about public sector reform changed over time, it is also useful to highlight some of the other relevant findings.

In June 2000, MORI (2000b) published a report on the findings of the ethnic minority booster of the Panel. The results showed clear differences between the ethnic minority groups surveyed, and the wider white groups surveyed. In addition, the report shows notable differences *between* the main ethnic minority groups polled. Black respondents were much more likely to report dissatisfaction with services compared with both Asian and white members. Black members also reported being less involved in the community. Sixteen per cent of ethnic minority respondents reported that they had experienced some form of discrimination when contacting a public service. Respondents also rated a range of public services on how well they 'deal with diversity'; local primary schools, local GPs and local nurseries scored well; but the police, the courts, and local councils scored less well (MORI 2000b).

In 1999, MORI published a report on the views of Panel members aged 50 years or more (using data from waves 1 and 3). Generally, older people tended to have lower expectations of public services, and as a result, their satisfaction levels were higher than younger groups (MORI 1999, p. 2). Older Panel members were also more sanguine about the benefits of e-government, with many reporting not having used any new technology (MORI 1999, p. 5). MORI (1999, p. 10) also suggest that in the drive to improve public services

for older people, it may be important to encourage older people to raise their expectations, even if the initial result may show a fall in satisfaction levels.

The Cabinet Office also commissioned MORI (2000a) to undertake a detailed analysis of Panel members living in areas of deprivation (this group was identified using a government devised index of deprivation). These respondents tended to be younger and live in households with more children than the wider population (MORI 2000a, p. 6). Not surprisingly, these Panel members were less likely to be either employed or in full-time employment and they received lower incomes than the wider population (2000a, p. 6). Certain public services were more likely to be used in deprived areas, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau (MORI 2000a, p. 7). Broadly speaking, satisfaction rates with public services were comparable to the wider population (MORI 2000a, p. 9).

These supplementary research studies from the People's Panel were arguably the most useful and pertinent, and they showed a genuine willingness by New Labour to seek the views of some of the most marginal groups of people in British society. The findings from these reports reinforce the overall patterns of inequality of voice and political participation outlined in Chapter 3. The challenge for New Labour is to make public services more responsive to these diverse and heterogeneous groups.

## **Summary Evaluation of the People's Panel**

As outlined in Chapter 2, the summary evaluation of each case study draws upon the Beetham–Pratchett framework (Pratchett 1999). Pratchett (1999) evaluates various different models of participation using two operational principles from Beetham's 1994 work on auditing democracies. The two principles for auditing and evaluating consultative and participative models are representativeness (derived from the notion of political equality) and responsiveness (derived from the notion of popular control). These two principles frame this evaluation of the People's Panel.

Over the course of the life of the People's Panel there were two commissioned evaluations. The first evaluation was completed after the Panel's first year in operation (Evaluation Associates 2000). This evaluation report focuses largely on how well the Panel was being run and managed. The second and more substantive evaluation was undertaken by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) near the end of the Panel's life (Gregory 2002). The evaluation of the Panel in this section draws together the findings from both of these reports and supplements them with interviews conducted in 2007 with a number of the key figures involved in the Panel.

The summary evaluation of the People's Panel is organised under the following main headings:

- Media reaction to the Panel

- Overview of strengths and weaknesses
- Representativeness
- Responsiveness.

### *Media Reaction to the Panel*

To help contextualise the formal evaluation of the Panel, it is worth reflecting on the media reaction to the People's Panel. Perhaps unusually for such a government initiative, the People's Panel received some press attention in the British print media. A number of British tabloids ran critical pieces on the Panel. The *Daily Mirror* (25 July 2001) described the Panel as 'a giant focus group'. It was also reported that Richard Littlejohn, a well-known right-wing commentator for *The Sun*, decried the Panel as a waste of taxpayers' money and reiterated his well-known diatribe about New Labour governing by spin and focus group.<sup>73</sup> The *Daily Mirror* article was picked up by Iain Murray in *Marketing Week*—the main newspaper for the British marketing and public relations industry. Murray (2001, p. 90) argues that the Panel cost £1.5m, and his main complaint is that it did not produce any new or significant findings.

Now I realise that, as jokes go, these are not in the Oscar Wilde class nor even in the Christmas cracker category, but they are funny. When every penny we earn from January until June goes in taxes, and £300,000 of that is

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<sup>73</sup> The outline of Richard Littlejohn's article on the People's Panel was conveyed to the author in an interview with one of the key people involved with the Panel. A concerted search has failed to retrieve this article, but there is no reason to doubt either the credibility of the interviewee in citing the article, or indeed the likelihood that Littlejohn would take such a view.

spent on finding that people prefer people to machines, there is no alternative to laughter.

The tabloid media reaction was predictable, and the 'government-by-spin' tagline was quickly attached to New Labour and became something of an albatross (Wring 2006). For the tabloid press, the People's Panel was a convenient target representing New Labour's style of government. The government and MORI attempted to refute the worst of these allegations (Cunningham 1999b; Worcester 1999). Bob Worcester (1999, p. 13), then Chairman of MORI, argues that the People's Panel:

... is not, as some of the media has described it, a gigantic focus group. It is a versatile and cost effective way of coupling objective information about citizens' behaviour with their subjective views on how government is performing its role.

By the time of Worcester's rebuttal, the damage had already been done.

### **Overview of the Strengths and Weaknesses of the People's Panel**

Table 15 outlines the main strengths and weaknesses of the People Panel. These issues are discussed at more length in the following sections. Using the two key commissioned evaluation reports, it is useful to group the strengths and weaknesses into the following four main elements of the Panel and link them with the two Beetham–Pratchett evaluative principles:

- The design of the Panel (responsiveness and representativeness).

- The operational issues (representativeness).
- The management of the Panel (responsiveness).
- The impact on policy (responsiveness).

**Table 15: Strengths and Weaknesses of the People’s Panel**

<b>Aspect of Panel</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<b>Design</b>	Symbolic value of consultation.	Symbolic value was seen as a weakness—a ‘public relations stunt’.
	Quick production of results.	Problematic for longitudinal research.
	Accessibility of results.	Inadequate sample and design.
<b>Operation</b>	Easy financial procedures.	Question design.
	Good support for novice users.	Analysis of questions was simplistic.
	A number of policy statements were linked to findings from the Panel—a good example of linking policy to research.	Superficial reporting of results.
		High levels of attrition.
Evidence of conditioning.		
<b>Management</b>	Management of the Panel improved when a single senior researcher was appointed to oversee it.	‘Uneasy triangle’ between main players and some lack of clarity about roles.
	Management functioned to produce numerous waves of data despite the complexity of project.	The role and input of the People’s Panel Support Group diminished over time.
<b>Impact on policy</b>	Influenced various micro policies.	Little or no influence on macro policy.
	Raised the profile of consultation as a key part of the policy-making process.	Little or mixed support at both the political and public service level.

The starting point for evaluating the People’s Panel is to measure how far, in practice, its operation and use matched the stated aims and reasons for its establishment. From the outset, the Panel was designed to achieve a range of outcomes including:

- Tracking Panel members' view on public services over time.
- Providing one-off research for government agencies, with the overall aim of improving public services.
- Raising the profile of consultation across government.
- Saving money by having a resident pool of people willing to be surveyed.
- Acting as a reservoir of individuals who could be recruited to take part in other consultative exercises.
- Having a fast turnaround of results.
- Acting as a vehicle for encouraging greater cross-governmental research coordination.

In the first commissioned evaluation of the Panel, it was clear that this 'bold experiment' faced unrealistic expectations about what it might be able to deliver (Evaluation Associates 2000, p. 2). One of the initial concerns was that it was unclear how the Panel could carve out a niche for itself. From the outset, there seemed to be some ambivalence about what the Panel was for:

... the Panel is a research tool rather than a policy instrument and can not in itself deliver a broader policy agenda. (Gregory 2002, p. iii)

Gregory (2002, p. iii) expresses the view that 'the Panel will struggle to compete with well established mechanisms for longitudinal work'. For example, central government in Britain funds a number of high profile and well-established longitudinal surveys, such as the British Crime Survey, and it

was unclear how the Panel would link with these other surveys. This criticism is arguably borne out when the 30-odd uses of the Panel are considered (see Appendix 5). By and large, the Panel was mostly used by government agencies to conduct small-scale and one-off quick polls of specific policy issues.

### **Representativeness and the People's Panel**

Of all of the case studies considered in this thesis, the People's Panel is the only case that made a systematic attempt to address issues of representativeness from the outset. The Panel sought to be broadly representative of the main demographics of the wider British public. Moreover, as noted in an earlier section, the Cabinet Office commissioned a number of specific studies to gauge the views of some of the more marginal and deprived population groups.

Ensuring that the People's Panel remained broadly representative was an ongoing challenge. There was a concern, particularly from some of the senior researchers on the Panel's reference group, that the sample size of the Panel was too small to produce statistically significant results. The only time all 5 000-plus members of the Panel were consulted at once was for the first-wave survey. Thereafter, most surveys only consulted with about one-fifth of the Panel, albeit weighted to the United Kingdom's population. These samples were often too small to analyse the data for anything other than top-line results (Gregory 2002, p. 24).

In relation to the principle of representativeness, a further two key weaknesses in the Panel were identified. The Panel had a high level of attrition (panel members who no longer wished to participate in the exercise), and there was some evidence of conditioning (panel members were no longer representative of the wider public as a result of their involvement in the Panel).

By the end of the first year of the Panel's operation, it was clear that attrition was taking place. By the end of 1998, 8 per cent of Panel members asked to leave; 8 per cent refused to take part more than once; and a further 8 per cent could not be contacted more than once (Evaluation Associates 2000, p. 15). The result of this attrition was that the Panel members were more likely to be middle-aged, white, middle class and professional, and more 'activist' (Evaluation Associates 2000, p. 15). The high level of attrition brought into question the central reason for establishing the Panel—tracking the views of a representative sample of the population over time. Inequality of voice threatened to undermine the credibility of the People's Panel.

After a year, MORI topped up the panel with a booster of 500 people. The ONS, in its later evaluation report, notes that between waves 3 and 5 of the Panel research 'between 8% and 11% of those approached said they wanted to leave the panel' (Gregory 2002, p. 39). The ONS concludes that 'the usefulness of the panel as a vehicle for measuring change over time is therefore questionable' (Gregory 2002, p. 7).

The second related issue is that of conditioning, which takes place when panel members' responses are affected by them being on a panel. One such outcome is that panel members are more likely to give a response, either positive or negative, rather than offer a 'no opinion' response. The risk is that as panel members develop a prolonged relationship with the exercise, they become more interested in current affairs and related issues, and as a result, they become less representative of the groups that they were selected to represent.

It is difficult to prove that conditioning is taking place, and both evaluation reports acknowledge the methods used were less than ideal (Gregory 2002, p. 21). Any conclusions are therefore tentative. At the end of the first year, 490 members of the Panel were called to investigate possible conditioning: 26 per cent of this group reported becoming more interested in public services since joining the Panel, 33 per cent reported feeling personal knowledge had increased, and 24 per cent had tried to find out more information on public services (Gregory 2002, p. 21). In the first year, there was a suggestion that about one-third of the Panel (predominantly white, male and middle class members) were more prone to conditioning. The ONS evaluation report was circumspect about the amount of conditioning taking place:

Our data do not unequivocally demonstrate that the Panel is experiencing significant conditioning. Neither do they rule it out. (Gregory 2002, p. 21)

The ONS evaluation report also considered the issue of conditioning over the life of the Panel. Wave 1 and wave 5 responses of 844 members of the Panel were compared. The most relevant finding for this evaluation of the Panel is the suggestion that:

... there is some evidence of conditioning, but more serious is the possibility of bias due to attrition. (Gregory 2002, p. 7)

The small sample sizes, the evidence of attrition and the concern about the levels of conditioning all undermined confidence in the Panel as a representative and effective research tool. It is interesting to note that the Panel proved much more popular with novice social researchers. For these users, one of the benefits of using the already established Panel was that they did not have to spend time addressing the wider and more complex methodological issues.

### **Responsiveness and the People's Panel**

There are a range of issues related to the theme of responsiveness and the Panel. Responsiveness refers to the degree to which the government agencies used the findings from the Panel to influence their policy agendas.

The main issues relating to responsiveness and the Panel include:

- Question design.
- Management of the Panel.
- Impact on policy-making.
- Commitment to the Panel.

The issue of question design relates to what can be seen as the 'supply side' of responsiveness. The quality and clarity of the information elicited from the Panel is a determining factor in how far government agencies can make practical use of this information. The Panel's impact on policy is likely to be weaker if the information generated is overly general, contradictory or inaccurate. In its analysis of the Panel, the ONS identified a range of problems around the issue of question design and reports that:

... there was a widely held view among senior researchers that generally the questions were too broad and superficial. (Gregory 2002, p. 23)

The concern was that asking people a rather general question about their satisfaction with a particular service is only a very crude measure for gauging the service's performance and overall effectiveness. Senior researchers saw a much more complicated story at play which the top-line results of the Panel did not reflect. For example, Ben Page, Director of Social Research at MORI, outlines the main drivers of satisfaction levels for health services in the United Kingdom (Table 16).

**Table 16: Drivers of Satisfaction Levels for Health Services**

Driver for Satisfaction	Strength of Issue on Overall Satisfaction
Political belief and support for the government	<div style="text-align: center;">   <b>Strong driver</b> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">   <b>Weak driver</b> </div>
Age	
Poor experiences of Accident and Emergency Services	
Staff bad-mouthing	
Media coverage	
Direct NHS communication	
Positive experience of in-patient services	

*Source: Page 2007, slide 32.*

MORI's research suggests that asking people a general question about their satisfaction with a particular service is actually a proxy for a range of other related issues. People's political affiliation is one of the strongest drivers for their reported satisfaction with health services. Not unsurprisingly, people who are more sympathetic to a government are more likely to view it favourably (although conversely, raised expectations from core groups can result in higher levels of dissatisfaction). Political affiliation, knowing a person who works for a health service, the respondent's age and media coverage are all more significant factors in determining how people rate their satisfaction with health services than their actual experience of in-patient services. The concern is that the Panel's tracking of the members' satisfaction levels did not sufficiently investigate these other variables. MORI did ask if political affiliation could be part of the battery of questions asked to Panel members, but this was rejected as there was a concern that the Panel would be an overly party political exercise (Public Administration Committee 1999). Poor question

design and a lack of investigation of key variables meant that secondary and more detailed analysis from the Panel's findings was not possible.

This links to another weakness associated with the Panel—the problem of reporting. At periodic intervals and after each wave of data, the Cabinet Office issued a newsletter with the top-line results. Senior researchers were particularly critical about the superficiality of these newsletters (Gregory 2002, p. 24). The main complaint was that there were not enough technical data and caveats in the newsletters, which meant that the newsletter headlines could be misleading. In addition, there was a concern that the newsletters overly accentuated the positive results (Gregory 2002, p. 24). While it is too simplistic to describe this as 'spin', this outcome is not too surprising. The Cabinet Office was keen to extol the virtues of the Panel and promote the wider modernising government reform agenda. However, the newsletters, along with some of the attending press releases, were quite superficial and highly promotional. A striking example of this is the presentation of the final comparable wave of data (Cabinet Office 2002). The final press release (along with the newsletter) focused predominantly on the relatively high levels of satisfaction rates for key services (GPs in particular), but far less attention was paid to the widespread decline in satisfaction levels for many of the public services—which was arguably the main 'story' (Cabinet Office 2002).

### *Management of the Panel*

The overall management and oversight of the Panel were factors in limiting its impact on policy. Both formal evaluation reports found weaknesses in the

management of the People's Panel. The MPSG within the Cabinet Office managed the Panel. At the outset, steering and advisory groups were set up, comprising research and statistical experts both within and outside government. Due to some confusion about the roles of these two groups, they were merged in July 1999 to form the People's Panel Support Group.

The first evaluation report describes the 'uneasy triangle' between the MPSG (who had strategic oversight of the Panel), MORI (which ran the Panel on a day-to-day basis) and the users of the Panel (Evaluation Associates 2000, p. 10). The uneasiness between these three groups stems, to some extent, from both the newness of the project and the complexity of what the Panel was set up to achieve. Initially, there was a lack of survey expertise in the MPSG, which was hampering the brokerage of relations between novice users and MORI. In January 2001, a senior research officer was appointed to oversee the Panel, which helped to improve the situation.

The ONS report highlights further issues with the management of the panel. One perceived weakness was that the division between the MPSG and MORI was not clear enough (Gregory 2002, p. 26). The composition of the support group was called into question, with some members expressing that it was too government focused and lacked sufficient research expertise. Also, the input of the support group diminished over time.

The ONS report makes an interesting, and somewhat amusing comment that:

... many Support Group members were surprised that they were still members and almost no one could remember when the group last met.  
(Gregory 2002, p. 26)

None of these issues were among the most significant problems with the Panel. Given the complexity of establishing the Panel, it was always likely that the management structures and processes would evolve over time.

### *Impact on Policy*

One of the main tests of the effectiveness and value of the People's Panel is to explore its impact on policy-making. In his testimony to the Public Administration Select Committee, Jonathan Rees, Director of the MPSG, made a demarcation between micro-level and macro-level input on policy by the Panel (Public Administration Committee 1999). Rees argues that causality between the use of the Panel and input into policy at the micro level is easier to prove. Some examples cited from both Rees's testimony and the first year evaluation report are presented in Table 17.

**Table 17: Examples of the People’s Panel Impact on Micro-level Policy**

<b>Examples of the People’s Panel Impact on Micro-level Policy-making</b>	
<b>Issue</b>	<b>Detail</b>
Extension of opening hours of key public services	In July 2001, the Cabinet Office produced an action plan on extending opening hours of five main public services including local councils, NHS Trusts, social services and the Passport Agency. This plan was directly linked to the Panel findings which were supportive of these proposals.
Research on public appointees	In January 2001, the Office for Public Appointments used a sample of the Panel to test public attitudes about public appointees. Most of those people polled knew very little about public appointments and most comments were negative. This data was used to launch public service week later in 2001 as a way of raising awareness about public appointees.
Leaflet on genetically modified (GM) food	The Ministry for Fisheries and Food (MAFF) used the Panel to evaluate a leaflet about GM food and to ask questions about food labelling. The results were discussed at the Food Standards Agency’s Board meeting in September 2001. The Panel data was used as part of a wider strategy to lobby the European Union for legislative changes to the labelling of food.
Biosciences consultation	1 000 structured interviews with Panel members were undertaken to examine views on the regulatory framework for biosciences. While the first evaluation report of the People’s Panel notes that ‘officials believe the consultation made some contribution to the review ... it is difficult to pin down its precise impact’ (Evaluation Associates 2000, p. 12). However, the report did find that the interviews had a ‘strong influence’ on the House of Lords Select Committee’s <i>Science and Society</i> report (Evaluation Associates 2000, p. 12).
Performance tables for schools	Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) officials recruited two focus groups from the Panel to seek views on ‘value added’ performance tables. This process was used to present findings to the minister about the presentation of tables.
Housing benchmarks	The Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) used the third wave of the Panel to supplement a separate consultation on benchmarks for the <i>Urban White Paper</i> and <i>Housing Green Paper</i> .

Source: Adapted from Evaluation Associates 2000; Public Administration Committee 1999.

In most of these examples, the findings from the uses of the People's Panel were cited in a range of government reports and documents. In some of the small specific cases, such as the amendments to the leaflet about GM food, there is evidence of the Panel's impact. In most of these cases, the Panel was used for a specific one-off purpose: usually with only a small sample of Panel members. In this respect, the Panel was a relatively cheap and accessible survey tool for departments under pressure to consult quickly.

### *Impact on Macro-level Policy-making*

The impact of the People's Panel on policy at the macro level is much harder to demonstrate. It was not wholly apparent what the Panel should be used for, and it had a rather ambivalent status across government. Officially, the Panel was used to inform policy development, but this explains very little about the dynamics of the decision-making processes and the overall level of influence exerted by the Panel. The note of defensiveness in the view of the then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Jack Cunningham (1999a) about the role of the Panel is also striking:

The question posed in the title of this evening's lecture is 'Do People's Panels represent the people?' The answer is no, they do not. That is not what they are for. People's Panels inform elected representatives who do represent the people of this country, both in the House of Commons and in government. They also inform the public servants who serve the government of the people,

so that all can be better informed about their views, in particular about service delivery.

Cunningham clearly asserts the subordinate role of the Panel and reasserts the primacy of members of parliament (MPs) and the government as the final arbiters of decision-making. Cunningham (1999a) states that the Panel would not 'dictate' policy, but rather that it 'does provide people a real voice in policy making as their views are taken into account'. An additional factor is that there is a clear time lag between the longitudinal use of the Panel and its influence on policy-making. Jonathan Rees, the main public servant in charge of the Panel, is even more circumspect about the link between the Panel and policy-making:

At the macro level on a major policy area like electronic government, it will have an impact over time, but I cannot say yet that there is a causal effect. I do not think there will ever be a causal effect. (Rees 1999, cited in Public Administration Committee 1999)

The Panel's lack of causality on macro-level policy-making raises a suite of complex issues. There seems little incentive for a member of the public to be involved with the Panel when its impact is seemingly so marginal. This factor may explain the high rates of attrition. The linkages between the Panel and the governmental decision-making processes are unclear, which meant that the Panel's overall influence on government policy was weak. The Panel may have informed ministers, but there were clear limits to its impact. Ministers were clearly more receptive to some of its messages than others. In effect, the

Panel was a legitimising device for the modernising government agenda, rather than a potential source of information to challenge dominant ideas about how government services could be improved. New Labour's reform program was largely predetermined and the function of the Panel was to feed into this agenda.

The ambivalent status of the influence of the Panel is reflected in the mixed attitudes held by the Panel members. While 79 per cent of Panel members believed they were 'helping the government', 36 per cent also agreed that the Panel 'hasn't mattered much to me' (Evaluation Associates 2000, p. 19).

The ambivalence about the status of the Panel was shared by Ian McCartney (former minister for the Cabinet Office and former Chair of the Labour Party). McCartney characterises the Panel as a 'useful innovation', albeit with limitations:

... so there was no direct intervention by Ministers on who was on the panel, and the issues. That was all independent and quite rightly so. It was a useful exercise in gauging information at any point in time. I wouldn't say that as an exercise I would use ... for long term planning, or major changes; but it does give an opportunity to engage in issues, either chosen by the public, or a mixture chosen by departments, to have a relationship with the public on issues. I think they are worthwhile, but on their own they are not sufficient. (I McCartney, 2007, interview with author, 14 December)

McCartney was circumspect about the impact of the Panel on more strategic policy questions. The Panel's clearest influence was on much smaller and more specific micro-policy issues. While the Panel was a flagship of New Labour's reform program to make government more responsive, the Panel itself made only a minimal impact in this area. The significance of the Panel was its symbolic value rather than its practical input into policy. The relatively short life of the Panel meant that its longitudinal impact was also marginal.

### **Political and Public Service Commitment to the Panel**

New Labour's responsiveness to the People's Panel is ultimately shown by its overall commitment to the project. It is useful then to consider both the political and policy support for the Panel. Moreover, while the officially commissioned independent evaluations give thorough and useful insights into the design and operation of the Panel, the degree of political commitment is missing from these evaluations. The following section is drawn largely from a series of interviews with some of the main people involved with the Panel.

#### *Political Support for the Panel*

At the political level, what emerges from interviews with senior figures is that within the Cabinet there was clear disagreement about the role and place of the Panel. Interestingly, Tony Blair only discovered the Panel existed nearly a year after it had been operational. According to Geoff Mulgan, former head of No.10's Strategy Unit, the People's Panel:

... was not considered much certainly by Blair, and it certainly came as a bit of a surprise to him when he first heard about its existence, to be honest. (G Mulgan, 2007, interview with author, 5 December)

One of the other difficulties is that the Minister in charge of the Panel was the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and during the period from 1997 to 2003, four different people held this position. Each of these people had varying degrees of commitment to the Panel. The Ministers were:

- David Clark (May 1997–July 1998)
- Jack Cunningham (July 1998–October 1999)
- Mo Mowlam (October 1999–June 2001)
- Gus MacDonald (June 2001–June 2003).

According to Ben Page, Director at MORI, 'basically the reason the People's Panel was set up [was because] one Minister [David Clark] ...was really keen on it' (B Page, 2007, interview with author, 5 December). According to Page, enthusiasm for the Panel wavered:

Cunningham was very keen on it. But, I think the problem was ... then there were various successive Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's who were not keen on it at all ... I think the famous quote from Lord Gus Macdonald, basically he said to us 'I don't want to build a gallows to hang myself on thank you very much'. (B Page, 2007, interview with author, 5 December)

The People's Panel became a victim of New Labour's steep learning curve on the realities of government, where its good intentions were soon displaced by a more cynical sense of 'real-politik'. Ben Page accurately sketches the change in New Labour thinking:

... principally was that they we're going to do this wonderful consultation and it was all going to be terribly open, and they were going to publish the results to see how they were going, they were going to be fully accountable ... so they start doing it and the results are not getting better, so they decide, 'oh we don't actually want to publish the results any more'. (B Page, 2007, interview with author, 5 December)

Geoff Mulgan (G Mulgan, 2007, interview with author, 5 December) argues that the Panel evolved rather quickly, and the longer-term consequences were not thought out. Outside the immediate environs of the Cabinet Office, there was mixed support and commitment for the Panel. Ben Page reports an intriguing Cabinet meeting, with less than full support from the then deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott:

The Politicians weren't all on board with it, I remember once Prescott went completely berserk in a Cabinet Meeting ... because there was a question about road pricing, and you know it's quite interesting what the people think of road pricing, and questions like that ... Prescott said, 'why are we going this mad exercise?! We are absolutely insane to be asking people these questions and people are producing negative answers'. (B Page, 2007, interview with author, 5 December)

This encapsulates the ambivalence about the role of the People's Panel. For senior figures, such as Prescott, and crucially, Gus MacDonald—then minister in charge of the Panel—there was no incentive to continue government funding for a vehicle which could be used to constantly undermine and criticise the government's reform agenda. This lack of support was also a significant barrier to using the Panel to influence policy:

... basically it had very little influence on decision-making, so even at the Centre was never really integrated to processes. I can say that even more harshly than he [Ben Page] would, let alone getting departments to buy into it which was intended to be its business model. (G Mulgan, 2007, interview with author, 5 December)

### *Public Service Support for the Panel*

The lack of commitment to the Panel at the political level was underscored by a similar lack of commitment from the wider research community across government. While the formal evaluation reports highlight the concerns of senior government researchers about the People's Panel, the reports do not accurately describe the outright hostility many had towards the Panel. A number of the senior researchers were highly critical of the small sample size of the Panel. Most of the significant surveys funded by government had much larger samples of about 20 000 people, which produce much higher quality data. Ben Page (B Page, 2007, interview with author, 5 December) argues

that there was no proper budget in the Cabinet Office to ‘actually do it properly’.

The other aspect was that despite the number of agencies that used the Panel, there was very little cross-departmental use of the Panel. Geoff Mulgan (G Mulgan, 2007, interview with author, 5 December) confirms that it ‘never really got any traction with any departments as clients’. A view supported by Ben Page:

... there was then this tension between the Departments and Cabinet Office, where the departmental research did huge things like the British Crime Survey which deeply resent a high profile centrist exercise that looks across all these services ... because they’ve always got one better ... and it shows that their department is getting worse, and they’re defensive about it, and their own research disagrees with it because it wasn’t invented here, so there was no support, no buy-in amongst the people inside for it ... So the official line was that department said that it was best to have ‘best practice’ rolled out and adopted by the departments—which was utter bollocks. (B Page, 2007, interview with author, 5 December)

Ultimately, the Panel lacked political commitment from the Cabinet and across the wider government research community. The limitations of the Panel’s methodology, coupled with the increasingly negative views of Panel members about public services, all proved too damaging for keeping the Panel.

## **The People's Panel: A Bold, But Failed Experiment**

It is estimated that by 2001, the People's Panel cost in the region of £1.27m (Gregory 2002, p. 16). This is not an inconsiderable sum of money, and in evaluating the People's Panel it is pertinent to ask if it was value for money. The strengths and weaknesses of the Panel set out in Table 15 at the outset of this summary evaluation reinforce the view that there is no simple answer to this question.

The significant amount of funds attached to the Panel did demonstrate a high level of commitment to this consultative experiment. The attempt—a world first by a national government—to institute a citizens' panel, demonstrates a genuine willingness to innovate and consult with the wider public. As the first evaluation report makes clear, the Panel was a 'bold experiment' (Evaluation Associates 2000, p. 2). It had a good deal of symbolic importance in demonstrating New Labour's commitment to improving government responsiveness, and to a large degree, there was a good deal of openness and transparency in publishing findings from the different uses of the Panel. It was a useful tool for generating quick survey responses, and it was particularly useful for micro-level and small-scale policy uses. There was a good deal of risk attached to establishing the Panel, and in this light, New Labour deserves some credit for showing a willingness to experiment.

However, the Panel suffered from raised expectations and confusion about what its primary role should be. Given that the Panel only survived New Labour's first term in office and its principal aim was to provide a longitudinal

survey resource, then the balance of weaknesses outweighs the strengths. What is also clear from the literature is that citizens' panels may not be best suited at a national level (Gregory 2002, pp. 28–9).

At the outset of this chapter, it was suggested that the increasingly sceptical and critical views of the Panel members about New Labour's public sector reform agenda was the key reason why the Panel was discontinued (McHugh 2002). This was a significant factor, but the story is more complex than this. Ultimately, it was the lack of widespread and sustained support for the Panel at both a political level and in the public service which led to the Panel's closure. The formal evaluation reports helped to provide a useful alibi for the Panel's wider lack of support. New Labour's focus on government responsiveness was a highly politicised program, and it was happy to dispense with the People's Panel when it was no longer serving a legitimising function to this agenda. The People's Panel can rightly be seen as a 'bold experiment', but ultimately, a failed one (Evaluation Associates 2000, p. 2).

## Chapter 6

### *Case Study 2 - New Labour's 'Big Conversation' (2003–2005)*

## **Introduction**

As outlined in the previous chapters, this thesis is a comparative study of five cases of Labo(u)r governments in Britain and Australia, and their attempts to institute new mechanisms of dialogue and consultation with wider civil society. All the Labo(u)r governments considered in this thesis are broadly influenced by the politics of the New Social Democracy (NSD), which is an attempt to modernise social democracy (Giddens 1998, 2000). The first section of the thesis sets out the underlying context and understanding for the five cases. The previous chapter (Ch. 5) examines the first case study – British New Labour’s ‘People’s Panel’, which was a significant program in its first term in office after being elected in 1997.

This chapter examines New Labour’s ‘Big Conversation’ initiative which ran from late November 2003 until 2004, during its second term in office. The Big Conversation is the largest ever consultation ever undertaken by the British political party. The aim of the exercise was to hold a wide ranging public debate which informed the content of the New Labour’s 2005 general election manifesto.

The Big Conversation is a high profile example of New Labour’s attempt to find new ways of engaging with public on a wide ranging set of policy issues. The initiative was part of New Labour’s push for democratic renewal and quest for the modernisation of government. This chapter examines how far the

tightly controlled New Labour project was prepared to let external voices and perspectives inform its overall policy direction.

The first part of the chapter sets the context for the case study. The Big Conversation is linked with New Labour's internal modernisation program. A number of key themes and tensions are bound up in this process, which also played out during the Big Conversation. The timing of the Big Conversation is also outlined. A significant criticism of the initiative was that it was designed, in part, to divert attention away from Labour's decision to support the invasion of Iraq (Leyden 2003).

The chapter then focuses on the main elements of the Big Conversation and its impact on policy-making. The chapter concludes with a summary evaluation, which like the People's Panel, suggests this initiative was a bold experiment but with significant flaws.

### **'Modernising' the Labour Party**

Unlike the People's Panel (Ch.5), the Big Conversation was not a government initiative, but a vehicle for the Labour Party. Indeed, for a number of participants there was confusion about this distinction. In the previous chapter, the evolution of New Labour's *external* modernisation program was sketched. The Big Conversation should be seen in the context of New Labour's *internal* modernisation process. In some respects, the Big Conversation is a fusion of the both the internal and external strands of the modernisation process. To

understand some of the main themes and tensions that underpin the Big Conversation, it is useful to outline some of the main elements of the internal reform process.

Between 1979 and 1999, the Labour Party's internal structures underwent significant reform<sup>74</sup>. The detail is outlined elsewhere (Heffernan 2003, Mair 2002, Seyd and Whiteley 2001, 2002, Shaw 2004), but significant changes in the process include:

- Direct election of the Party leader by the membership (rather than just from MPs)
- Since 1997, no single Labour MP has direct funding from a Trade Union
- Trade Unions have 50 per cent of the vote at annual conference (it was 90 per cent in 1979).

Neil Kinnock instigated the reform process, after succeeding the Party leadership from Michael Foot following the heavy defeat at the 1983 General Election. A key feature of Kinnock's reforms was to increase the powers of the Party leadership (Seyd and Whiteley 2002, p.5). After initial resistance from the Party membership:

(it was)...clear that the party's individual members were weary of permanent opposition and were willing to adapt their views on some issues in order to win electoral support. (Seyd and Whiteley 2002, p.5)

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<sup>74</sup> As noted in chapter 4, the effects of the internal changes to the Labour Party's structures were very similar to those that resulted from Hawke and Keating's internal reforms imposed on the Australian Labor Party (Marsh 2006).

Modernisation was consolidated, rather than accelerated under John Smith's brief period as Party leader (Seyd and Whiteley, 2002, p.7). The reform process was accelerated when New Labour secured power in 1997.

### *New Labour's 'Partnership in Power' Reforms*

In 1997, the Party membership formally endorsed New Labour's 'Partnership in Power' (PiP) proposals for significant internal reform (Labour Party 2008). Seyd and Whiteley characterise the changes as:

...the Labour Party's abandonment of its traditional commitment to delegatory democracy...(2002, p..19)

The detail of the changes are outlined elsewhere (see Labour Party 2008), but the net effect was to downgrade both the power of the National Executive Committee and the Annual Conference (Seyd and Whiteley 2002, p.xvi). The Leadership argued that now the Party was in power, Annual Conference should have a promotional role in 'showcasing' the government's achievements (Labour Party 2008, p.6)

The main innovation of the PiP process was to set up a bi-annual policy making cycle, which encouraged greater solicitation of external views<sup>75</sup>.

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<sup>75</sup> *Partnership in Power* built upon earlier reforms agreed in 1990, and after the bruising 1992 election defeat. In 1990, party conference approved the NEC statement *Democracy and policy-making in the 1990s* which approved in principle the rolling programme of policy development and National Policy Forum to oversee the process (Labour party 2008). After the 1992 General election, conference agreed to set up the interim National Policy Forum, the new Joint Policy Committee and the Policy Commissions. One of the reasons why the New

*'Modernising' the Party, Consolidating the New Labour leadership*

New Labour's PiP reforms are instructive about its approach to consultation and decision-making, and the link with the Big Conversation. There are number of themes and tensions which underpin the PiP reforms:

- Most Party members were broadly supportive of the PiP reforms (and the new consultative forums), but only a minority thought they had some influence over policy (Seyd and Whiteley 2002, p.24)
- A preference for plebiscitary forms of democracy which simultaneously create new forums for internal dialogue and debate while strengthening the power of the Party leadership (Seyd and Whiteley 2002, p. 175; Heffernan 2003)
- The Party membership can only modify a pre-determined agenda set by the leadership. The leadership are better able to dominate and 'manage' the consultation process (Davies 2001, p.81).
- Consultation is fused with promotional activities (Davies 2001, p.170)
- Consultation is a consensus-building process

There was a good deal of unease and cynicism from both within the NEC, and the wider membership, about some of the Leadership's attempts at consultation:

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Labour leadership could introduce the new policy-making regime post-1997 was that the membership had already been 'softened up' with these earlier measures.

..like everyone else in the room (the rest of the NEC), knew perfectly well that a Millbank-led 'consultation' was not about listening to the Party members, but selling something to them. (Davies 2001, p.170)<sup>76</sup>

New Labour introduced more professional techniques into its internal decision-making processes. In stream-lining the internal processes, the Party leadership was keen to stimulate debate, while down-playing internal divisions. Often the new mechanisms and forums had professional facilitators to oversee and steer the discussion. It was interesting to note, that a prominent left-winger in the Party, Liz Davies, records that she continually struggled to ensure that her comments were accurately noted and not diluted by the facilitators (Davies 2001). As outlined later, this criticism was also levelled at aspects of the Big Conversation. Critics might dismiss Davies' account as mere 'sour grapes' from a left-wing outsider, but there is evidence that other more mainstream Party members shared some unease at the new consensus-seeking arrangements (Seyd and Whiteley 2002, p.25).

Understanding the PiP process is crucial to understanding the Big Conversation. It is not the intention of this chapter to describe the reforms in full, or indeed evaluate their effectiveness, but rather the underpinning themes and tensions in the internal modernisation process are outlined as they also link with the Big Conversation.

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<sup>76</sup> Liz Davies was a former Labour local councillor, who eventually served on Labour's National Executive Committee from 1998-2000, backed as part of the 'grassroots' campaign by party members to improve internal party democracy. She eventually left the Labour Party to join the Socialist Alliance, before eventually leaving the Alliance. Davies provides a thoroughly interesting account of her time on the NEC (Davies 2001).

### *Plugging in the hearing aid: Labour Learns to Listen*

While the scale of the Big Conversation was unprecedented, similar 'listening' exercises have become a more recent political phenomenon (Tonn 2005)<sup>77</sup>. Most commonly, they have been held by opposition parties as a means to – mainly symbolically – reconnect with the electorate. In British politics, one of the most notable attempts was the Labour Party's 'Labour listens' instigated by Neil Kinnock after the 1987 election defeat.

It is useful to note some of the themes and issues related to Labour Listens as it was an early model of the Big Conversation. The main criticism levelled at Kinnock's effort was that it was a largely superficial and symbolic exercise (Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy 2002).

As a means of enabling target voters to tell Labour what they thought, "Labour Listens" was about as effective as an unplugged hearing aid (Hughes and Wintour 1990, p.100)

There were a number of significant problems with Labour Listens, including:

- The public meetings were entirely unrepresentative of the wider population, mainly attended by political activists.
- There was negligible impact on policy making

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<sup>77</sup> In 1997, William Hague, then leader of the freshly defeated Conservative Party undertook a 'listening tour' of the UK with over 50 visits and apparently met 8 000 people (BBC 1997). The phenomenon of Listening exercises is also a recent occurrence in Australian politics. Mike Rann, while opposition leader, undertook a listening exercise in South Australia modelled on the British Labour Party's 'Labour's Listens' (Manning 2005). More recently, Kevin Rudd, on assuming the Labor leadership, undertook a national 'listening tour' to demonstrate his receptiveness to the wider public (Darby 2006).

- A static and non-innovative format with town hall-style meetings
- Meetings held during the day, thus excluding working people.
- A distinct inability by many MPs to listen effectively

As a consultation initiative it was widely recognised as a failure, but it did succeed on some other levels. Some of the main benefits included (Hughes and Wintour 1990, p.100):

- Despite the numerous flaws in the exercise, there was some new level of commitment to engagement and consultation
- The parallel exercise aimed at women was more successful
- It did not generate any new ideas, but it did crystallise a number of agendas
- It attempted to make a debate outside the confines of the Westminster 'village'

Ultimately Labour Listens was not a success, but it was a key milestone and learning experience for the Party, and provided fresh impetus to its internal reform program. As Geoff Mulgan (former head of No.10 Strategy Unit), argues:

I think one of the interesting things about the past ten years there's been a lot of active work to get beyond the 'labour listens' was it? I'm trying to remember... some dire example of having a road-show and having a public meeting to whoever turned up. Which I think everyone would agree is the worse possible way to engage the public because you get a

dramatically unrepresentative sample of the loudest voices who get heard. (Mulgan, 2007, interview, 5 December)

## **Origins of the Big Conversation**

On 1 October 2003, Tony Blair delivered his keynote address to Labour's annual conference, and announced the Big Conversation (Blair 2003). In the speech, Blair sets out his vision for the initiative:

Over the coming months, I want our Party to begin a new discussion with the people of Britain...But this is not just a discussion between us. Because if we want a Government in touch with the Party, we must have a Party in touch with the people...and so, let us make this the biggest policy consultation ever to have taken place in this country...Not the daily diet of froth; not turning serious politics into soap opera, debasing it, turning it into an endless who knew what, when, as if politicians simply competed on villany. The British people deserve better from the politicians and with respect, from parts of the media too. But real politics with real people... (Blair 2003)

Matthew Taylor, then Labour Party Director of Policy, is widely credited with being the originator of the Big Conversation. The idea of the national debate happened very quickly, and even Taylor himself, was caught off-guard when Blair made the announcement.

I wrote these three or four paragraphs for his speech about a national debate...and I hadn't seen the final version of it, and I was quite shocked when he said all this stuff, and two things happened – a lot of people ran up to me and said what does this mean? Including, obviously, Party people. The other thing was that a whole lot of commentators were quite snooty about it, I remember Jonathan Freedland in particular writing a very snooty article about it. (Taylor, 2007, interview, 5 December)

The unexpectedness of Blair's announcement, the relative lack of prior planning and also the capacity of the Party to deliver this national debate all posed significant challenges. As Taylor confirms:

...It was all pretty much back of the envelope stuff. No-one knew that Tony was going to announce it, he announced and then we had to make it up after that. (Taylor, 2007, interview, 5 December)

This is a useful reminder, if any were needed, that policy is often developed at speed, and without being fully developed or thought-through. This proved to be both a strength and weakness of the initiative.

### *Timing of the Conversation*

The timing of the Big Conversation is crucial to understanding its overall aim and impact. It was launched in late 2003, and its overall objective was to be a public dialogue on the contents and key themes for the Party's manifesto for

the 2005 election.<sup>78</sup> There were clear policy and political drivers for the national debate. The main policy driver was that the PiP program is a bi-annual policy cycle, and for the Big Conversation to have a meaningful impact on the Manifesto then there was only a limited timeframe available.

There were also a number of more pressing political reasons for launching the Big Conversation. At this point, New Labour was in the middle of its second term, and the initial shine of the new government was waning. The re-election of the New Labour government was far more muted than in 1997, with a massively reduced amount of turnout at the 2001 election (see Ch.3). At the 2001 election only 59.4 per cent of the electorate voted, which was the lowest turnout since 1918. This trend was masked to some extent by the UK's majoritarian electoral system, and New Labour had a comfortable 166 seat majority over the Conservatives. According to Matt Carter, General Secretary to the Labour Party at that time:

I think the shock to the system came in 2001 where having delivered some institutional reform... there was a clear sense which that the public was broadly content with what the government was doing and yet democratic participation was falling...There were also at that point discussions about how the Party needed to change to better engage externally with the electorate, in part, there was a sense that it (The Big Conversation) was political... you saw a combination of different events

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<sup>78</sup> When the Big Conversation was launched the exact date and timing of the General Election was not known. The British political system does not have fixed term dates for General Elections. However, it was widely speculated that New Labour would see out the full length of their time in office before seeking a third successive electoral victory.

that made one think that think the perhaps Party should be more open and engaging. (Carter, 2007, interview, 3 December)

There were other political factors which triggered the Big Conversation. At this stage in the second term New Labour was dealing with the backlash from a number of largely unpopular policies. Pre-eminent amongst these was the Blair government's decision to support the US-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003. The discourse about the Iraq invasion dominated British politics for a sustained period of time, and for many Labour supporters the unpopularity of the issue was diverting attention away from some of the progress made on a number of domestic policies<sup>79</sup>. This issue, along with other controversial New Labour policies, cropped up repeatedly during the Big Conversation, much to the chagrin of the Party leadership.

The Big Conversation served a specific political function:

The purposes of the Big Conversation were explicitly political, it was because in the wake of the Iraq war, public service reform, the Party was restless, there was a need to engage with it. I also felt, so did many other people in the Party, that we needed to go out and get the Party

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<sup>79</sup> At this time, New Labour also introduced a number of other controversial domestic policies, not least the decision to introduce University top-up fees and also Foundation hospitals. In 2003, New Labour introduced plans to allow universities to charge 'top-up' tuition fees up to £3000 per year (hitherto most undergraduate degrees cost £1100 per annum). The Education White Paper introduced in January 2003 was in direct contradiction with the 2001 Manifesto commitment that New Labour 'will not introduce top-up fees and has legislated against them' (Alley and Smith 2003).

The proposal to create 'foundation hospitals' was introduced to enable top-performing NHS hospitals to apply for 'foundation' status, which means that they can operate with greater independence from Central Government. Foundation Hospitals are granted some independent powers to generate their own revenue from the private sector. For New Labour this would drive up standards and enable greater patient choice. Critics fear it will lead to a two-tier public health service (Pollock 2004).

engaged in issues before we had to make decisions about them, rather than waiting to make a decision and then trying to win permission for it afterwards (Taylor, 2007, interview, 5 December)

## **Organisation of the Big Conversation**

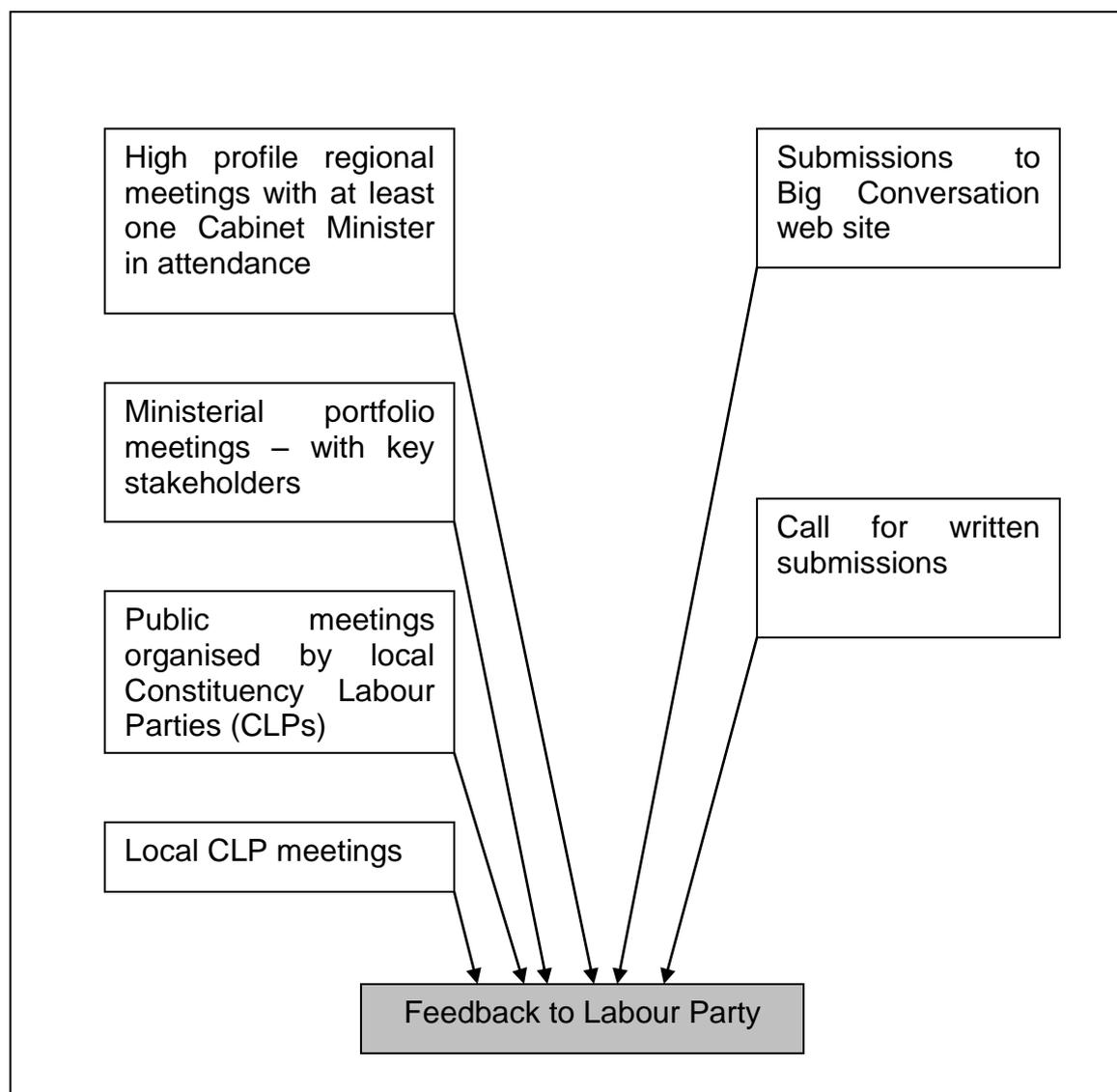
As soon as Blair made the call for a national debate, the Party machinery went into furious action to make it happen. While many of the techniques used in the Big Conversation were not particularly innovative, the scale was quite unprecedented (The British Council 2004). Figure 22 outlines the main methods used.

There were four main elements to the consultation:

- A series of high profile regional meetings, with every government Minister attending at least one event.
- The dedicated Big Conversation web site was launched for public comments, submissions and 'personal stories'.
- A large number of local public meetings and forums were held – predominantly run by local constituency parties (CLPs).
- An open call for written submissions.

To promote the launch of the Big Conversation, the Party also ran a political broadcast on the main television channels as part of the wider publicity and launch of the campaign (2003a). To start the debate, New Labour produced a prospectus called 'A Future Fair for All' (Labour Party 2003).

**Figure 22: Overview of the Big Conversation**



### **Starting the Conversation – a ‘Future Fair for All’**

Labour’s Director of Policy, Matthew Taylor drafted the Big Conversation prospectus, which was billed as the ‘conversation starter’ (Labour Party 2003, p.1). Examining the prospectus in detail is important as it set the agenda and parameters for the wider Big Conversation. The prospectus gives clues as to

which areas of policy were open to external influence. 'A Future Fair for All' has 13 main sections and each covers a broad area of policy such as the economy, health etc. There is a chapter on 'democracy and citizenship' which outlines how New Labour will continue to pursue the NSD agenda for the democratising of democracy. Each chapter poses a main question, and throughout each section are a series of sub-questions for participants to address (see Appendix 7 for full list).

Blair's foreword to 'A Future Fair for All' reinforces a number of the main themes of the NSD, and the desire to promote democratic renewal:

The challenge for politics is how to create a better dialogue between politicians and the people...a new partnership between citizen and government: a modern, streamlined, empowering government on the one hand, and more active, responsible citizens on the other. (Labour Party 2003, p.2)

Blair reiterated his familiar call for further democratisation and devolution:

...and responding to changing needs and expectations also means reform on the way we do things in government, opening up, letting go, devolving power. So we ask how government can be truly empowering...we ask how we can devolve power not just to regions and local government but to neighbourhoods themselves. (Labour Party 2003, p.7).

At a rhetorical level at least, there is a renewed commitment to greater engagement with the public and a promise to move on from the centralised ethos which characterised New Labour's first term.

### *Framing the Big Conversation*

At the outset of 'A Future Fair for All', the parameters and overall aims of the Big Conversation were outlined:

This document is about the issues that will shape our future but it should also be a chance for us to develop new forms of engagement, linking the policy challenges facing government with the issues that most concern ordinary people. The dialogue will frame the thinking for our next manifesto, helping to enrich and feed into the Party's Partnership in Power process. (Labour Party 2003, p.3)

There is a lack of detail about how the conversation will 'frame' the New Labour's thinking (2003, p.3). It was not wholly clear what the filtering process was for the policy priorities, ideas and suggestions that arose from the Big Conversation. At a simple level, it was not even very clear how New Labour would catalogue the best or most suitable ideas. Due to this ambiguity in the aims of the consultation, there were some mixed messages from government Ministers about the use of the Big Conversation. Some such as then Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott were a little sanguine about its influence, while others such as Peter Hain, gave stronger indications that the initiative would

have a more direct impact on policy-making (Lilleker and Lees-Marshment 2005).

The questions frame the 'conversation' by a dual process of simultaneously opening and closing issues for dialogue and debate. For example, none of the questions invite participants to question the merit of specific New Labour policies<sup>80</sup>. Some of the questions also contain an implicit goad for participants to agree with the thrust of New Labour's approach. For example, 'should we experiment with all-postal ballots in general election campaigns?' (Labour Party 2003, p.72). Other questions were much more promotional, and rather heavy-handed, in seeking to praise the government. For example, 'How do we build on economic stability?' (2003, p.15). Other questions are much more rhetorical – 'Should Whitehall departments be cut back – as power is devolved?' (2003, p.72). Many of the questions, however, are relatively open and seem part of a genuine attempt to provoke further thought and deliberation.

Overall, 'A Future Fair for All' steers a course between stimulating debate and dialogue, while not eliciting comment on a range of specific unpopular policies. The risk is that this rather mixed agenda would fuel scepticism that

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<sup>80</sup> Given that a central aim of the Big Conversation was to move debate away from the invasion in Iraq, it is interesting to note how this issue was dealt within the prospectus. There is not a specific question on Iraq, but a rather more general one: "What responsibilities do we have to help people liberate themselves from dictatorial regimes elsewhere in the world? How do we reconcile this with the right to non-interference?" (Labour Party 2003, p.75). The main document only has a very brief mention of the issue and states, "whatever our differences over the war in Iraq - and they have been deeply felt within the Party – that country needs to be rebuilt as a democracy and successful economy. Withdrawal at this stage would simply leave the country in the hands of foreign extremists". (2003, p.75). The party leadership were keen to ensure that issue of Iraq was not a prominent part of the Big Conversation, but the focus should be on mainly domestic issues.

the Leadership was not interested in having an authentic debate. It should be noted, that while no documentation exists to show how widely the prospectus was circulated, it is highly likely that the vast majority of participants did not read the document.

### *Conversing about Democracy and Citizenship*

Given the overall focus of this thesis is on the wider NSD democratic renewal agenda, it is useful to reflect on this section of a 'Future Fair for All'. New Labour took the opportunity of the Big Conversation to take stock its democratic renewal agenda and pose some questions as to how it would continue. It is, then, an important marker in this evolving agenda. The chapter on democracy and citizenship covers five broad areas:

- Constitutional reform
- Routes to re-engagement
- A vibrant local democracy (focus on local government)
- Renewing civil society
- A new role for government.

The chapter identifies many of the key issues and prevailing social trends, including the theme of inequality of voice:

The young and the disadvantaged, who have the most to gain from in engagement in politics and community organisations, are often the least involved. (2003, p.64).

The prospectus also deftly steers away from some issues. It notes that local government can 'feel remote' to the public but makes no similar mention of central government (2003, p.66).

The section on the 'routes to re-engagement' articulates familiar themes (see Ch.3) such as falling public trust and changing patterns of political participation. Interestingly, most of the questions posed by New Labour tend more toward more technocratic responses to the issues, such as lowering the voting age to 16 and extending postal ballots. The willingness to experiment with forms of direct or deliberative appears to have weakened.

The section on local government is one of the more open sections, and there is a good deal of candour about the success and failure of New Labour's reforms:

We have put in place new arrangements including smaller executive cabinets, with elected mayors to create a new democratic dynamism, especially in the big cities. Some of these experiments have been very successful, others less so and some have made no difference either way. (Labour Party 2003, p.67)

This is a frank and insightful analysis. There were a number of high profile controversies for New Labour in relation to its new reforms<sup>81</sup>. The section on 'renewing civil society' is equally open and makes a strong case for improving democratic engagement. There is a strong sense of New Labour being receptive to ideas in this area.

The final section on public sector reform has a far more prescriptive and closed agenda. While the report states that 'the man in Whitehall does not always know best' (2003, p.69) there is strong promotion and defence of New Labour's highly centralised-driven agenda for extending customer 'choice' across the public sector. Compared with the other sections in the chapter, this section is the least open for eliciting countervailing views to Labour's embedded reform agenda.

Overall, the democracy and citizenship chapter is rather mixed. In places it is open, candid and makes a strong defence of the democratising of democracy agenda. Yet, in other sections it is highly prescriptive, closed, and has a focus on using technocratic responses to issues such as falling political trust. There is also an impression that the willingness and commitment to experimentation with democracy is weakening, and a lack of certainty about where the constitutional reform program is headed.

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<sup>81</sup> Most notably in 2002, the citizens of Hartlepool elected 'H'Angus the Monkey' the mascot of the local football team as elected mayor (*BBC Online*, 2002, 'Monkey Mascot elected Mayor', 3 May, viewed 31 August 2008, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/politics/1965569.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/1965569.stm)).

## **Response to the Consultation**

There are no publicly available records of all the Big Conversation events. In addition, with the exception of the web site comments, the Party has not made any of the notes, minutes or submissions publicly available. Nor have they made publicly available any documentation which encapsulates how they used the submissions. For these reasons it is difficult to fully establish the extent of the response to the Big Conversation. However, the British Council (2004, p.3) calculate that the Big Conversation led to:

- 4,000 submissions from local parties including two thirds of all constituency parties.
- Over 40,000 individual submissions
- 15,000 submissions made on the web site.
- 'thousands more attended events'

The response to this national debate was indeed massive, and arguably was the largest such exercise ever undertaken across Britain. The actual number of public events is hard to determine, and a sound estimate is at least in the region of 500 (Hollingshead 2006) although the British Council (2004, p.3) suggest it may have been 'thousands'.

### *Immediate Reaction and Responses*

As such a high profile initiative, the Big Conversation triggered a good deal of response from the other political parties and the media. The political reaction to the launch of the Big Conversation is probably best summed up in the headline of one newspaper article, 'Blair launches consultation amid scorn' (Tempest 2003). Blair and New Labour predicted a good deal of cynicism from both the press and the other parties, and these two groups were not the main intended targets of the exercise (Labour Party 2003, p.3; Leyden 2003).

The response by the main Opposition spokespeople was, for the most part, scornful and dismissive. Co-chair of the Conservative Party, Dr Liam Fox states:

Voter's don't want a conversation with Tony Blair they want an explanation from him, they want to know why their taxes have gone up and why they have not had the delivery on health, education, pensions, or transport they wanted....This is another example of the Government trying to detract attention from their failures... (Leyden 2003)

This was to be a recurrent criticism of Labour using the initiative as a diversionary device, particularly for issues such as the invasion of Iraq. Matthew Taylor<sup>82</sup>, Party Chair of the Liberal Democrats, was equally scathing and dismissive:

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<sup>82</sup> Not to be confused with his namesake Matthew Taylor, former Head of Policy for the Labour Party and architect of the Big Conversation.

Labour have been ignoring us for years now. This simply makes it official. Email your views, but everyone knows that from foundation hospitals to the war in Iraq and tuition fees, Labour doesn't listen. (Leyden 2003)

Interestingly, there was some disquiet from within the Labour Party about the exercise. Paul Flynn, the Labour MP for Newport, attended the launch of the Big Conversation which was held in his constituency. Flynn commented that there was a case that the 'conversation' should have been aimed at increasingly marginalised backbench Labour MPs (Tempest 2003).

### *Media Reaction*

The media reaction, predominantly measured by the print media, was largely sceptical and critical of the whole enterprise. This is not surprising for a number of reasons, not least that most of the British national newspapers are highly sceptical and critical of New Labour<sup>83</sup>. Many of the critics saw the initiative as a PR stunt, and were gifted some headlines with the Big Conversation brand name. The *Daily Mail* led with 'Big conversation? A big con, more like' (Letts 2003). The *Sun* was equally derisive, and its editorial

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<sup>83</sup> As noted in the previous chapter on the People's Panel, only the *Guardian* and the *Mirror* can be considered the most supportive newspaper of New Labour. Thomas (2005) provides a useful account of the British Labour Party's relationship with the print media since 1945. The press were at their most hostile during Labour's 1979-1992 period in Opposition. The *Daily Mail* and *The Sun* are the most vocal, perhaps at times rabid, critics of the government (see note in previous chapter). The press hostility during their years in Opposition during 1979-92 scarred many New Labour politicians (Woodward 2007). Tony Blair in one of his final speeches as Prime Minister lambasted the British print media describing them as 'feral' (Summers & Tempest 2007). In this speech he conceded that New Labour had relied on the use of 'spin' in the early years, which for Blair was borne out of necessity. At a Labour NEC meeting, Liz Davies reports that Blair would often bemoan the media, and that he got a laugh when he said 'we've only got the *Guardian*' (Davies 2001, p.106)

suggesting that Blair's '... Big Conversation campaign is nothing but a publicity campaign' (*The Sun*, 3 December 2003, p.8).

The *Guardian* and the *Daily Mirror* were the only newspapers who took a more open view about the Big Conversation. The *Guardian* editorial on the launch of the initiative was insightful:

No one who takes politics seriously should dismiss Labour's so-called Big Conversation, especially when it has barely begun. It goes without saying that the exercise has limitations: it has been launched from a position of government weakness not strength; it evades issues that the high command is reluctant to address; and it should surely have all happened long ago...Politics and democracy in this country are not in so healthy a state that concerned citizens can afford to sit back and scoff when offered a chance to play a part. (The Guardian, 2003, 'Serious Opportunity' 1 Dec 2003, London)

### **Big Conversation in Detail - High Profile Regional Meetings**

This section focuses on the two main parts of the Big Conversation: the high profile regional meetings and the on-line consultation. While other elements, such as the written submissions local meetings were part of the overall process, they were to some extent less significant.

Blair attended approximately ten regional meetings, while other Cabinet Ministers were encouraged to hold at least two events.<sup>84</sup> A number of Cabinet

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<sup>84</sup> Much of the detail for this section comes from a telephone interview with Jo Gibbons, Tony Blair's former Director of Events, Visits and Scheduling for No.10 (Gibbons, 2008, telephone interview, 14 November).

Ministers accompanied Blair at the initial wave of events, along with the local Labour MP, if appropriate. As Blair made clear in his speech to launch the Big Conversation, he invested a good deal of personal commitment to its success.

The regionally-based events were all organised in broadly the same fashion. For the most part, the Party used third party organisations to run the events. Partner agencies included the Guardian Newspaper, the carmaker Ford, the supermarket Asda, a range of children's charities including Barnado's and the National Children's Home (NCH). The use of third party agencies was a deliberate effort to engage outside the Party's usual stakeholder list.

There are no publicly available lists of attendees at any of the regional events, but broadly speaking there was a mix of Labour supporters and members, organisational or other representatives, and the wider public. Most of the events had an over-arching theme, and stakeholders and participants were largely drawn from organisations and individuals working on these broad policy areas. In some cases, adverts were put out in the local media to recruit participants. Would-be participants had to outline why they wished to attend the event, and the Labour Party then selected appropriate participants.

Jo Gibbons, former Director of Events, Visits and Scheduling for No.10, organised the logistics of the Big Conversation regional events for Blair, and outlined the difficulty in reaching the target audience:

The Big Conversation was trying to achieve a fusion between the general public and their views and the views of Labour Party members...The overall

objective was quite a hard to thing to do, we did not just want to hold open meetings, as these tend to be dominated by political activists...the meetings had to be controlled but not too controlled. (Gibbons, 2008, telephone interview, 14 November)

The regional events had a broadly similar format, and were deliberately not run along *Labour Listens* 'town hall'-style events. After an initial presentation, the participants were divided up into smaller groups comprising 8 – 10 people. Each group was given three different questions to discuss and focus on for a period of about 45 minutes. The questions were mostly drawn the Big Conversation prospectus. Blair tended to arrive about half way through the meeting once the smaller groups had been set up and the discussion was flowing. Blair would sit with each group for about five minutes, sometimes just listening, other times making a contribution.

After the allotted time, the group would nominate a speaker to report back for five minutes on the discussion at the table. Then Blair or the Cabinet Minister would then respond to overall points for about 20 minutes or so. After the event, all participants at the regional events attended by Blair were sent a personal 'thank you' letter and, at some, but not all meetings, a summary of the discussion was included.

### *Use of Facilitators*

At each of the regional events, the small group discussions were co-ordinated by an independent facilitator. The facilitators were heavily briefed beforehand

that their role was solely confined to stimulating the discussion and time-keeping and they were not allowed to either make contributions or lead the discussions. There was, however, some criticism that facilitators and note-takers at some of the meetings diluted some of the more critical comments about the New Labour government (Rudd 2004)<sup>85</sup>.

Some of these meetings were more successful than others. One factor was that some MPs were used as facilitators, and some were better skilled at this than others. Jo Gibbons reported that on the whole, 'the younger MPs tended to be better as facilitators' (Gibbons, 2008, telephone interview, 14 November).

Another factor was the balance of the type of people who attended the meetings. Gibbons suggests that 'the more real the public were, the more dynamic the events were...' (Gibbons, 2008, telephone interview, 14 November). Where there was a high preponderance of activists, the debate was apparently more stilted. Gibbons cites an interesting comparison of two of the 'youth' meetings attended by Blair. The NCH and Barnados organised one event, and intensively briefed and hand-picked the young people who attended. A later event, organised by a local youth charity called 'Kick Ass', had enlisted a small group of participants from the pub the night before. From the point of view of the leadership this latter meeting was far more successful as the participants were more 'real'; in that they spoke directly to the issues and without too much briefing.

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<sup>85</sup> This criticism echoes the same complaint by Liz Davies about the use of facilitation during the PiP process (Davies 2001).

The stiltedness of the conversations was also identified by Estelle Morris, then Arts Minister, at an event held in Liverpool:

Later (Morris) pointed out that the problem with such consultations is that most of the participants are already engaged with politics and can “talk the jargon”. Indeed, one of those present in Liverpool called for “cross-sectoral new templates of practice”, a phrase unlikely to make the missing millions race to the polling stations. (Baldwin 2004)

The representatives from the Labour Party suggest, perhaps not unsurprisingly, that most of the participants were broadly satisfied with the process. There was, however, no formal evaluation of these meetings to gauge the participants’ views about the success of the Big Conversation to validate this claim either way. The media accounts of the meetings are, therefore the best, if unreliable, barometers of the meetings.

There were a few accounts of some of the high profile meetings, and the degree of support for the event largely reflected the bias of the newspaper. Columnists from the *Guardian* and the *Independent* were more effusive:

It was a good start...The PM was able to show his best side...It was also a triumph of substance over froth. The Prime Minister did not breeze in and out yesterday, as if for a photo op. He lingered, way beyond schedule, pen in hand, taking careful notes... (Freedland, 2003)

Yesterday the Prime Minister came to Enfield for a big conversation...to listen to policy suggestions from randomly chosen ticket-applicants. He gave an answer to them all – yes, no, or “if we had the money” – and most went away gratified, even if not agreeing....Labour has found a fine way to converse with voters above the raucous distortions of the media... (Toynbee, 2004)

...It was civic Britain at its best... (Bunting, 2003)

Other accounts were far more critical, Quentin Letts writing in *The Daily Mail* was unconvinced:

Most Odd. These are the first two words that come to mind to describe yesterday's launch of Labour's 'Big Conversation' with the electorate...Stilted is another term....Classically Blairish, really... (Letts, 2003)

It is interesting to compare the different reporters' accounts of the same meeting. For example Jonathan Freedland praised Blair for staying on at the launch event, while Quentin Letts accused Blair of being rude by turning up 50 minutes late (Freedland 2003; Letts 2003). Other participants at the regional meetings were more ambivalent. George Cox, Director-General of the Institute of Directors, attended an event with Patricia Hewitt, Trade and Industry Minister, and reports:

From the point of view of the minister did she learn anything new from it? I doubt it...They have entitled it the conversation. You can't have a conversation with 40 odd people. I am not cynical about it but I didn't come away thinking I had changed the world...(Baldwin 2004)

By and large, depending on a person's degree of political party partisanship, participants and observers sought and found what they wished to find in the Big Conversation's regional meetings. Conservative supporters and those more cynical of the motives of New Labour found the exercise to be 'The Big Con' (Letts 2003) Others, more broadly supportive of New Labour, tended to be more positive (Toynbee 2003).

### **The On-line Big Conversation**

When the Big Conversation was launched the Labour Party established a dedicated web site for the general public to submit their comments and also their personal stories (this was accessible at [www.bigconversation.org](http://www.bigconversation.org)). The aim of the web site was to provide a new, and to some extent, innovative mechanism for the public to join the debate. At different points during the Big Conversation, several Ministers took part in 'live' one-line debates.

There were a number of controversial issues related to the Big Conversation web site, which yielded some unwanted publicity for the Party. Perhaps rather unfortunately for New Labour there was another web site up and running with a similar name. 18 months before the New Labour initiative began, as a quite separate enterprise, a consultant called Jamie Roy had established the web

site [www.thebigconversation.org](http://www.thebigconversation.org) as a forum for a consultation on the National Health Service (NHS). Roy accused New Labour of hijacking his idea and according to one report 'irreparably damaging' his brand (Hollingshead 2006).

The main criticism levelled at the Labour Party was that its web site was excessively moderated and censored out strident criticism of the New Labour project (Bennett 2003, Bisset and Hastings 2003, Hollingshead 2006, Walters 2004). It transpired that to get the web site started, Party officials interviewed a number of people they knew to be broadly sympathetic to Labour, and then posted up the most positive extracts from these interviews as comments (Tonn 2005). A week into the Big Conversation, a number of commentators highlighted how the first 50 or so comments seemed excessively pro-Labour (Bennet 2003; Hollingshead 2006):

I am so proud to have voted labour with my first ever vote a few years ago. Everywhere I look I see new cars wealth, opportunities, investment and most favourable mortgage rates. (Bennett 2003)

I now feel there is a Labour leader I can totally identify with. His name is Tony Blair (Hollingshead 2006)

As the on-line conversation evolved, more mildly critical comments were posted. However, as there was confusion about which was the official web site, Jamie Roy posted all negative comments up on his web site. Roy explained that:

The Labour Party hijacked our idea and has tried to bully us out of complaining. Their project is a Big Con because they censor people's views. We are happy to publish all replies sent to us in error. It serves the Labour Party right for their shocking arrogance. They have cost me a fortune. (Walters 2004).

Some of the more critical comments posted on Roy's Big Conversation web site include (Walters 2004):

The Labour Government should not pretend it is interested in we voters. The people express their opposition clearly and the Great Leader proceeds regardless.

I have two sons who will be at university next year...I was assured top-up fees would not happen. You have betrayed your supporters and gone where not even Maggie Thatcher would have dared.

In addition to the comments posted, there were a number of live on-line discussions with various government Ministers. These were, to some extent, much more interactive. Analysis by Stephen Coleman (2004), calls into question how 'conversational' these webchats were:

Each chat comprised approximately 1,300 words. Of these approximately 800 words (61%) were provided by politicians and an average of 45 words by each member of the public. The structures of these interactions were not conversational. Firstly, members of the public were invited to put questions to the politicians rather than enter into an even-handed conversation with them. Secondly, there was no opportunity for supplementary questions or for members of the public to

comment upon their own questions or the politician's responses. Thirdly, some politicians did not address the questioner when giving their responses. (Coleman 2004, p.14)

For Coleman, these were at best somewhat limited interactions with faint echoes of the Labour Listens exercise which was heavily dominated by politician's rhetoric.

### **Summary Evaluation of the Big Conversation**

This final section offers a summary evaluation of the Big Conversation. In common with the other cases reported in this thesis, the broad evaluative framework draws upon the work of Beetham (1994) and Pratchett (1999) (See Ch.4). In this framework, the principles of representativeness and responsiveness can be used to audit and critically examine the strengths and limitations of the Big Conversation. Representativeness explores the issues of inequality of voice, while responsiveness relates to the links between the consultation and its impact on policy. This section explores the issues related to responsiveness and then focuses on representativeness. Finally, the overall aims of the consultation are reconsidered.

### **Responsiveness**

So what, if any difference, did the Big Conversation have on New Labour's policies? This section considers its impact on New Labour policy from two

aspects. Firstly, key Labour documents are considered to discern the impact of the Big Conversation, with a particular focus on the 'democracy and citizenship' stream. The second aspect considers the degree to which, if at all, the Big Conversation was designed to influence policy.

While the Big Conversation was the external vehicle for shaping the 2005 manifesto, the main driver was the internal PiP process. Labour's National Policy Forum (NPF) and thematic Policy Commissions are the principal mechanisms to formulate and write Party policy, which are then endorsed by the Joint Policy Commission (JPC) and finally at the Party's annual conference.

After the Big Conversation was completed in the summer of 2004, the NPF produced a report which comprised the outcome of both these internal and external consultative processes (Labour Party 2004). The report, 'Britain is Working' is the written culmination of the Big Conversation process. It remains an internal Labour Party document, and was not made publicly available.

The coverage of the Big Conversation in *Britain is Working* is generally good. In the 192 page document, there are 30 separate references to the Big Conversation, and an additional 40 comments and submissions. These references are peppered throughout the document, although in some chapters and sections, greater use of the Big Conversation has been made than others. The document serves the purpose of providing a much more detailed context and statement of Labour's policy positions for the manifesto.

The preamble to the report suggests that the Big Conversation ‘backed up’ the internal consultation process (Labour Party 2004, p.3). The 40 direct quotes from participants of the Big Conversation are mostly generalised concerns about a particular issue, rather than a specific suggestion. Where there are some specific suggestions, such as the suggestion of a ‘national join-a-sports club’ day, there are no firm commitments to make these into formal policy commitments (2004, p.58). There are no directly critical comments about New Labour. There are a small number of quotes which seem to have been selected on the basis that they fit closely with the New Labour agenda. For example,

The NHS has to radically extend patients’ choice to ensure services are responsive to individual needs and requirements. Big Conversation in Warwick (Labour Party 2004, p.118)

Inequality can be tackled by the development of more Sure Start schemes. Young People’s Big Conversation (2004, p.116)

However, these type of comments are in the minority. The vast majority of the comments are mostly generalised statements about values or issues, rather than specific solutions:

School breakfast clubs received strong support as a way of improving health and providing a balanced diet. Schools should provide and promote a balanced diet but people of all ages need to be educated in

how to lead a healthy life. Big Conversation response, Gillingham (2004, p.142)

Government, employers and parents should share the financial burden of childcare. Big Conversation event in Gateshead (2004, p.53)

Overall, the Big Conversation has a fairly strong presence in the document, even if there are no specific ideas or policies that seem to have arisen directly out of the initiative.

#### *Impact on New Labour's 'Democracy and Citizenship' agenda*

The section on 'reconnecting people and politics' in the 'Britain is Working' report retreads very familiar ground. For the most part, this section broadly restates New Labour's approach to democratic renewal. Interestingly, in this chapter of the report, there is not a single mention of the Big Conversation and this seems to have had less impact than on other areas. The main themes include:

- A stronger emphasis on devolution
- A call for a new civic activism
- A commitment to renew civil society, and support volunteering
- Reinvigorating political parties and other institutions to increase public trust and confidence in politics
- Greater onus on responsive government
- Extending citizenship and equality

In the main, the report outlines general policy statements. There are only two specific policy proposals for decision at annual conference. First, New Labour, in principle, supports the idea of lower the voting age to 16, but will await an Electoral Commission report before formally committing to this proposal (Labour Party 2004, p.98). Second, Labour conference is invited to vote on the wording of the section on reform of the House of Lords (2004, p.106).

What impact did the Big Conversation have on the 2005 Party manifesto – via the ‘Britain is Working’ report? The answer appears to be very little. The Big Conversation is not mentioned at all in the 2005 manifesto, and there are no policies which either directly or indirectly supported by the exercise (Labour Party 2005). Chapter 9 of the manifesto outlines New Labour’s values and policies for citizenship and is titled ‘Democracy: power devolved, citizens empowered’ (2005, p102). It is not the intention to outline all these policies in detail, or indeed to judge New Labour’s record on what they did actually promise; but rather to see how far, if at all, the Big Conversation had an impact on the 2005 manifesto.

There is little evidence that the Big Conversation had an impact on the democracy section of the manifesto. While this might not be too surprising given that ultimately the manifesto-writing is mostly an internal process, it is odd that New Labour did not make any reference to their own high profile attempt at a more dialogic form of politics. In summary, the ‘democracy’ section promises:

- More devolution to local government and neighborhoods
- Further reform on the House of Lords
- Legislation to support social enterprises, and reform of the Charities Bill
- National framework for young people and engagement
- Ensuring a 'voice for all' by enhancing equalities legislation and creating a single equality commission

Compared with the 'big bang' set of proposals in the 1997 manifesto, this is rather tame. There is a sense that New Labour's zeal for democratic renewal agenda is waning. There is little evidence or enthusiasm for experiments in direct or deliberative democracy. There is no link between any of these generic policy goals and the demands from many Big Conversation participants to enhance and extend the democratic renewal agenda.

*The Big Conversation, Not the Big Proposition*

Given the scant evidence of any real impact on Labour policy, this raises a key issue in asking what was the purpose of the Big Conversation? From the outset New Labour argued that it was only to 'frame the thinking' for the next manifesto (Labour Party 2003, p.3). It was unclear how far the Big Conversation would influence policy. The 'Britain is Working' report merely suggests that the Big Conversation 'backed up' the internal consultation processes (Labour Party 2004, p.3). Yet, somewhat mixed messages were given out by the Party leadership. According to Lilleker and Less-Marshment

(2005, p.29), 'Government figures stressed that the feedback received could change Party policy'.

The Big Conversation's impact and relationship with formulating policy was indirect. Matt Carter, then General Secretary of the Labour Party, argued that the main aim of the process was to "maintain...dialogue" between the Party and the public, or at least those parts of the public interested in having a dialogue with the Party (Carter, 2007, interview, 3 December). This view was confirmed by Matthew Taylor, the architect of the Big Conversation:

So I think the Big Conversation played a part, not a big part, in just about maintaining a conversation between politicians, Party members and the public at a very very troubled time... it contributed to a healthy modernisation of the way that politicians in a day to day way engaged with people; but it was not, nor was it ever intended to be some kind of quasi-democratic process, because it was a qualitative one rather than a quantitative one, so those people who think it was about achieving something very big will say it was rubbish, but I never thought it was about achieving something big. I think it was about achieving something quite modest, and I think it achieved what it set out to do pretty impressively. (Taylor, 2007, interview, 5 December)

Both Carter and Taylor are clear that the emphasis on dialogue was the key aim rather than gaining achievable outcomes:

It was not intended to create a false sense of policy democracy, it was intended to create a debate, a conversation, a dialogue. It was not the 'Big Proposition' or the 'Big Resolution', it was the 'Big Conversation'. It was intended to be discussion by people. It wasn't inviting people to put forward a motion to the Labour Party conference, it was inviting them to engage in the issues that they were concerned about, and to have a dialogue with the Government and the Party. And that was the benefit of doing that process. (Carter, 2007, interview, 3 December)

What is interesting it that there is some evidence that dialogue created did have an impact, particularly on Blair. While, a range of issues, such as the invasion of Iraq, were not up for debate; on broader questions such as anti-smoking bans, obesity, and work-life issues, there was some receptiveness to the ideas and generic comments that came out of the events:

...So family friendly working – which Tony (Blair) had been previously reasonably sceptical about because he was anti-regulation and pro-business, through the Big Conversation process he became more keen and more willing to countenance further steps to family friendly working. There's no question in my mind about that. (Taylor, 2007, interview, 5 December)

The impact of the Big Conversation was arguably more subtle and indirect than critics acknowledged (Letts 2003). That said, the Party sent rather mixed messages about the potential impact of largest consultation ever undertaken by a British political party. At the outset, some indication was given that it

could influence Party policy, but for those who organised the process, the aims were much more modest.

### *A Genuine Conversation?*

If the more modest aim of the Big Conversation was to achieve a public form of dialogue in a difficult period for New Labour, it is relevant to ask how far the exercise was a genuine attempt at conversation and dialogue. Research by Coleman (2004) goes some way to addressing this question. Coleman uses a sociological approach to ask if the Big Conversation abides by the main criteria of what constitutes a conversation. Coleman identifies a number of characteristics that differentiate conversations from 'institutionalised debate' (2004, p.117):

- Conversations are reciprocal undertakings. Participants agree to enter in them and agree the protocols of collaborative speech.
- Conversations give participants equal rights to speak and respond, in accordance with the implicit codes of turn taking.
- Conversations are informal, unpremeditated, and unbounded.

Coleman examines the on-line Big Conversation exchanges using these criteria, and in his view it was not an 'authentic polylogue' (2004, p.118). Using these criteria, a similar finding applies to the regional and other meetings. A number of MPs struggled with the concept of what the Big

Conversation involved. Coleman cites an illuminating comment by John Prescott (then deputy Prime Minister) on the BBC's Radio 4 Today program:

...Conversation means you have a two-way exchange. You ask the question and I answer it. It's called a conversation. (Coleman 2004, p.116)

As Coleman observes, 'Prescott was, in fact, describing an interview, not a conversation' (2004, p.116). Coleman's overall verdict is:

Tony Blair's 'big conversation' is at best a metaphorical event. It is clearly not a conversation in anything like the usual sense of the term. (Coleman 2004, p.116)

This reinforces the view that for the most part, the Big Conversation was highly regulated and managed, and to some extent, did not conform to higher standards of public dialogue and exchange. This overall critical judgement, along with the Big Conversation's indirect influence on policy, risks overshadowing some of the benefits of the exercise. First, it took a debate outside the confines of the Westminster village, and did manage to draw in a large number of participants. Second, it had some minor impact on Blair's (and some of Ministers) thinking about other policy areas. Geoff Mulgan argues that to the surprise of a number of Labour politicians, the public were much more supportive of ban on smoking in public places than they expected (Mulgan, 2007, interview, 5 December). Third, it placed a number of MPs and in front of somewhat critical audiences and required them to listen and engage with issues, rather than just deliver a speech. Fourth, it did have some

symbolic value of showing New Labour keen to engage in wider public debate (albeit within a highly regulated framework).

### *Lack of Capacity within the Party*

Finally, it is worth noting an additional limiting factor the responsiveness of the Party to the Big Conversation. There was a lack of capacity within the Party itself to handle and deal with the sheer volume of the submissions. This criticism was made by Geoff Mulgan, Blair's former No.10 Head of Strategy:

One it became quite clear that the Party had almost no capacity to do this sort of thing, and the Party was pretty atrophied in its machinery. So, some of the many events which were held were pretty much events which people found different in style and energising. Some of the MPs were really good at it and were able to use it for a different style of conversation with their public, but most weren't, most didn't know how to do that kind of 'dialogue politics', if you like, and so the Party didn't have the capacity. (Mulgan, 2007, interview, 5 December)

### **Representativeness and the Big Conversation**

The second key theme of the Beetham-Pratchett framework is representativeness. This invites a consideration of how far the initiative dealt with issues of inequality of voice. On the whole, people from higher socio-economic groups are much more likely to engage civically than people from lower socio-economic groups (see Ch.3). Given that equality is a central motif

of Labour politics, it is important to consider how far this issue was addressed in the Big Conversation.

From the outset, it was clear that the principle of representativeness was not central to how the Big Conversation was designed. As Jo Gibbons notes, the aim of the exercise was to engage a fusion of the wider public and Labour Party members. There is no formal evaluation or evidence to validate the types of people who engaged with the process, but anecdotally, it seems that there was a substantial involvement of Labour Party members and people active in their local community. In terms of involving the wider public, different aspects of the Big Conversation fared better than others.

At the regional meetings, it was clear that within certain parameters, efforts were made to both invite people who were not considered political activists. The use of facilitators in smaller groups was a useful mechanism in ensuring that some voices did not dominate. However, the invite-only nature of these events ensured that activists were still the majority. It is striking, that even where people who were not activists did attend, they were not always comfortable in speaking out. Pauline Kelly, an unemployed participant was apparently 'tongue-tied' on meeting the PM (Letts 2003). As far as can be shown, a similar pattern was happened at a local level, with perhaps even greater numbers of Party activists present.

The Big Conversation web site offered the opportunity for wider public input. Yet, as explored in Chapter 3, people from lower socio-economic groups are

far less likely to either own or have access to a computer. The initial set of comments posted on the Labour Party's Big Conversation web site was heavily drawn from Party activists and supporters. Moreover, the rather heavy-handed moderation of more critical comments – particularly about the war in Iraq – somewhat skewed the debate. In this respect, while the web site offered the opportunity for a more diverse forum of views and comments, the heavy moderation appeared to create some inequality of voice.

Finally, in terms of submissions sent to the Party, as far as can be shown these were predominantly from organised community, voluntary, or business groups. This is a more traditional form of consultation, and was pitched specifically at these groups, rather than the public.

In sum, the Big Conversation was targeted at a mix of Party members, key stakeholders, and the wider public. There was not a significant attempt made to create forums and consultative mechanisms to achieve a greater equality of voice. While the Labour Party formally invited the wider public to participate, it took only limited measures to ensure that those less likely to engage took some part.

### **The Aims of the Big Conversation Reconsidered**

Finally, it is worth reconsidering the overall aims of the Big Conversation. Why would New Labour go through all the time and expense of such a large consultation, if it was in the eyes of some critics, a mere 'PR stunt' (Letts

2003)? The Big Conversation was an imperfect process and had a number of different, and at times, contradictory aims.

First, the Big Conversation was both a *diversionary* and *legitimising* device. It was diversionary in that it was an explicit attempt to promote dialogue away from the debate about the invasion of Iraq. It was a legitimising device in that it sought to bring in a wider range of 'publics', including a largely neglected Party membership, into New Labour's tightly controlled policy-making process.

Further, it was a *campaigning* device (Rawnsley 2003; Toynbee 2004). It was a deliberate attempt to gain support and build a broad coalition of support for the Party's next manifesto. The Big Conversation was underpinned by one of the central tensions in the New Social Democracy; in that it sought to devolve responsibility, but retain centralised power (Fitzpatrick 2003). It was, in part, a strategy to educate the voters about the realities of government and reinforce the theme of active citizenship and individual responsibility. Despite the attempt to open up new spaces for dialogue and debate, the overall upshot was to reinforce centralised forms of power and control (Tonn 2005). Lilleker and Less-Marshment (2005) examine the Big Conversation through the prism of political marketing, and see it as one of the latest manifestations of the increased use of marketing techniques in the political process. In their analysis:

...political marketing practice, as thus far defined, appears to force centralisation on to the electioneering process. (Lilleker and Lees-Marshment, 2005, p.31)

This links to with another underlying function of the Big Conversation – it was also a *therapeutic* device (Tonn 2005). Rawnsley notes:

...Here, I think, we reach the deeper meaning of the Big Conversation. When they came to office in 1997, New Labour tended to think that all the troubles that the Tories had got themselves into could be explained by the fact that they were, well, the Tories. New Labour has now had...painful lessons about just how bloody difficult it is to govern...The underlying purpose is less about learning from the country and more about educating the country in the toughness of choices. (Rawnsley 2003)

This is a view shared, in part, by Roy Hattersley, former deputy leader of the Labour Party. Hattersley describes the Big Conversation as ‘a confidence trick in a good cause’ (Hattersley 2003). His view was that while the exercise in listening was bogus, it was a useful initiative none-the-less. Hattersley argues that that while the ‘dialogue is a monologue in disguise’, it is to be encouraged as it showed an ‘admission that the public can not be taken for granted’ (Hattersley 2003).

Finally, it was a *listening* device, and an attempt at more dialogic politics. There was, within with set parameters, an attempt to hear everyday political

concerns outside the London, and also provide some mechanisms for dialogue. While the dialogue was uneven, stilted, and heavily wrapped around a tightly controlled agenda, it was still a dialogue nonetheless. It should be recalled that the entire process was put together at speed, and in Matthew Taylor's view:

...Its great strength was that it changed the way that politicians do engagement with the public...where I think the Big Conversation did not succeed, it was not in anyway a scientific, or 'capital D' 'Democratic' process by which people were consulted and policy conclusions were reached. (Taylor, 2007, interview, 5 December)

The multiple aims of the Big Conversation had the effect of pulling New Labour's initiative in a number of different, and at times contradictory, directions. Despite the views of right-wing commentators, there was some attempt at listening and dialogue, but this aim also had to sit alongside the other goals of therapy, legitimisation and diversion. These interlocking aims perhaps reinforce both why New Labour put so much effort into it, and yet ultimately explains why it had very little direct impact on policy.

### **The Big Conversation – A Transitory Device**

In this respect, the Big Conversation, like the People's Panel outlined the previous chapter, is a bold experiment, albeit a strongly flawed one. It shows New Labour's genuine interest in creating a more dialogic polity, but also its ambivalence about the value of the process:

...The Big Conversation was...an oddly sort of mixed experience, quite good in many ways in terms of conception; problematic in execution. Quite good in terms of a notion of how you make a strategic policy making exercise more open, of course also overshadowed by the fact of Iraq, and the web site and so on couldn't have, you know, feedback on Iraq and so on. Therefore, symbolising, in some ways the more controlling 'spin' era of politics, rather than a more open dialogic one. So, I think it was very much a transitional device rather than being a kind of end-point. (Mulgan, 2007, Interview, 5 December)

## Chapter 7

### *Case Study 3 - The 'Growing Victoria Together'*

#### *Summit (2000)*

## **Introduction**

This thesis is a comparative study of five cases of British and Australian Labo(u)r government's attempts at instigating new forms of consultation and engagement. While the first section of the thesis sets the context, the second section focuses on each of the five cases in detail. Chapters 5 and 6 outline and evaluate British New Labour's 'People's Panel' and 'Big Conversation'. The focus of the case studies now shifts to Australia. Shortly after New Labour took office in 1997 and began to implement its Third Way–New Social Democracy (NSD) agenda, a number of Australian State Labor governments took office (see Table 1). These Australian Labor governments are loosely influenced by both the Hawke–Keating governments and New Labour, and developed new mechanisms for enhancing citizen-engagement.

This chapter examines a key consultation initiative undertaken by the Victorian Labor Government—the 'Growing Victoria Together' (GVT) Summit, which took place in March 2000. The Bracks' government was one of the first Australian Labor States to pursue a broadly NSD-influenced agenda. The GVT Summit was an early initiative designed to be a springboard for setting a new policy and political direction in Victoria. This chapter examines some of the wider projects and initiatives that stemmed from the Summit, which had the overall aim of creating a more 'vibrant democracy' in Victoria (Department of Premier and Cabinet 2005, p.20).

For Labor State governments in Australia, the democratic renewal agenda has been woven into a new focus on producing mid-to-long term strategic plans.<sup>86</sup>

Victoria was the first Australian State to develop a ten-year State-wide strategic Plan. This chapter examines the GVT agenda in detail to investigate how effective it was in enhancing the relationship between the government and Victorian civil society. How far did the GVT Summit, and some of its spin-off projects, show a willingness to introduce a form of the NSD at the State level in Australia?

This chapter is organised in the same way as the other case studies in this research. First, the wider political context for the Bracks government is outlined. The details of the GVT Summit are then summarised along with other key initiatives. The final section of the chapter offers a summary evaluation of the case study.

### **The Victorian Political Context**

The surprise election of the Bracks minority government in November 1999 was arguably part of 'one of the most dramatic and transformative six months in Victorian political history' (Economou 2000b, p.226). Bracks' ALP was lagging in the polls and most commentators were predicting another defeat for Labor. Jeff Kennett, the former Liberal Premier, had ruled over Victoria for

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<sup>86</sup> In the US, during the late 1980s/early 1990s, a number of States had produced whole-of-State Plans as a mechanism to stimulate economic growth and achieve other policy goals. One of the most notable examples is the 'Oregon Shines' plan which was a source of policy emulation on a number of Australian states including Tasmania and South Australia (State of Oregon 1989).

seven years from 1992 to 1999, and had dominated Victorian politics during this period (Economou, 2000b).

Jeff Kennett's Liberal-National coalition was a political earthquake in Australian State politics, and 'Kennett, was a larger than life character ... [who] dominated Victorian politics for the seven years before Bracks became leader in a way that has not been seen for a generation' (Costar and Hayward 2005, p. 89). Kennett's government gained a reputation as one of the most 'actively reformist' State governments, pursuing a vigorous neo-liberal agenda (Economou 1998, p.261).<sup>87</sup>

When Kennett's government took office in 1992, it inherited a relatively large public deficit from the previous Labor administration. Kennett instigated a brutal program of budget cutting and privatisation. Costar and Economou (1999, p.90) estimate that in Kennett's first term, 55 000 public servants were retrenched; 350 schools were closed (along with large-scale retrenchments); and mass sackings occurred in the transport sector. They also report the sale of the State's electricity and gas utilities, along with the ambulance service, a number of prisons and some smaller public service agencies.

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<sup>87</sup> In Australia, the term economic rationalism is often used to describe neo-liberal politics, and is mostly closely associated with John Howard's Federal Liberal Coalition government from 1996 – 2007. Neo-liberalism, crudely defined, is inspired by the political thought of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, and promotes 'free-market' economics, a focus on individual freedom, a small State, extensive privatisation and a minimal welfare state (Hayek 1950; Friedman 1962).

While the detail of Kennett's policy agenda is outlined elsewhere (Costar and Economou, 1999), it is Kennett's approach to politics that is of key interest to this chapter:

Kennett's style was to be CEO of Victoria ... he pursued his objectives with an at times breathtaking disregard for consultation and a dismissive attitude towards any opposition. These traits were to be his undoing. (Costar and Hayward 2005, p.96)

Kennett remains a key influence on both Bracks' style as Premier and the policy agenda of the then newly elected Labor government:

...where Kennett had been brash and uncompromising, Bracks went out of his way to listen and be inclusive (Costar & Hayward 2005, p. 89).

### *The Cain Legacy*

While Bracks deliberately sought to distance himself from Kennett, Costar and Hayward (2005) argue that Bracks also wanted to differentiate his government from the previous Labor administration led by John Cain. Cain was Premier from 1982 to 1990, and for much of this time enjoyed strong popularity ratings in the Victorian electorate. As Premier, Cain promoted a broad social democratic agenda, with a particular focus on pursuing social justice. However, Cain's ALP government imploded with the onset of the 1990–91 recession and presided over a 'number of spectacular financial collapses', most notably, the huge deficit associated with 'WorkCare'—the State workers' compensation

scheme (Costar and Hayward 2005, p. 93). Cain was ultimately forced to resign as a result of the parlous state of the public finances<sup>88</sup>.

In 1990, Steve Bracks worked for Cain as an advisor and witnessed first hand the implosion of the Labor government. This close-at-hand observation encouraged in Bracks 'a cautious political style and fiscal conservatism' (Costar and Hayward 2005, p. 93). Bracks' incremental political approach owes something to both an aversion to the Kennett era as well as the collapse of the Cain–Kirner Labor government.

### **Bracks and the NSD**

In a number of respects, the Bracks government epitomises the NSD at an Australian State level. First, fiscal conservatism, which is a key feature of the NSD, is an integral part of Bracks' social democratic politics. As a number of commentators point out, Bracks left in place the same economic framework that was established during the Kennett revolution (Costar and Hayward, 2005, Economou, 2000a, 2001a, 2002). The Bracks government was enthusiastic about engaging with the Victorian business community and it is striking that it received more positive support for its budgets than from the wider community sector.

Second, the Bracks government also put a strong emphasis on caution and pragmatism. There is an interesting parallel with the archetypal NSD

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<sup>88</sup> Joan Kirner succeeded Cain as Labor Premier in 1990, and remained opposition leader for a short period after the 1992 defeat to Kennett.

government — the Blair-led New Labour government. For Blair, pragmatism was a key component of New Labour's political approach which attempted to eschew ideology in favour of a 'whatever works' approach (Labour Party 1997). For Bracks, pragmatism was an obvious response given the ALP's unexpected victory and a fear of alienating the private sector. That said, the similarities between Blair and Bracks' style of pragmatism should not be overstated. For Blair, pragmatism was often a coda for his strong reformist approach to modernising the public sector. Yet Bracks' pragmatism led to a much more cautious policy approach, and his government was dogged with a 'do-nothing' label (Economou 2001b).

Third, Bracks' 'nice guy' tag reflected a strong consensual political conviction which lasted for three terms, in which he sought to make policy 'without making enemies' (Costar & Hayward 2005, p. 111). This consensual approach, particularly between capital and labour, is a defining characteristic (and criticism) of the NSD (Fitzpatrick 2003). Bracks' government was very proactive in courting the private sector. John Brumby, Bracks' Treasurer, drove this process and was 'successfully pursuing another agenda heartily approved of by business, but not recognisably Labor' (Costar & Hayward 2005, p. 111). Bracks' government had no interest at all in rolling back the Kennett privatisations.

There are some interesting echoes with Bracks' consensual approach and New Labour. New Labour are criticised for invoking the language of making 'tough choices' but then in seeking to appeal to all groups, they fail to make

genuine transformational change, or capitulate to the demands of capital (Giddens 2000, p.21). A similar criticism was made of the Hawke government – that its focus on consensus concealed a rather conservative agenda (Johnson 1989, p.96). The Bracks administration, and its GVT agenda, has been criticised on these grounds (Davidson 2000). The GVT Summit was accused of being a mechanism to foster a consensus where none existed, and that it concealed a conservative, incremental agenda.

There is, however, a limit in how far the Bracks administration could be described as a NSD government. Bracks and his Ministers appear never to have used the terms ‘New Social Democracy’ or the ‘Third Way’ to describe their politics. In its purest form, the NSD agenda involves a high degree of state activism and reform, which the Bracks government never aspired to achieve. It is perhaps rather uncharitable to describe them as ‘NSD-lite’. None-the-less, the politics of the NSD, particularly the British New Labour government, was an influence. According to one senior figure in the Victorian Government at that time, one of the aims of the GVT Summit was to ‘leverage third way ideas’ (Anon, 2009, interview, 15 February). Shortly after the Bracks government took office, Geoff Mulgan (former Director of the No.10 Strategy Unit under Blair) and Tom Bentley (former Head of the think tank Demos)—both closely aligned to New Labour—met with a number of Victorian Government figures to establish links.

## Origins of GVT

The new Victorian Labor Government was caught off guard when it won the 1999 State election. The ALP had developed a ‘transition to government’ strategy but this was a rather rudimentary document (Costar and Hayward 2005, p. 97). Very quickly the government was under pressure to formulate a clear and distinct policy direction, which became the driving force for creating what was to become the GVT strategy:

...after the election there was a sense of not knowing what the Bracks government stood for. Initially this was resolved by the establishment of four pillars of governance – restoring democracy through open and accountable government; responsible financial management; delivering improved services; and promoting growth across the whole state. (Crowley and Coffey 2007, p. 28)

Bracks and his Ministers engaged a number of former Cain advisors and former Ministers to prepare the new Ministerial team and begin this work on developing a new agenda. It was decided that the State would run a conference loosely modelled on Bob Hawke’s Accord Summits held in the 1980s<sup>89</sup>. The Accord Summits epitomised the Hawke government’s search for

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<sup>89</sup> The Accord summits were an innovation of the Hawke government (Singleton 1990). In essence, Hawke forged an agreement between the interests of capital and labour. The ALP brokered a deal with the trade union movement for wage restraint—negotiated through its peak body, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU)—to enable the private sector and the business community to reduce unemployment and increase wider employment. There were two main summits, the first held in 1983, and the later tax policy summit held in 1985.

consensual politics and dialogue between opposing stakeholders (Johnson 1989, p.103). At one level, the Accord attempted to play down the differences between labour and capital, and there is some echo of the politics of the NSD which seeks to transcend the traditional left-right axis. While the Accord is not without precedent in Australian politics (Johnson 1989, p.105), as a consensus-building exercise it has proved to a popular source of inspiration for policy transfer in Australian Labor politics<sup>90</sup>.

### **GVT Summit**

In July 2000, Terry Moran was hand-picked by Bracks and appointed Secretary to the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet. It was Moran's idea to hold the Summit<sup>91</sup>. According to Professor David Adams, who was deputy Director in Bracks' Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC), there were three main aims in holding the GVT Summit:

Our primary logic was:

- to establish what the potential new role for a fresh Labor government might be by widely scanning the policy field
- to get stakeholder buy-in and measure momentum around issues

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<sup>90</sup> The South Australian government held an economic summit loosely based on the Victoria GVT Summit and the Hawke Accord Summits (see Ch.8). The 2020 Summit can also be loosely connected to the Accord summits (Ch.9).

<sup>91</sup> Terry Moran has links with the 2020 Summit (Ch.9). In the early 1990s, Moran was CEO of the Victorian State Training Board. In 1998, he was appointed Director-General of Education Queensland – where he established links with future Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. Rudd appointed Moran as Secretary of the Federal Department of Premier and Cabinet in 2007. Moran is also a Director of Grattan Institute – a progressive think tank based in Melbourne.

- to be seen as major players on the national stage in preparation for subsequent Victorian COAG agendas such as the Human Capital Agenda. This third objective is not well understood by most observers and not widely discussed. (Adams, 2009, email, 13 February)

At a State level, the Summit served a predominantly symbolic function in bringing together a range of different groups previously excluded under the Kennett regime. It included a range of representatives from the business and community sectors along with some government and political stakeholders. There were 102 delegates including representatives from groups such as Business Victoria, Parents Victoria, Victorian Farmers Federation, Victorian Council of Social Services and the Brotherhood of St Lawrence (Shaw and Costa 2000).

The Summit was held over two days on 30 and 31 March 2000 in Parliament House and, in neat symmetry with the Accord Summits, was chaired by former Prime Minister Bob Hawke. The main theme of the GVT Summit was economic growth. It followed a rather traditional conference structure with keynote addresses followed by smaller discussion groups, which then fed back into a final plenary session. The format of the Summit was not particularly innovative, nor did it closely resemble an experiment in deliberative politics. Its main function was to be a general forum for an exchange of views between the different participants rather than a deeper process of public reasoning with specific policy goals in mind.

## **Outcomes from the GVT Summit**

At the end of the Summit, the Bracks government drew up a communiqué summarising the main issues (Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC), 2000a). The communiqué set out a number of key recommendations which outlined how the Bracks government would continue to develop the GVT agenda. These include:

- The government would develop a medium-to-long term State plan which would set economic and social policy priorities for Victoria.
- The GVT State Plan would adopt a 'triple bottom line' approach to economic growth, social development and environmental sustainability.
- The Plan would 'develop a consultative process to set targets and benchmarks in meeting its social goals, and that it will audit existing levels of access to and adequacy of services' (DPC 2000a, p. 3).
- The government would establish a Victorian Economic Environmental and Social Advisory Council (VEESAC) that 'will enrich policy development and build community partnerships, and will be chaired by the Premier, with equal representation from businesses and employer organisations, unions, community groups and State and local governments' (DPC 2000a, p. 3).

In addition to the recommendations outlined in the communiqué, the Bracks government also introduced a suite of other policy proposals to build upon the GVT Summit:

- rolling out a program of Community Cabinets
- establishing the Department of Victorian Communities (DVC)

- setting up the community sector partnership group to pilot and oversee new forms of partnerships to deliver public services
- establishing a community fund to provide seed funding for local based community activities.

According to one senior public servant who was involved with the Summit:

One of the most significant outcomes from the GVT Summit was establishing the Department of Victorian Communities. This was designed to find an institutional 'home' for strengthening the relationship with the wider Victorian community (Anon, 2009, interview, 15 February)

What should be made clear from this process is that for most of these outcomes, the decision to implement them had already been made *before* the Summit. By and large, participants at the Summit were broadly endorsing an agenda already developed by Bracks and his Ministerial team. The Summit's main importance:

...lay more in it being a symbol of the Bracks government's intention to pursue a much more consensus-oriented approach to policy-making than its predecessor (Economou 2000a p. 570).

In addition, the Summit had an explicit set of political aims. The Bracks government was keen to build wider political legitimacy into the top-down and centrally driven GVT agenda, and the Summit was a useful mechanism for enabling some feedback into this process. Many of the delegates to the

Summit had been ostracised during the Kennett years, and while the delegates' level of influence over the agenda was limited, there was a significant amount of goodwill for Bracks' GVT agenda. The other key political aim was to provide a platform to show Bracks as an emerging statesman in Australian politics and boost his credibility through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) process.

### *Media and Political Reaction to the GVT Summit*

The GVT Summit was a high profile event in the State and received a good deal of—albeit mixed—media reaction. The more supportive articles highlighted the following issues:

- it was an attempt at a more consultative approach to government (Shaw and Costa 2000)
- many delegates reported positive experiences of attending the conference with an opportunity to air their views (Shaw and Costa 2000)
- there was an indication that the Summit helped ease relations between the business sector and unions in the state (Charles 2000, Shaw and Costa 2000).

The more critical articles outlined the following issues:

- it was a mere 'talkfest', with little tangible outcome (Gettler 2000; Hannan 2001)

- it was a waste of taxpayers money (Hannan 2001)<sup>92 93</sup>
- it attempted to achieve consensus when none existed (Barber 2000)
- it neglected the IT industry (Turner 2000)
- criticism of Hawke as chair of the event (Cusworth 2000; Hudson and Gilchrist 2000).

There was no formal evaluation of the GVT Summit and no attempt was made to seek the views of the participants on the process. The press reports of the Summit provide a useful snapshot of the publicly-stated views of some participants. The main media reports suggest:

...[the] consensus among participants is that the broad-ranging, unanimously endorsed report will produce positive, concrete action. (Shaw and Costa 2000)

Some of the main supportive comments include: (Shaw and Costa 2000):

- it gave the GVT process added credibility
- there was a useful focus on regional and rural issues
- a more inclusive approach to policy-making

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<sup>92</sup> As an interesting aside it seems as if the Rudd government learned some lessons from this negative focus on public money spent on such a conference. As explored in Chapter 9, the delegates to the 2020 Summit were asked to fund their own expenses.

<sup>93</sup> Interestingly, much of the criticism seems to focus on the choice (and cost) of Bob Hawke chairing the summit (Cusworth 2000). A rather hysterical headline in the *Hobart Mercury* (15 February 2000) is 'Hawke invitation outrage'. The 'outrage' seems mostly confined to the Victorian Liberal opposition. Mark Birrell, then Opposition Upper House leader, argued that '[they're] having a summit so they can think of a vision and now we're having someone from the 1980s to tell us what it should be' (*Hobart Mercury*, 15 Feb 2000, p.4). It is reported that Victorian taxpayers footed Hawke's expenses and travel, although Hawke was quoted as saying 'Payment hasn't been mentioned and if it were, I would reject it' (Hudson 2000, p.9).

- the group discussions 'less combative' than one participant feared

A typical comment by a GVT Summiteer was made by Belinda Morieson, Victorian Secretary of the Australian Nurses Federation, who defended the range of government audits and taskforces initiated by the Bracks government:

the problem in my specific area is that because everything's been so decimated by Kennett, you don't know what's left ... I thought it was pretty astonishing to achieve what was achieved. (Shaw and Costa 2000)

Inevitably, there were some complaints. Beth Sheffield, President of Parents Victoria, said the 'Summit failed to adequately acknowledge the importance of public education' (Shaw and Costa, 2000). Yet, these views, at least publicly, were in the minority. There is a sense that, particularly among the trade union and community sector delegates, the very fact that the government established the Summit was a step forward.

The more substantive press criticisms of the Summit address a central issue in NSD politics—the issue of achieving consensus. There was some media speculation that one of the main reasons Bracks held the Summit was to help diffuse unrest in the wider Victorian business community (Barber 2000; Davidson 2000; Gettler 2000). Gettler (2000) notes the industrial dispute at Yallourn and construction workers' staged walkouts at the Colonial Stadium. Apparently, 'business was talking about a capital strike' and the Bracks

government was under pressure to restore the confidence of large private sector companies (2000, p.12). This reading seems to suggest that the GVT Summit was part of a concerted ploy to appease the interest of 'big business' —a charge consistently made of the Blair New Labour government (Giddens 2000, p.24):

In this age of irreconcilable differences, government is required to make decisions. There is no Hawke magic that will change this, because there is no happy family of interests that will emerge today and tomorrow to allow Bracks to govern by consensus...Either his government will repair the damage to the physical and human infrastructure left by the Kennett government, or his government will – consciously or not – sanctify the Kennett inheritance by meaningless stunts like this. (Davidson 2000, p.17)

Apparently, Bracks had implored the GVT participants to 'find and champion common ground', but this seemed elusive given the clear divide between business and the unions at that time (Barber 2000, p.1). One of the most disputed issues was the construction industry's campaign for shorter working hours which was strongly resisted by Business Victoria and its allies. Barber notes:

As the delegates broke into three-hour workshops, agreement on all but the importance of dialogue seemed beyond them...The problem is the summit has been charged with producing a vague motherhood statement – a communiqué on how to boost the economy and create

jobs – when the real issues are beyond consensus...and while most of the 'stakeholders' paid tribute to this new consultative style today, when it comes to the core issues, Steve Bracks cannot please everyone. (Barber 2000, p.1)

As a consensus-building exercise, the GVT Summit should be viewed as a first step by the Bracks government. For the most part, participants' expectations of any tangible outcomes arising from the Summit were quite low. It was never intended to be a forum for resolving an industrial dispute with a binding resolution. Nor was the GVT Summit an exercise in deliberative democracy. It was not designed to be a process of public reasoning to achieve specific policy outcomes. Rather, participants exchanged views about their particular concerns and there was only minimal expectation that they would change or amend their views to any great extent as a result of attending the Summit. The Summit can be seen as a first step in the attempt by the Bracks government to forge a more inclusive polity in Victoria. By examining some of the suite of policies and programs that followed the Summit, it is possible to get a clearer view of how successful Bracks managed to achieve this aim.

### **GVT—the State Plan**

The GVT State Plan was released in November 2000; nine months after the Summit took place and just over one year on from when the Bracks government was elected. The State Plan is described as a 'signpost document which attempts to break from the Kennett era but also appeases

both private and public sector interests (Crowley and Coffey 2007, p. 29). Crowley and Coffey (2007) contrast the Victorian GVT process with the more community-based 'Tasmania Together' process. In their view, the GVT State Plan was part of an attempt to initiate new forms of governance in the State, especially as it emphasised the triple bottom line approach to policy-making. The GVT plan states:

It is clear that we need a broader measure of progress and common prosperity than economic growth alone. (Department of Premier and Cabinet 2001, p. 3)

The GVT plan remains one of the earliest attempts by a State-based Labor government to fuse together economic, environmental and social goals. The GVT plan sets out 10 strategic issues which constitute the Bracks' ten-year vision for Victoria. These issues include a focus on lifelong learning, sound financial management, sustainable development and two key areas of interest to this research:

- promoting rights and respecting diversity
- providing a government 'that listens and leads' (Department of Premier and Cabinet 2001, p. 6).

The GVT plan highlights a range of challenges facing Victoria, and political and civil participation is a prominent part of this policy agenda. The GVT plan states that Victoria has a 'proud tradition of community participation', but that a central concern is 'improving confidence and participation in democratic decision-making' (DPC–Vic 2001, pp. 4–5).

The GVT focus on political participation helps locate the Bracks' government policy agenda within the broader politics of the NSD. While the GVT plan does not set out a radical program of the 'democratising of democracy' (Giddens 1998, pp.70-77), there is still an evident desire to focus and improve the existing relationship between the government and the wider Victorian civil society. In the latter revised editions of the GVT plan, this democratic renewal agenda became part of the Bracks government's 'vibrant democracy' agenda (Department of Premier and Cabinet 2005, p.20).

The GVT plan released in 2000 sets out the Bracks government's achievements and the priority actions for each of the 10 strategic issues. The key issues of most relevance to this thesis are outlined in Table 18.

Since the GVT booklet was intended for the wider public, it tends to make rather general statements and set broad goals. While the Bracks government publish annual progress reports on the GVT agenda, it is noteworthy that the original targets are deliberately general.

**Table 18: Growing Victoria Together – Democratic Renewal Agenda**

<b>Strategic Issue: Building cohesive communities and reducing inequalities</b>		
<i>Past Achievements</i>	<i>Priority Actions</i>	<i>Demonstrating Progress</i>
Began 10 community building projects, and introduced new guidelines for the Community Support Fund	Develop new community partnerships with local councils to meet local need	The extent and diversity of participation in community, cultural and recreational organisations will increase
	Enhance community participation and engagement in cultural activities	Inequalities in health, education and wellbeing between communities will be reduced
<b>Strategic Issue: Promoting rights and respecting diversity</b>		
<i>Past Achievements</i>	<i>Priority Actions</i>	<i>Demonstrating Progress</i>
Ended discrimination against same sex couple in areas such as property rights	Improve awareness of rights and promote equal opportunity	Awareness of legal and civil rights will increase
Begun implementing racial and religious tolerance legislation	Increase religious and racial tolerance	More Victorians from all backgrounds will have the opportunity to have a say on issues which matter to them
	Promote Aboriginal reconciliation	
	Increase the diversity of representation on decision-making boards and in local government	
<b>Strategic Issue: Government that listens and leads</b>		
<i>Past Achievements</i>	<i>Priority Actions</i>	<i>Demonstrating Progress</i>
Held regular Community Cabinet meetings	Provide strong, clear visions and direction with regular reports on progress	More Victorians will be consulted on issues which matter to them
Held community consultations on many important issues such as health, education, etc.	Make government more open, democratic and inclusive through better access to decision-making processes including numerous Community Cabinets each year	There will be regular reports on progress in improving the quality of life for all Victorians and their communities
Increased parliamentary sitting days and taken parliament outside Melbourne for the first time	Strengthen capacity of the public sector	

*Adapted from: Department of Premier and Cabinet 2001, pp. 22–28*

The GVT priorities for a vibrant democracy and improved civic participation are rather general and limited. For example, the GVT plan argues that community participation will be enhanced and 'more Victorians from all backgrounds will have the opportunity to have a say on issues which matter to them' (DPC – Vic 2000, p.4). However, there is a lack of detail about how this will be achieved. While NSD enthusiasts have called for more experimentation with democracy (Giddens 1998 2000), the GVT approach is more pragmatic. There is little in the way of innovation beyond holding more consultations and a reliance on Community Cabinets to bridge the gap between state and civil society. The approach to reinvigorating democracy in Victoria is top-down, tightly controlled and centralised.

The GVT Summit and the subsequent State Plan was the springboard for the Bracks' wider democratic renewal agenda. It is useful to examine a number of these different initiatives to evaluate how effective the government were in trying to create a more vibrant democracy in Victoria. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to evaluate all these projects and programs, but rather the aim is to get a picture of how some of the underpinning tensions and themes in the NSD democratic renewal agenda (see Ch. 1) were addressed by the Bracks government.

## **The Bracks Government's Approach to Inclusive Politics**

The GVT Summit and subsequent Plan initiated a broad democratic renewal agenda, and some of the most significant supporting programs and initiatives include:

- Community Cabinets
- VEESAC
- Indicators of Community Strength project
- the evolution of the GVT plan, particularly the commitment to greater public participation.

### *Community Cabinets*

The most high profile of the initiatives to enhance the relationship between the Victorian government and wider civil society was the decision to roll out a program of Community Cabinets. These are essentially regional 'town-hall' style public meetings that require all members of the Cabinet to attend. These public forums give the public some opportunity to meet the relevant Cabinet Minister to highlight their issue of concern.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Interestingly, the idea for Community Cabinets appears to have first been made by Mark Latham – a noted enthusiast of the NSD ('Community Cabinets are a worthwhile exercise' *The Age*, 22 January 2008) and were first adopted at a State level by the Queensland Labor Premier Peter Beattie. While Beattie is not a noted 'policy entrepreneur' (Wanna and Williams 2005, p.71), at that time Glyn Davis, now Vice Chancellor of Melbourne University, was working for Beattie and assisted in rolling out the program. Glyn Davis was instrumental in another key consultation case study reported in this thesis – the 2020 Summit (Ch.9). Community Cabinets have since been adopted by other Australian states including South Australia. On election in 2007, Kevin Rudd rolled out a program of Federal Community Cabinets. As noted elsewhere in this thesis, Geoff Mulgan unsuccessfully tried to get Tony Blair to run them in Britain, but Gordon Brown has subsequently adopted the idea.

Community Cabinets have strengths and limitations as a consultative mechanism. Positively, they offer a new forum for civic engagement. In addition, they are often rurally or regionally based event. This addresses a common issue that the large capital cities dominate the media and political agenda. Community Cabinets have an important symbolic value in showing that government listens to the wider communities (Davis 2001). Their other strength is that, since they are episodic, Community Cabinets fit more closely with existing patterns of political participation. As Stoker (2006) notes, most people prefer to engage only on an ad hoc basis; Community Cabinets can meet this intermittent need.

Community Cabinets can also provide local communities with direct and unmediated access to their political representatives and this has the potential to promote greater understanding between the government and the wider public. There is an interesting link here with Community Cabinets and New Labour's 'Big Conversation' (Ch. 6). One of the notable features of the Big Conversation was a desire by New Labour to educate the public about the 'tough choices' and the difficulty of governing (Rawnsley 2003). Community Cabinets also have this potential, in that the political elite can use them to help manage public expectations.

However, Community Cabinets are not without their limitations (Davis 2001). The central problem is that they tend to attract those people who are already politically engaged, which in turn can reinforce the 'inequality of voice'. Participants attending the Community Cabinets can be unrepresentative of the

wider local public. For some, such as Skidmore (2006), this might not necessarily be a drawback, since the atypical, locally active community leaders have a crucial role in disseminating information and representing wider constituencies. However, the risk of inequality of voice remains a concern. An additional issue is the link between public accountability and the intermittent timing of Community Cabinets, as the Cabinet(s) tend not to return to places they have already been held. There are issues about how the local public can hold Ministers to account after the meetings have taken place.

Furthermore, it has been suggested that Community Cabinets at the State level are often dominated by representatives from the relevant Local Council. Local Councillors and public servants working in local government use the forums to lobby the State government<sup>95</sup>. In effect, while they are promoted as a vehicle for *public* involvement, they are a new form of exchange between the State and Local tiers of government in Australia.

At best, Community Cabinets can provide a new forum for civic dialogue, but there is little real integration with the wider government decision-making process. Ministers might hear more direct and local views (either critical or supportive) on a particular issue, but Community Cabinets in themselves are not decision-making forums. Power remains strictly centralised, and on a scale such as Arnstein's ladder (1969), they are at the information-sharing end of the spectrum. Community Cabinets have an important symbolic value, but the built-in power bias towards the government is a central characteristic

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<sup>95</sup> This suggestion was made to the author by a public servant in the South Australian government, and was made under the condition of anonymity.

of these events. More crucially, government has a built-in advantage over the wider community in terms of access to power, resources and information. This means it has access to a greater array of strategies to control the dialogue (Williams 2004). Community Cabinets can be a useful forum but they are not unproblematic (Davis 2001).

## *VEESAC*

The Victorian Economic Environmental and Social Advisory Council (VEESAC) was one of the main outcomes from the GVT Summit and established to assist implement the wider GVT agenda<sup>96</sup>. VEESAC was part of the attempt by the Bracks government to institutionalise the triple bottom line agenda. VEESAC was established to provide wider input into the GVT agenda, and encourage debate and policy responses to cross-cutting issues.

VEESAC was heavily involved in the formation of the first iteration of the GVT plan. A number of VEESAC members provided a range of detail comments about the strategic goals in the GVT plan. There were a number of strengths and commendable features in establishing the Council:

- a potent symbol of Bracks' search for consensual politics
- at least nominally, independent of both the government and the public sector
- established to draw upon different areas of political and policy expertise

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<sup>96</sup> The comments and observations on the role of VEESAC in this section are drawn from a number interviews with public servants in February and March 2009, under the condition of anonymity.

- set up to have a cross-cutting role which enabled it to think outside traditional policy and ministerial silos
- given a small budget and was initially chaired by the Premier, which was a sign that the government was committed to the success of the body and the wider agenda.

However, VEESAC has to be ultimately considered as a failed political exercise. Significantly, the Council was wound up only a year after it was established. Aside from its members' comments on the first State Plan, its impact was largely negligible. From the outset, it not clear what its precise role should be and how it linked with the wider public sector. For example, there were numerous discussions about whether VEESAC should have an input into budget deliberations. Eventually, the Bracks Cabinet decided that the Council would not be a part of this process, a decision which ultimately downgraded its role and significance.

There were also tensions between VEESAC and the Victorian public service. Initially, VEESAC also tried to establish a role in challenging public sector performance in meeting the broad GVT goals, and this was met with resistance. The Council only had credibility with the Department of Premier and Cabinet, and for as long as Bracks chaired the main board meetings.

VEESAC is a noteworthy experiment in governance (a defining characteristic of the NSD), and was a powerful symbol of an attempt to build a more

inclusive era in Victorian politics. Yet, for all its symbolic value it is interesting to note how relatively quickly VEESAC was dissolved.

### *The Indicators of Community Strength Project*

A more substantial outcome from the GVT Summit was the 'Indicators of Community Strength' (ICS) project. This is a large-scale mapping exercise which aims to collate a detailed knowledge of Victorian society<sup>97</sup>. A key recommendation from the GVT Summit was that 'a new system of Victorian "social benchmarks and indicators" should be set up, with community involvement' (Salvaris et al 2000, p. 3). The State government commissioned a team of consultants from Swinburne University to identify a suite of indicators for establishing a 'community wellbeing' index. This was the flagship project led by the newly established Department of Victorian Communities (DVC)<sup>98</sup>.

The overall aim is that community benchmarks are established (with community involvement), and the government should regularly report on progress in addressing the benchmarks (Salvaris et al 2000). A notable feature of the project was that it was designed to be 'a powerful way to strengthen democracy by making present and future governments more accountable' (Salvaris et al 2000, p. 4). The initial report on the project

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<sup>97</sup> In recent years, a number of Labo(u)r governments have begun measuring civic and community engagement on similar indices. New South Wales was the first Australian state to develop a pilot project and it has been followed by other states including South Australia (Salvaris et al 2000). There are also similarities with New Labour's citizenship survey run from the Home Office (see Ch. 5).

<sup>98</sup> The DVC was later renamed the Department for Planning and Community Development (Department of Planning and Community Development–DPCD 2009).

identifies a range of problems including a lack of long-term goals for the State's 'social and community development', and 'the need to repair damaged communities and "re-engage" ordinary citizens' (Salvaris et al 2000, p. 4).

ICS is one of the most successful projects initiated by the Bracks Government and it has been well-promoted (Blacher and Adams 2007; Hess & Adams 2007). The intention here is to highlight some of the main issues underpinning the project, rather than evaluating it in full, which has been done elsewhere (Department of Victorian Communities 2004).

The ICS record levels of civic engagement, social trust, group membership and involvement in local community activities. The data is generated from responses to a series of questions in regular Victorian population health surveys (Department of Victorian Communities 2004, p. 24) Since 2006, the Victorian Government has collated this data at the Local Government Area (LGA) level.

What the findings from the regular ICS project show is that Victoria has very similar patterns of inequality in trust, participation and civic engagement as other Australian States (and other advanced industrial societies). An early study using the Victorian data highlight these inequalities (Vinson 2004). It is not within the scope of this research to highlight these inequalities in detail, but rather to emphasise that these patterns exist, and they remain the key subject of government policy-making through the GVT agenda.

The ICS project gives rise to a number of observations. First, it is a very substantial and impressive area of the government's work. Significant resources are devoted to this project, and the then newly established DVC used this project to build up a comprehensive picture of Victorian communities that was clearly lacking under the Kennett era. Second, there is some evidence that this project provides new forms of knowledge which, to some extent, challenges how the Victorian government should tackle patterns of inequality of engagement and trust (Adams and Wiseman 2003, p.20). Third, the project goes beyond pure measurement and polling opinion, in so far as the State government has set up a number of partnership agencies to address some of the inequalities in civic trust and engagement.

The ICS project, however, is not without its limitations. It remains unclear how far the supporting partnership agencies have delivered any meaningful improvement in reducing inequalities of civic participation. The project produces a large amount of data at the local level which is available to policy makers, the wider community and the private sector. However, it is unclear how far, if at all, this data is being used by external stakeholders.

A further concern is that it is unclear the degree to which the wider public has been involved in shaping this project. The initial scoping report explicitly called for a degree of community involvement in the project (Salvaris et al 2004). Yet, the project has is still a predominantly top-down government approach to civic engagement. There was also some hope that the project might lead to new and innovative forms of policy making (Adams and Wiseman 2003), and

it is unclear if the impact of the ICS project is having such a transformative effect.

### *Evolution of the GVT Agenda*

Finally, this section briefly considers the evolution of the GVT agenda since its inception at the 2000 Summit and the progress made by the Victorian Government in its search for a vibrant democracy. In 2005, the GVT plan was revised and updated. As part of this process, the Department of Premier and Cabinet 'led consultations with Ministers and departments' and 'carefully considered the views and priorities of Victorians from all walks of life' (DPC-Vic 2009a, p.2). The consultation process was largely an internal exercise, and there is very little available evidence of much public or stakeholder engagement with the consultation<sup>99</sup>.

The revised version of the GVT plan does not differ a great deal from the first version. The section on 'greater public participation and more accountable government' is mostly unchanged (DPC-Vic 2005, p.20). The revised GVT plan outlines some of the main achievements of the Bracks government, which includes (DPC-Vic 2005, p. 20):

- reform of the Legislative Council to make it more responsive and representative

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<sup>99</sup> As a point of comparison, it does not seem that the Victorian consultation on the GVT plan in 2004-05 was as wide-ranging as the South Australian consultation undertaken in 2006 which engaged over 1 600 South Australians (Ch. 8).

- increased involvement of ‘Victorians in a range of consultative committee and advisory boards’
- regular Community Cabinet meetings
- reform of the powers of the Freedom of Information Act in 2000, along with reform of the powers of the Auditor General.

Bracks’ reform of the Legislative Council is widely seen as his government’s major achievement (Costar and Hayward 2005). While some of these achievements are not inconsiderable, especially given the Bracks government was a minority one in its first term, there is a sense that much of this was ‘catch-up’ from the Kennett era. Aside, from the reform of the Legislative Council, the other achievements under the democratic renewal agenda are incremental, modest and not particularly innovative.

Since 2002, the Victorian Government has published annual progress reports on its push for a vibrant democracy. It is therefore useful to highlight some of the main findings from these reports to track the progress made on this strand of the GVT agenda.

### *Political Efficacy*

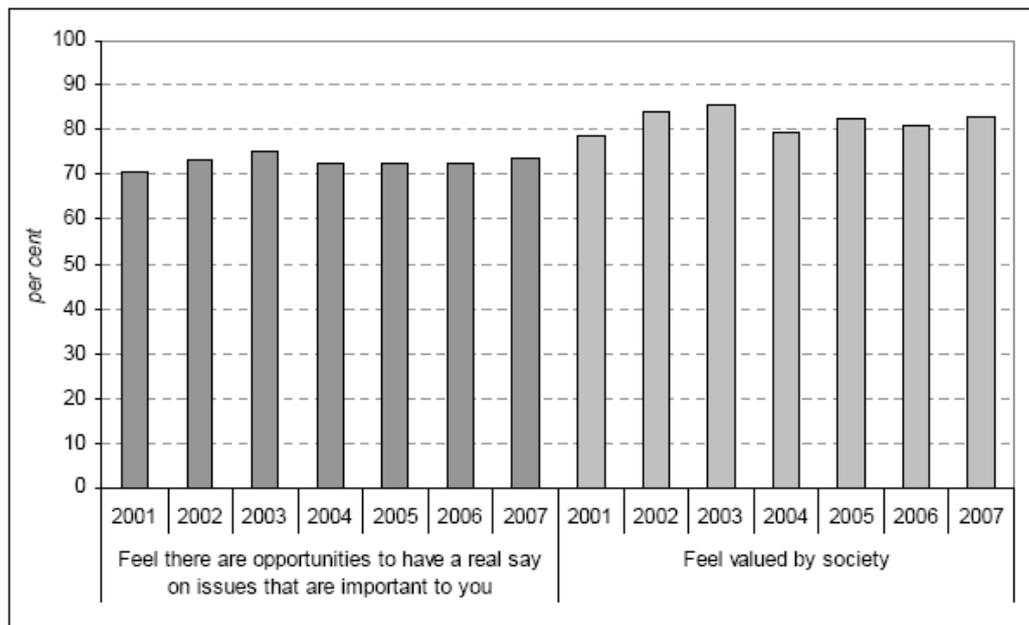
Under the ‘vibrant democracy’ section of the GVT plan, the key measure for this target is political efficacy, which is a measure for how far people believe they can influence the political process. Since 2001, the Victorian Government has used two efficacy indicators:

- the proportion of Victorians who feel that there are opportunities to have a real say on issues that are important to them
- the proportion of Victorians who feel valued by society.

Figure 23 outlines the results of these two indicators from 2001 to 2008.

**Figure 23: Proportion of Victorian that feel they have a say on issues important to them**

**Chart B.52: Proportion of Victorians that feel there are opportunities to have a real say on issues that are important to them and feel valued by society**



Source: Department of Human Services Victorian Population Health Survey

Source: Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2008d, p. 428.

Both indicators show that during this time political efficacy has slightly increased. There is a much clearer increase in the number of Victorians who report that there are 'real opportunities to have a say on issues important to

them' (DPC–Vic 2008, p.427). In disaggregating this data, the 2008 progress report provides evidence that:

- Female respondents are more likely than male respondents to report that they have opportunities to have their say (76.6 per cent versus 70.3 per cent).
- Rural and regional-based respondents have slightly higher levels of efficacy than urban-based respondents (75.6 per cent versus 72.8 per cent) (DPC–Vic 2008, p.428).

In summary, there is some evidence that Victorians are more likely to report that they are involved in the political process. How far this increase can be directly traced to the actions of the Bracks government is a separate issue. This is not to suggest that the Victorian government have had no role in this increase in levels of political efficacy, but the data does not reveal why this increase has taken place. It might well be that there is an element of 'catch up' from the Kennett era, but since data does not exist from this period, that remains speculation.

#### *Public Satisfaction with Health and Community Services*

In common with other Labo(u)r governments in this thesis, the Victorian Government has tracked public confidence on a range of public services. From 2001 to 2008:

- satisfaction with public hospitals remained broadly the same—around 80 per cent of those polled reported that they were ‘very satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’
- satisfaction with kindergarten and pre-school services declined from approximately 95 per cent to 86 per cent
- satisfaction with maternal health and child health services declined from approximately 95 per cent to 87 per cent
- regional and rural respondents were generally more satisfied with the three service areas monitored compared with urban-based respondents (DPC-Vic 2008d, p.427-428)<sup>100</sup>.

This snapshot picture suggests that over the course of the life of the Labor government in Victoria, there has been some general decline in satisfaction with some public services. There are interesting parallels with the British New Labour’s initiative to track attitudes to public services through the People’s Panel (Ch. 5).

### **The Future of the GVT Agenda**

Finally, it is worth noting that to some extent there is a suggestion that the GVT agenda is waning in Victoria. According to one well-placed source in the Victorian public service:

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<sup>100</sup> All data sources in these bullet points are cited in the 2008 GVT annual progress report, and the original source is the Victorian Department of Human Services Victorian Population Health Survey.

By way of context, GVT is dying a slow death here in Victoria - the monitoring is continuing, but active policy development based on GVT is questionable. (Anon. 2009, interview, 20 March 2009)

This is not surprising for a number of reasons. First, sustaining a long-term policy agenda is in itself a difficult and onerous task. Second, Steve Bracks resigned as Premier on 27 July 2007, and since he was one of the main driving forces for the GVT, it is not surprising to see it lessen as a policy priority. Bracks' successor, John Brumby, is under pressure to show some continuity with the previous era but also to set his own political agenda. Third, a series of other issues have sought to displace the centrality of the GVT agenda. For example, the global economic crisis (from 2008 onwards) is stretching the economic capabilities of both State and Federal governments. In addition, in February 2009 more than 200 lives were lost in Victoria in the most devastating bushfires in Australian history. Fourth, as noted in other case studies in this thesis, democratic renewal is a second-tier political priority which rarely dominates party political activity and wider public and media attention. For these reasons, it would seem that a new agenda will need to be generated for renewing democracy in Victoria, if it is still considered a worthy policy and political goal.

## **Summary Evaluation of the GVT Summit and Democratic Renewal**

### **Agenda**

This final section offers a summary evaluation of the Summit and the democratic renewal strand of the GVT agenda. As with other case studies in this thesis, the Beetham–Pratchett framework is used to evaluate the effectiveness and scope of the GVT Summit. To recap, Pratchett (1999) uses two principles to evaluate the democratic credentials of a range of different consultation and engagement initiatives; representativeness and responsiveness. The principle of representativeness enables a critical discussion of the degree to which the Bracks government address the issue of inequality of voice. The principle of responsiveness enables an evaluation of how the GVT Summit, and wider agenda, influenced government decision-making processes.

### *Scope and Aims of the GVT Summit*

In evaluating the GVT Summit and vibrant democracy agenda, it is useful to reconsider the overall scope and aims. The scope and aims of the GVT Summit were quite modest. The three main aims of the Summit were to:

- establish a new policy agenda for the new Labor government
- get stakeholder buy-in and build momentum for the evolving policy agenda
- raise the profile of Premier Bracks.

Compared with other initiatives, such as the 'Tasmania Together' process, the GVT Summit and agenda is a much more overtly political project than a strictly public policy exercise (Crowley and Coffey 2007). The Summit was devised to build wider political legitimacy for the newly installed Bracks government, particularly from a sceptical business sector. As one senior public servant involved with the GVT Summit reports, it was 'developed on-the-run ... and was not designed to be a full democratic experiment' (Anon. 2009, interview, 7 March). There are clear parallels with New Labour's Big Conversation which was also developed relatively quickly (Ch.6). The Summit was not intended to be a full experiment in democratic renewal; instead it was to be the beginning of a greater push for more consensual politics.

The GVT Summit, while ostensibly a mechanism for dialogue and discussion, was mainly designed for political and promotional purposes. These political aims do not lessen the impact of what was achieved. Indeed, such a top-down approach to consultation with a highly controlled agenda can have important benefits:

Growing Victoria Together is a more traditional, top down, strategic planning, policy reorientation exercise, not community owned or driven, and very much an overtly political tool. There is clearly a case for politicised planning, and, indeed, it has great strengths for stamping new directions in the face of potentially derailing interests. (Crowley and Coffey 2007, p. 35)

Contextualising the aims of the GVT Summit then helps shape the understanding how the two principles of representativeness and responsiveness were addressed by the Bracks government. These principles are first applied to the GVT Summit, and then used to evaluate the wider democratic renewal strand of the GVT agenda

### **Representativeness of the GVT Summit**

Representativeness invites a discussion of the types of people and groups invited to the GVT Summit. From the outset, the targeted participants were representatives from the main business and community groups and organisations and what might be termed loosely as 'opinion formers'. The Summit was not intended to engage to the wider public, but was an elite exercise.

It is also noteworthy that the wider public and Victorian civil society were not directly involved in shaping the first GVT State Plan. The risk of devising a top-down plan is that the views of the people who are traditionally marginalised from the policy process (low income groups, women, ethnic minority groups, etc) have little scope to shape the agenda. A view confirmed by a Senior public servant involved with the GVT Summit:

The participants at the GVT Summit were mainly drawn from the wider political and policy elite. The weakness of this approach is that it can privilege 'expert' forms of knowledge over more local and anecdotal forms. (Anon, 2009, interview, 5 February 2009).

The GVT Summit was a good deal more inclusive of the wider interest groups than any previous initiative during the Kennett era; in particular it engaged with those groups from the community sector who advocate on behalf of the most marginalised. In this context, it was an improvement on the previous regime. However, given the strong focus on the political aims of the Summit, the invitation list was tightly controlled and the overall representativeness of the participants was limited.

### **Responsiveness and the GVT Summit**

The principle of responsiveness refers to the relationship between the consultation and the impact on policy making. In terms of the GVT Summit, it was clear from the outset that the impact was designed to be minimal. There were no formal links between the GVT Summit and influencing the government's policy agenda. It is striking that the Summit did not produce a formal set of recommendations. Moreover, 'no draft documents or papers were released for feedback' before the Summit and no feedback documents were sent to delegates after the Summit (Crowley & Coffey 2007, p. 20). The initial post-conference communiqué was mostly drafted by government advisors and public servants. All of these aspects of the Summit reinforce the view of a tightly controlled government agenda with little real scope for participants to directly influence the agenda.

The communiqué was an attempt to meld together the different agendas of the participants. The Bracks government's commitment to a 'triple bottom line' policy approach was part of the process of aggregating some of these diverse interests. At this level of generality the communiqué is evidence of some degree of government responsiveness, but it also confirms that the agenda was tightly set by the government, and they were left with plenty of scope to marginalise issues that did not link with this overall policy direction.

### **Representativeness and Responsiveness in the GVT Democratic Renewal Agenda**

The Bracks government's approach to inclusive politics should not be viewed solely through the prism of the GVT Summit. It is important to apply the principles of responsiveness and representativeness to some of the wider GVT projects and initiatives. This enables a fuller evaluation of the attempt to create a vibrant democracy in Victoria.

In terms of representativeness, broadly speaking it is clear that while the Bracks government was generally interested in issues of inequality of voice, it was far less committed to embedding this principle into some of its actual initiatives. The short-lived VEESAC was an elite vehicle, and as noted above, Community Cabinets as a mechanism for community involvement can be highly unrepresentative. While ICS project maps patterns of inequality of voice and participation, in the underpinning specific programs attached to this

project, there was far less engagement with population groups often excluded from the policy process.

Examining these initiatives through the prism of responsiveness is also instructive. As noted above, Community Cabinets are a forum for discussion and provide an outlet for questioning of the relevant minister. However, there is no formal link to decision-making and, given their episodic timing, the lines of accountability are weak. Problems with responsiveness were also a key factor in the demise of VEESAC. From the outset, it was unclear what VEESAC's role could be in terms of steering the GVT agenda, and it met with resistance, particularly from within the public service. It is tempting to see the fate of VEESAC as a microcosm of Bracks' push for more inclusive politics; well-intentioned, top-down and—to some extent—innovative, but ultimately something of a failed experiment.

While the Community Strengthening Indicators project scores well in terms of representativeness, it does less so in terms of responsiveness. Government use of the data is patchy at best, and the data is not directly linked and feeding into policy-making processes. The project is strong on measurement but much weaker on specific remedial action.

### **The Bracks Government's Approach to Inclusive Politics—Reconsidered**

Finally, it is worth reviewing the Bracks government's overall approach to creating a vibrant democracy in the State. Given the singular approach of the

previous Kennett administration, Bracks' emphasis on inclusion, dialogue and consensus was a refreshing change in the State's politics. Community groups marginalised under the Kennett era, were given new opportunities for dialogue with the Bracks government.

However, the search for dialogic government was tentative, limited and largely more symbolic than representing a genuine shift in relations between state and civil society. There are merits in this approach and, in some cases such as reform of the Victorian Upper House, these are not inconsiderable achievements. But perhaps compared with later efforts in other Australian States, the democratic renewal agenda was more limited and tightly controlled. Bracks may have opened the door through the GVT agenda for a new era of State planning in Australian politics, but the other States have seemingly built on this trailblazing work.

Ultimately, while the Bracks government was undoubtedly keen to achieve a more vibrant democracy, the overall level of ambition was limited. Interestingly, this lack of ambition was highlighted by one of Tony Blair's key advisors:

Perhaps the most challenging question about targets is the political one – how ambitious should they be? ... in comparison to the many politicians in other countries with whom I have discussed this question, Blair's ministers have shown considerable courage in setting goals for which they can be held to account both by the public and the media. Just to give one comparison, the targets in Growing Victoria Together, the document

on which the Premier of that Australian state Steve Bracks, has based a successful career, are cautious and gentle. Bracks took the view that it was better to underpromise and overdeliver, a phrase often used in No. 10 during my time here. As a strategy, this appears to involve less risk, but there is a hidden risk involved in accepting incremental rather than transformational change. (Barber 2007, p. 81)

## Chapter 8

### *Case Study 4 - Consultation on South Australia's Strategic Plan (2006)*

## **Introduction**

This thesis examines a range of consultation initiatives undertaken by a number of Labo(u)r governments in Britain and Australia. All of the governments considered in this thesis are broadly influenced by the politics of the 'New Social Democracy' (NSD), which attempts to 'modernise' social democracy (Giddens 1998, 2000). A key strand of the NSD is a focus on democratic renewal, and a call for governments to innovative and experiment to enhance the relationship between the state and civil society (Giddens 1998, p.74).

The first two case studies of this thesis considered initiatives developed by New Labour in Britain. The previous chapter shifted the focus to Australia, and examined the Bracks government's 'Growing Victoria Together' (GVT) agenda. Bracks' government was the first Australian Labor government to develop a State-wide plan, which had a specific focus on creating a 'vibrant democracy' (Department of Premier and Cabinet – Victoria 2005). A number of other Australian States followed this lead, including the South Australian Labor government led by Premier Mike Rann. Of all the Labor State governments in office from the late 1990s/early 2000s, the Rann government is the most clearly influenced by Tony Blair's New Labour.

This chapter examines the community engagement and consultation on South Australia's Strategic Plan (SASP) that took place in 2006.<sup>101</sup> <sup>102</sup> The Plan represents the Rann government's vision for the State for the period 2004-2014. The first version of the Plan was produced in 2004, with little public consultation taking place to influence its targets. Two years after the release of the Plan, the government undertook an extensive community consultation that resulted in a revised version of the Plan being published in February 2007.

The first section of the chapter examines the political context and backdrop to the emergence of the Rann government. The extent to which the Rann government is influenced by the NSD is also considered.. The main part of this chapter details the consultation process.. Like the GVT plan considered in the previous chapter, South Australia's Strategic Plan contains specific targets relating to political participation, and these targets are outlined. The final section offers a summary evaluation of both the consultation and the Rann government's commitment to democratic renewal.

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<sup>101</sup> Note on terminology. When released in 2004, the first version was called the State Strategic Plan (SSP) but when updated in 2007 was re-branded as South Australia's Strategic Plan (SASP) – mainly to encourage broader community ownership. For ease of reference it will be abbreviated as either SASP or 'the Plan' throughout this chapter. Where relevant, the 2004 or 2007 version of SASP will be identified.

<sup>102</sup> An early version of this chapter appeared as a conference paper for the Australian Political Science Association Conference held in Melbourne in November 2007 (see Manwaring 2007).

## **South Australian Political Context**

The Rann-led Labor government unexpectedly won office at the 2002 State election (with rather similar parallels with the Bracks government). To understand the context of the Rann government and the Plan, it is important to locate the government in wider South Australian political history. There are two main political legacies which continue to cast a shadow over the Rann government; the 'Dunstan Decade' (1970s) and the collapse of the State Bank in 1992 (Macintyre 2006).

The legacy of the former Premier Don Dunstan's Labor government, elected in 1970, is one of the most significant in the Australian Labor Party's history. The Dunstan government displayed a reforming zeal and made an impact at the state level that initially pre-dated and then coincided with the political earthquake of former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam's federal government. Dunstan's highly activist brand of social democracy encompassed a wide range of issues, including gender equality, gay and lesbian rights, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues, and the environment (Macintyre 2006; Manwaring 2008; Parkin and Patience 1981). Mike Rann served as Dunstan's press secretary, speech write and adviser during his period of office. Rann is explicit about the legacy and importance of this period of reform on his own politics, and dedicated his first 100 days in office to Dunstan's legacy (O'Brien 2002; Rann 2000).

Dunstan retired early due to ill-health in 1979, and after a single term of Liberal government, the ALP resumed office in 1982, with John Bannon as Premier. Rann then served as Bannon's press secretary. The Dunstan era remains an exemplar of the heights that an energetic reforming social democratic government can achieve. In contrast, the dominant themes of Bannon's period in office 'were careful management and incremental change' (Parkin 1992, p.89). However, it was under Bannon that the other most significant recent event took place – the collapse of the State Bank in 1992. The collapse led, in the short-term, to Bannon's resignation, but in longer term saw a period of Liberal Party rule throughout the 1990s and heavy damage to Labor's economic management credentials<sup>103</sup>. These events mark both the best and worst impacts of Labor governments in South Australia, and continue to haunt the Rann government.

### *Rann, Consultation and British Labour*

Of all the current crop of the Labor Premiers, Mike Rann is the most overt in drawing inspiration from the British Labour Party, and New Labour in particular. Following the decimation of Labor at the 1993 state election, as the newly installed opposition leader, Rann undertook a series of 'Labor listens' meetings with community and interest groups across the state. The idea for this 'listening tour' was borrowed from a similar initiative organised by former British Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock (Manning 2005)<sup>104</sup>.

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<sup>103</sup> There are obvious parallels with the forced resignation of former Labor Premier John Cain and the eventual election of the Bracks government (see ch. 7).

<sup>104</sup> The British 'Labour Listens' exercise was an early precursor of its 'Big Conversation' initiative (Ch.6).

This early consultation initiative offers some interesting insights about Rann's approach to community engagement. Parkin (2005) describes the initiative as a campaign. Rann's 'Labor Listens' does not appear to have made any tangible impact on the ALP's overall policy direction. At best, it gave some community groups the opportunity articulate their concerns more explicitly, although with no guarantee of influencing the policy agenda. The campaign itself was directed at the community/interest group sector rather than the wider public. The main value of the exercise was its symbolic value in showing the Labor Opposition willing to engage. As outlined later in this chapter, some of these features prefigure the more substantive 2006 SASP consultation.

### **The Rann government and the New Social Democracy**

It is important to locate the Rann government's brand of social democracy, and also map it against the main characteristics of the NSD. First, like the Bracks Victorian government, Rann's government is cautious and pragmatic (Macintyre 2006; Manning 2002). In part, this reflects the broader support they were forced to seek as a minority government in 2002. It was widely tipped that three conservative-minded Independent MPs would side with the Liberal Coalition, and unexpectedly they were enticed to join with Labor (Manning 2005; O'Neil 2003).<sup>105</sup> It is characteristic of the Rann government that they

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<sup>105</sup> An interesting sub-plot of how the Labor Minority government took office is the deal struck by Rann with the Independent MP Peter Lewis to hold a Constitutional Convention, with a view to introducing some form of Citizen Initiated Referenda (CIR). It shows some interest, mainly driven by an Independent MP, to explore opportunities for democratic renewal in South Australia.

have continued this political alliance, despite it becoming unnecessary after its landslide win at the 2006 State election (Green 2006).

The continued support, and participation in the Rann's Cabinet, by the conservative-minded Independent Rory McEwen and National Party MP Karlene Maywald after the 2006 election informs the conservative strand of its social democratic politics. On her Ministerial appointment Maywald stated that she had not compromised her conservative ideals because:

...quite frankly, the Rann Labor Government have demonstrated that they are probably more conservative than the last Liberal government. (Parkin 2005, p.467).

The consensus-driven approach is acknowledged by Rann who stated that the responsibility 'of a state government is to provide effective and safe administration' (The Adelaide Advertiser, 20 March 2006). Rann has been described as a 'master of consensus politics' (Green 2006). Rann's focus on pragmatism, caution and consensus are also central main themes of the NSD. The NSD is a 'modernised' social democracy that seeks political legitimacy beyond the traditional class-based politics of the wider Labor movement.

The influence of the NSD can be detected elsewhere in the Rann government's policy agenda. Rann has been described as a 'policy bowerbird':

Just as the feathered variety collects bright blue objects to lure a mate, without regard to their original use or location, so the Premier picks up ideas wherever he finds them to attract the electorate's vote. (Anderson 2004, p.6)

In this, Rann has strong similarities with the Blair New Labour government. Rann, like New Labour, is keen to eschew ideology in favour of a 'whatever works' approach to policy (Labour Party 1997). Indeed, Rann has introduced a good deal of policy transfer from New Labour. At the 2006 election, Rann used a 'pledge card' outlining the five key manifesto commitments – a device used by the Blair Labour opposition in 1997. Rann also established the Social Inclusion Board (SIB) modelled on New Labour's Social Exclusion Unit. The synergies with New Labour are well documented:

There are parallels with the Blair government in Britain. By trying to re-orient political battles, Rann has sought to shift the emphasis of spending expectations that might have been held with a more reforming Labor administration to those built on more modest reforms (Macintyre 2006, p.129)

Rann's populism also echoes Blair's. Rann is hard line on criminal justice issues, which is heavily influenced by Blair (Manning 2005).<sup>106</sup> A key characteristic of the NSD is a need to formulate policy in areas traditionally seen as the preserve of the conservative-minded opposition (Giddens 1998).

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<sup>106</sup> Ranns' populism over 'law and order' issues is demonstrated by his politicisation of the 'Nemer' case, which saw a wealthy young man with a powerful lawyer secure a suspended sentence for shooting and harassing another man. See Manning (2005) for details.

Proponents of the NSD, such as Giddens, Blair and Latham argue that Labo(u)r should take strong policy approaches in areas such as defence, economic management and criminal justice issues (Blair 1998; Giddens 1998; Latham 2001).

The Rann government, like other broadly NSD-influenced governments, is fiscally conservative, and avowedly pro-market to an extent not seen by previous Labo(u)r governments. Manning argues that Rann's Treasurer Kevin Foley 'takes every opportunity to chasten his colleagues remaining social democratic spirit with reminders of the need for caution and prudence...(this) message and the Premier's populism define this government' (Manning 2004b). It is characteristic that the peak body for the private sector, Business SA, is broadly supportive of Rann's policy approach (Macintyre 2006).

The other interesting aspect of the Rann government, which also has echoes with the Blair administration, has been a willingness to institute new forms of governance. Rann set up five independent boards and brought in prominent outsiders to head these up. The most influential of these boards are the Economic Development Board (EDB), the Social Inclusion Board (SIB), and the Premier's Roundtable on Sustainability.<sup>107</sup> A unique feature of these boards is that the heads of the EDB and SIB are members of the Executive Committee of Cabinet, an arrangement that breaks with Westminster parliamentary traditions (Manning 2005).<sup>108</sup> The Rann government also invited

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<sup>107</sup> The other two most significant boards are the Premier's Council for Women and the Premier's Science and Research Council.

<sup>108</sup> The other striking break with Westminster traditions is the terms of which the Independent MPs were part of Cabinet. These Ministers were permitted to absent themselves from Cabinet

Geoff Mulgan to be one of its 'Thinkers in Resident' program during 2008. Mulgan is Tony Blair's former No.10 Head of Strategy, and his residency was focused on issues of social innovation<sup>109</sup>.

Of all the Labor State governments, the influence of British New Labour is most evident on the Rann Labor government. While the Rann government does not use the term 'new social democracy', it does encapsulate a good deal of its policy agenda. This modernised brand of social democracy is also evident in many SASP targets. Like the Victorian GVT plan, SASP has a broad democratic renewal strand.

### **Genesis of South Australia's Strategic Plan**

The origins of the Plan lie in the new governance arrangements set up by Rann. The Rann government established the EDB to help improve the economic stability and productivity of the State. The EDB produced a preliminary report in November 2002, and a final report examining the key issues for South Australia, published in April 2003. The second EDB report was developed from a two-day economic Summit held in April 2003. The Economic Summit was based on Hawke's Accord Summits, and also Bracks' GVT Summit:

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discussions if they in major disagreement with the government on an issue. In return, they would respect Cabinet confidentiality and support the government on the floor of the house (O'Neil 2003).

<sup>109</sup> There have been 18 different 'Thinkers' since the program was established in 2005. The program is a prominent example of the Rann government's willingness to experiment with new forms of governance.

Around 280 delegates, comprising much of the State's political, governmental, industrial, union, ethnic and community leadership, largely endorsed the thrust of the report. Normally adversarial participants seemed readily to reach a consensus: the Summit was not only a "significant step forward" according to the secretary of the United Trades and Labour Council but the start of "a new journey of prosperity" according to the CEO of Business SA (Parkin 2003, p.462)

After the Summit, the EDB made 72 recommendations to the Rann government, including the development of a 'whole-of-government State Strategic Plan to provide guidance and discipline to government agencies on priorities for action' (EDB 2003, p.24). The Rann government accepted the recommendations and also promised to 'regularly update the public on progress with implementing the measures' (Craig 2003, p.6). In December 2003, the Head of the Department of Premier and Cabinet handed the Premier a draft response and 'it appears Rann was most dissatisfied with the bureaucracy's effort' (Manning 2004a, p.501). Rann then convened a meeting with senior Cabinet Ministers and three months later, in March 2004, the State Strategic Plan was launched.

### **The State Strategic Plan – 2004**

The 2004 version of the Plan had 79 targets organised under the six broad themes of prosperity, well-being, sustainability, communities, creativity and

opportunity<sup>110</sup>. The targets relating to political participation and civic engagement were part of the 'building communities' objective of the Plan<sup>111</sup>. The section on civic engagement covered three broad themes (and set six specific targets):

- increasing the number of women in leadership roles
- increasing levels of volunteering
- enhancing political participation by halving the number of informal votes at State elections and increasing turnout at local elections.

The summary evaluation that concludes this chapter discusses the political participation targets in more detail. At this stage, it is worth noting that they were generally relatively pragmatic targets. The main focus is to enhance the overall amount of civic engagement, but there is less focus on issues of inequality of voice. The political participation targets in the Plan are not particularly innovative, and while it demonstrates some commitment to the broader democratic renewal agenda, the early approach might best be described as cautious and technocratic.

A number of commentators praised the Plan on its release (Beer 2004; Spoehr 2004a). Interestingly, Beer notes that:

...there are strong resonances also between Rann's 'Creating Opportunity' and Mark Latham's 'Ladder of Opportunity', and the

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<sup>110</sup> There are 79 numbered targets in the 2004 version of the SASP. In addition, there are four other sub-targets listed, which is 84 in total.

<sup>111</sup> While the democratic focus of the SASP is rather narrow, it noteworthy that some of the other targets – specifically those related to health and education - presuppose a good deal of community engagement, which is a key part of the wider democratic renewal agenda.

similarity in language is almost certainly no accident. (Beer 2004, p.6)<sup>112</sup>

The Blueprint for SASP is the United States State of Oregon's Plan 'Oregon Shines' (Anderson 2004)<sup>113</sup>. Jeff Tryens, the Executive Director of the Oregon Progress Board, spent 8 weeks with the Rann government to develop South Australia's Strategic Plan. Tryens also led the 2006 consultation on the Plan. Anderson reports that '...more than 8000 Oregonians have been involved in the Plan, which, in many respects, has been as important as the actual benchmarks' (Anderson 2004, p.6).

Arguably, the most crucial aspect of the 2004 Plan is that it was created without any significant public consultation (Anderson 2004). A point reinforced by Jeff Tryens:

As a Plan the first cut of SASP was pretty good, however, there was virtually no community buy-in, outside of the EDB and a few advisory boards. (Tryens, 2007, interview, 28 March)

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<sup>112</sup> As noted in chapter 1, Mark Latham was former Federal leader of the ALP, and led the Party to defeat at the 2004 Federal Election. Throughout the campaign, Latham used the motif of the 'ladder of opportunity' to reinforce his vision of the type of society his ALP government would have sought to create. The 'ladder' reformulates the concept of 'mutual obligation' with Government rewarding the hard-working and law-abiding citizens. Critics saw this as a conservative agenda (Barnes 2004).

<sup>113</sup> A number of other potential models were considered for the SASP, before the Oregon model was settled upon. According to one senior South Australian public servant, the 'Tasmania Together' model was considered but ultimately rejected (Anon, 2007, interview, 15 March 2007). There were concerns that the targets in the Tasmanian version was too generic. As it was closely embedded in the Tasmanian community, a perceived weakness was that it was not fully 'owned' by the Government. For these reasons, the South Australian government rejected this version. Interestingly, the Tasmania Together plan is directly inspired by the Oregon plan.

The lack of community engagement with SASP was widely noted:

The reality is that few South Australians are aware of the Plan, let alone involved in its implementation. And this problem is not likely to be remedied without the EDB and the State Government putting in place appropriate community consultation and engagement strategies. (Spoehr 2004a, p.4)

The first progress report on the Plan was published in June 2006 by the SASP Audit Committee – a board of experts appointed to provide an independent record of progress in meeting the targets. In its view, progress on the Plan was ‘mixed’ (SASP Audit Committee 2006, p.3). The Audit Committee made a number of recommendations about the Plan including the need to improve community ownership and also monitor the impact of certain targets on women and Aboriginal groups (2006, p.2).

### **Community Engagement of South Australia’s Strategic Plan**

When the Plan was released in 2004, the Premier indicated that the community would be consulted on the Plan every four years, and updated as a result. The first consultation was scheduled for 2006. Prior to this, the State government undertook a short public awareness campaign in September 2005. It ran a series of newspaper, television and radio adverts publicising the Plan<sup>114</sup>. The Government established the SASP Update Team, headed up by

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<sup>114</sup> It is estimated that the costs for this media campaign in 2005 was between \$700,000 and \$1m (Anon, 2007, interview, 16 March).

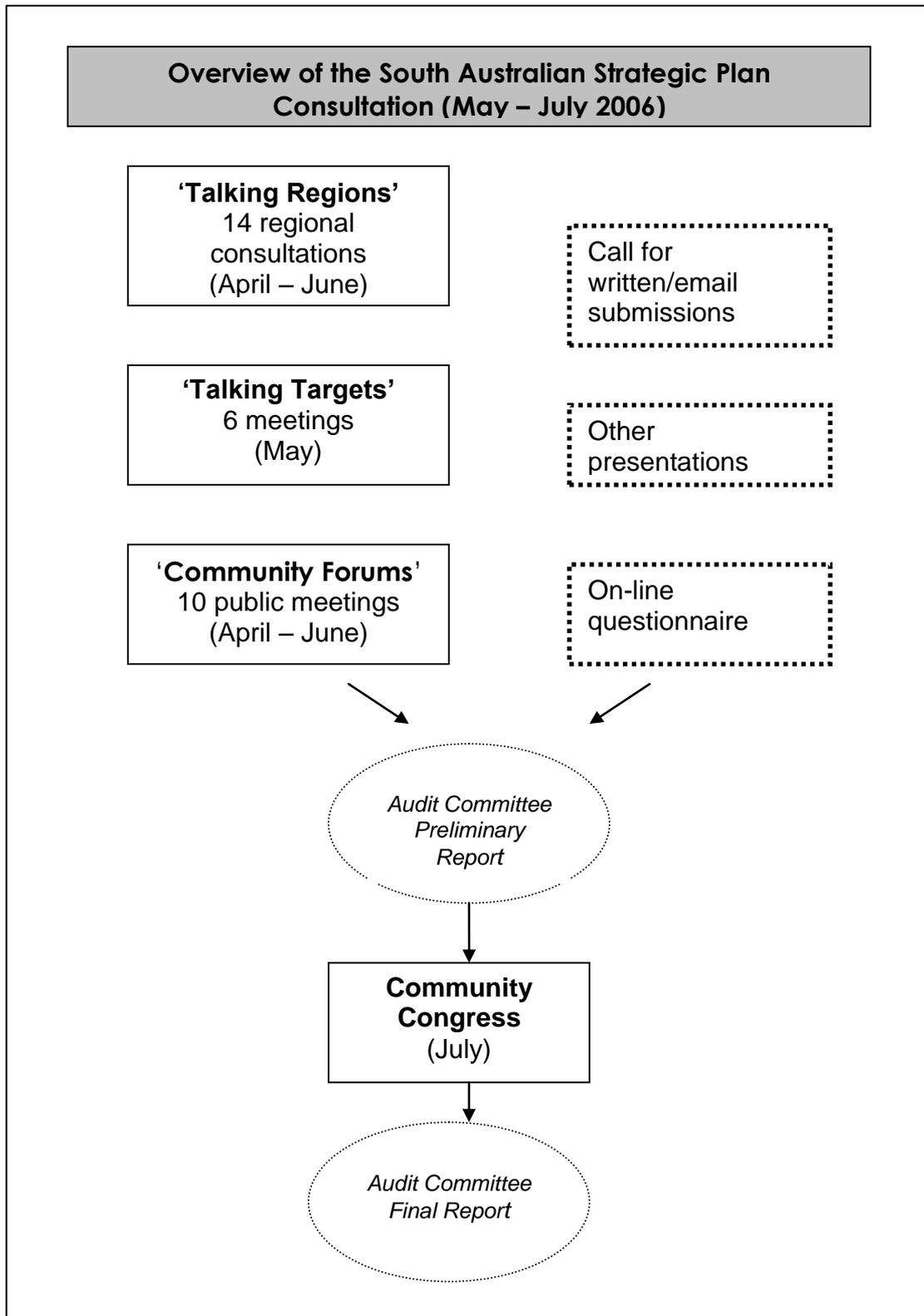
Jeff Tryens to lead on the community engagement process<sup>115</sup>. The Update Team comprised 26 'community leaders' all appointed mostly from the five main external government advisory boards. Tryens devised the consultation process.

Figure 24 outlines the main aspects of the community engagement process carried out. The consultation process had four main stages. First, a series of 14 regional meetings ('Talking Regions') were held across the State from April to June 2006. The next stage involved a series of six meetings ('Talking Targets') which looked at each of the six themes of SASP in detail. During this time from April to June, a series of ten community forums were held. Finally a Community Congress was held in July which drew all the key issues together. The SASP Update Team produced a preliminary report following the main consultation, and this was the basis for the deliberations at the Community Congress (SASP Update Team 2006b). Following the Congress, the Update Team produced a final report with all the formally agreed recommendations (SASP Update Team 2006a). The details of each of the different parts of the community consultation are outlined below.

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<sup>115</sup> The SASP Update Team had general oversight for the consultation. A supporting SASP Implementation team, also headed by Tryens, based in the Department of Premier and Cabinet ran the consultation on a day-to-day basis.

Figure 24: Overview of SASP Consultation



### *Talking Regions – The Regional Consultations*

Table 19 summarises the locations and number of attendees at each of the 'Talking Regions' consultation events. At least one meeting was held in each of the seven Local Government Association regions. These were all-day meetings, and 'invitations were sent to broad range of community leaders representing a broad cross section of the community' (SASP Update Team 2006b, p.7).

The meetings had a common format with an opening presentation on SASP targets by Jeff Tryens (or one of the Update Team), followed by presentations by a local community leader. Participants were then canvassed for their views on the particular strengths of their region<sup>116</sup>. Break-out sessions then took place to examine local concerns and then regional priorities were identified.

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<sup>116</sup> At each of the 'Talking Regions' meeting participants were surveyed on the strengths and weaknesses of their particular region (on categories broadly grouped under the six themes of the SASP. The results of the survey were then shared with the participants using a 'spider-gram'. Results of the spider-grams are appended to the preliminary engagement report (SASP Update Team 2006a).

**Table 19: SASP Regional Consultation Meetings**

Place	Date	Planning Day attendees	Community forum attendees
Adelaide CBD	26 May 2006	88	21
Mawson Lakes	17 May 2006	61	13
Noarlunga	31 May 2006	59	15
Berri	19 April 2006	75	9
Murray Bridge	18 May 2006	78	24
Eyre Region	4 April 2006	85	5
Ceduna*	5 June 2006	42	n/a
Clare	28 April 2006	72	0
Maitland**	1 June 2006	20	n/a
Nuriootpa***	10 May 2006	71	n/a
Port Augusta	11 May 2006	68	14
Mount Gambier	10 April 2006	82	9
Mount Barker	4 May 2006	65	19
Kingscote****	14 June 2006	25	n/a
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>891</b>	<b>129</b>

Source: SASP Update Team 2006b

\* Supplementary meeting organised at the request of the District Council of Ceduna.

\*\* Supplementary meeting organised at request of Yorke Regional Development Board

\*\*\* Organised at request of Barossa Regional Development Board.

\*\*\*\* Organised at request of Kangaroo Island Council

### *Community Forums*

Unlike the 'Talking Regions' planning meetings, the community forums were open to any member of the public. Generally, they were about 2-3 hours long and held in the evening, usually after the 'Talking Regions' session. Overall, the SASP Update Team report that:

The attendance figures at these meetings were low with the largest forum attracting 20 participants, despite fairly good media coverage in the lead up. Nevertheless, those who did attend were generally engaged and the small numbers allowed for detailed discussion on areas of interest and provided some valuable insights. In future we

recommend further consideration of how to engage more people at the 'grass roots' level. (SASP Update Team 2006b, p 7)

There are a possible range of factors to explain the low attendance, and in the case of the meeting held in the Clare region why there was a 'nil' attendance. As outlined in chapter 3, in general, attendance at public meetings tends to be low, and mainly from those already engaged in civil society. Given that the 'community leaders' were already invited to the regional planning meetings held during the day it is likely that these are the same people who would otherwise have attended a public meeting.

An additional factor may relate to the perceived benefits and incentives for attending the public meetings. As outlined in Chapter 3, incentives can be a strong factor influencing the overall amount of participation (Barnes & Kaase 1979; Downs 1957; Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley 2004). Despite being generally well advertised, the public forums were marketed as events where the public could learn more about SASP targets, rather than have an active role in shaping its contents. These public meetings were 'tagged on' to the regional planning meetings, and were not a particularly innovative or dynamic mechanism to engage the wider public.

### *'Talking Targets'*

'Talking Targets' were thematic events held during May 2006 (Table 20). Each of the six events was structured around one of the core SASP themes,

and the most relevant government agency led the design and management of the events, often in partnership with other agencies. Attendance at these events ranged from 90 – 240 participants. They shared a common format where a main plenary session was followed by with smaller workshop sessions.

**Table 20: SASP Thematic Consultation Meetings**

<b>Target</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Attendees</b>
1. Growing Prosperity*	2-3 May 2006	230
2. Improving Well-being	8 May 2006	91
3. Attaining Sustainability	15 May 2006	150
4. Fostering Creativity*	2-3 May 2006	230
5. Building Communities	25 May 2006	130
6. Expanding Opportunity	29 May 2006	240
	<b>Total</b>	<b>841**</b>

*Source: SASP Update Team 2006b*

\*This forum considered both targets 1 & 4.

\*\* Total only counts the 230 attendees *once* at the 2-3 May 2006 Meeting.

#### *Other Presentations and Submissions*

The community engagement process also included a series of presentations delivered to a range of organisations, and a call for written submissions<sup>117</sup>. It is not apparent how the feedback from these meetings was filtered back to the overall engagement process. In addition, 45 written submissions were sent to the Update Team as part of the consultation. These included a range of bodies across the different sectors, including the South Australian Council of Social Services (SACOSS), the Local Government Association, the National Trust, Business SA, SA Unions and the Royal Society for the Blind. Most of the submissions were from the ‘peak’ umbrella agencies representing parts of

<sup>117</sup> The presentations were made to agencies that included the Urban Development Institute of Australia and the Property Council of South Australia. The full list of presentation is appended to the Final Engagement Report (SASP Update Team, 2006a).

the wider community sector. It is interesting to note how several government agencies also joined in the consultation process.

A further 164 web-based questionnaires were also submitted, along with 160 other comments made through email, SMS/text, hotline, or post. There seems an attempt to utilise other forms of technology, but it noteworthy that the main vehicles for the engagement seem to be through the invite-only meetings.

The relatively small number of web-based questionnaires raises an interesting issue. Along with the community forums, this is the only other significant attempt to engage the wider public, and the response was relatively poor. The summary evaluation considers this in some detail, but it is noteworthy that access to internet in South Australia, like other advanced industrial societies, is highly stratified (Glover et al 2005) and broadband coverage lags below the Australian average (indeed this issue is the focus of a Plan target). None of the strategies employed to explicitly target the public attempted to engage with specific population groups, such as women, young people, single parent households or particular ethnic groups.

#### *Preliminary Findings from the Consultation Process*

At the end of the main phase of the consultation, the SASP Update Team produced a preliminary report to summarise the feedback and main issues. The aim of the report was to shape the Community Congress held in July. This report was part of the filtering process to identify the key issues, and it

notes that ‘... the intent of this report is to focus on those issues that carried the weight of opinion’ (SASP Update Team 2006a, p.4). There is a good deal of overlap between the preliminary report and the final report, and for brevity the contents of the first report are not outlined in detail. The preliminary report makes two main observations of interest to this chapter. First, it notes that the public are taking a ‘wait and see’ attitude to SASP (2006a, p.3). Second, the authors note that:

...while most agree that ideally there would have been a more comprehensive process like this prior to the plan’s launch in 2004, it could be argued that having the framework lent focus. (2006a, p.39).

### *The Community Congress*

The Community Congress was held in Adelaide on 8 July 2006. This was an invite-only event to all those who had participated in the earlier part of the consultation. The Congress attracted ‘nearly 400 participants, including many senior people from community groups, the business sector, state and local government’ (SASP Update Team 2006a, p.6). The findings of the preliminary engagement report were used as the main focus to seek agreement on the way forward. The preliminary engagement report made ten key propositions which shaped the discussions at the Congress (these propositions are considered in the later section which examines the outcomes from the consultation process). In the afternoon session of the Congress, a series of workshops were set up to finalise and refine the targets. There was broad

agreement at the Congress that the consultation had been useful and was seen as a positive initiative from many in the community sector (Yates 2006)

Following the Congress, the Update Team organised 11 working groups to further refine the recommendations on how to improve the Plan. The working groups were formed for each of the six main themes of the Plan, and a further five groups were formed to address:

- community engagement (including governance and regionalising the Plan)
- vision statement for SASP
- key interactions across the Plan
- increasing the profile of Aboriginal Issues
- data measurement issues – (as a resource for the other groups)

According to the Update Team:

Over 200 people from disparate sectors of the community were involved in the working groups. Ministerial advisers and state government officers were involved in many of the groups...An executive officer from each of the relevant government agency supported each of the working groups". (SASP Update Team 2006a, p.7).

Membership for the working groups was on a self-nominating basis from those already engaged in the process, in that interested parties were encouraged to join the appropriate group. It is worth noting that representatives from the

State government were actively involved in this process, and directing the groups to agree the final changes and recommendations. This was a political necessity, but also a way of ensuring that government remained the final custodian of the Plan.

Finally, at the end of this finalisation process, the Update Team produced the final engagement report which outlined all the main and specific recommendations for updating the Plan. These were presented to the State government, and were accepted in their entirety.

### **Outcomes from the Consultation**

Following the Community Congress in July 2006, the SASP Update Team was charged with collating all the comments and recommendations that arose from the consultation process. In its final engagement report, the SASP Update Team outline the following eight main recommendations to the State government (SASP Update Team 2006b, p.3):

**Table 21: Main SASP Recommendations**

1. Community engagement should become an integral part of the on-going governance arrangements for SASP; and that a 'Community Engagement Board' comprising non-government leaders is established.
2. SASP should be regionalised
3. There should be on-going community engagement and that the State government consultations should, in general, be improved.
4. SASP needs an over-arching vision
5. Key interactions across the Plan should be made – connecting the main targets and how they interact (for example the targets on economic growth and increasing the population)
6. Increase the profile of Aboriginal issues
7. Specific changes to the targets (including additions and deletions)
8. All comments from participants should be passed to the relevant Minister.

*Source: SASP Update Team 2006b, pp.1-2*

The Rann government's response to these recommendations is discussed in more detail in the summary evaluation at the end of this chapter. It is useful however to make a number of observations about these recommendations. First, the need for on-going and continued community engagement is a key theme and relates to several of these eight recommendations. There is also an implicit criticism that consultation processes, particularly around the Plan, can and should be improved.

The third main recommendation in this list has a further six sub-recommendations which all relate to enhancing the State government's consultative processes. There is a specific call to engage with NGOs and also young people. In line with a strand of NSD thinking, there is a further

recommendation to develop partnerships with parts of the wider community and private sector to work together on SASP targets. The net effect is that the consultation on the Plan in 2006 created a greater appetite for engagement and dialogue with the State government.

### **Summary Evaluation of South Australia's Strategic Plan**

This final section of the chapter offers a summary evaluation of the 2006 consultation and community engagement of the Plan. As outlined in the chapter on methodology and methods (Ch. 4), this is a comparative study and the evaluation is organised in the same way as the other case studies reported in this thesis. The evaluation draws upon the work of Beetham (1994) and Pratchett (1999) to critically audit the consultation initiatives. Pratchett uses the themes of responsiveness and representativeness to examine the democratic credentials of a range of different consultative forums and mechanisms. This thesis uses these two principles as a critical lens to evaluate the consultation on the Plan. The Rann government is the Australian State government most influenced by Tony Blair's New Labour government, and the politics of the 'New Social Democracy'. As outlined in the first two chapters of this thesis, there are a number of tensions and underlying themes in the democratic renewal strand of the NSD. Drawing upon the Beetham-Pratchett framework, this summary evaluation also examines the underlying tensions and issues.

### *Scope and Aims of the Initiative*

In evaluating the 2006 consultation on the Plan it is useful to re-examine the overall aims and scope of the initiative. Apparently, the 2006 consultation on the Plan '...is the most comprehensive, whole of State exercise conducted in South Australia' (SASP Update Team 2006a, p.2). This was one of the most substantive efforts made to engage South Australians on a range of issues. Over 1 600 South Australians were involved in the process, and at least 200 of these were intensively involved in the 11 working parties to finalise and agree the final recommendations.

There were a number of overlapping aims in the consultation, and it is useful to reflect on the links and tensions between them. According to the SASP Update Team, the consultation was designed to improve understanding of the content of the Plan, while also 'get feedback from interest groups, community organisations and individuals around the State' (SASP Update Team 2006a p.1). There are two separate strands to the overall aims of the consultation: promote awareness and also gain feedback. There is some tension between these two aims, particularly given that the main target groups of the consultation were coming from a low knowledge base of the Plan.

An interesting example of the overlapping functions of the consultation is highlighted by the role of Jeff Tryens, who led most of the regional consultation events and the community forums. Tryens spent a good deal of time outlining the key issues and bringing up the audiences up to speed on the Plan. This was a necessary task and yet in some cases it left little time for

actual engagement from participants. As one participant notes, who attended a community forum, 'it was like attending a lecture. (Anon. 2007, interview, 23 March). This is not to disparage the work of an individual, but rather contextualise the available space for feedback and critical discussion at public sessions.

The overlapping aims of the consultation are also reflected in the funding arrangements for the initiative. It is noteworthy that initially there was no significant budget allocated to the consultation process<sup>118</sup>. Prior to the consultation, SASP public awareness campaign costs were approximately \$700,000 - \$1m. The advertising campaign had both an educative and promotional function. The South Australian government has set of guidelines for public advertising that contain within them a degree of flexibility. (Department of Premier and Cabinet 2009)<sup>119</sup> While the advertising legitimately fell within these guidelines, it could be argued that it was an indirect form of tax-payer subsidy for promoting the Rann government. Regardless of the intent, the advertising campaign was certainly a beneficial promotional vehicle for the Rann government, as well as the Plan. It is interesting to compare this with the minimal amount of funds available for consultation itself; and indeed it was also suggested that both a lack of time *and money* was a factor in why there was not a stronger public component to the overall consultation process.

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<sup>118</sup> This was a comment provided in an interview with the author by a senior South Australian public servant under the condition of anonymity (Anon, 2007, interview, 15 June ).

<sup>119</sup> The issue of tax-payer funding overtly party political advertising is a pressing concern for the Rann South Australian government. In 2009, Rann announced a ban on Ministerial appearances in government campaigns. The findings from a South Australian Parliamentary Committee into tax-payer funded government campaigns are due to be published in November 2009 ('\$60m for Government Advertising', *Adelaide Advertiser*, 27 August 2009).

## Representativeness

The theme of representativeness links with the issue of inequality of voice. 'Representativeness' is an organising principle for a critical discussion of who participated in the consultation. As chapter 3 outlined, political participation and civic engagement tends to be highly stratified with groups from higher socio-economic groups tending to be more active and involved than people from lower socio-economic groups. This section outlines some of the issues about the types of people involved in the consultation. In summary, it was found that some groups were over-represented in the consultation, and others under-represented:

**Table 22: SASP – Over and Under-Represented Groups**

<b>SASP Consultation: Over and Under-represented Groups</b>	
<i>Over-represented Groups</i>	People from South Australian regional areas
	Groups already politically and civically engaged
	People with professional and academic occupations
	State government officials, and local government officials
<i>Under-represented Groups</i>	Women
	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander South Australians
	Low income groups
	Metropolitan-based South Australians
	Groups and individuals not civically engaged
	Smaller community organisations
	Business organisations

The design of the consultation process shaped and determined who participated. The SASP Update Team did not set out to achieve direct equality of voice from the outset. As noted above, the main target audience comprised community sector organisations and a broadly defined group of ‘community leaders’, along with ‘interested individuals’. As Jeff Tryens notes:

My focus was on engaging community leaders in shaping SASP. In many ways SASP is just too far removed from everyday life for the average person to get excited about. (Tryens, 2007, interview, 22 March)

The decision to focus on attracting ‘community leaders’ and interested individuals, rather than the wider public, was made for pragmatic reasons. The community leaders were those individuals active in their own local communities, who have some familiarity with government processes, and could play an intermediary role between the government and wider civil society. From the Government’s perspective, this group would be able to make more informed comments about re-shaping SASP targets. However, it appears that within Government there was some discussion about trying to broaden the range of groups and voices involved in the consultation process:

If additional money had been available, we would have run some focus groups on the plan, and possibly done some additional survey work. (Tryens, 2007, interview, 22 March)

While attendance lists were taken at most of the regional and thematic meetings, there has been no formal evaluation of the consultation to examine which groups participated. There was very little demographic profiling of the range of participants. Examining the attendance lists it appears that a large number of government officials and public sector agencies fed into the thematic and regional planning events. There is also some evidence that some of the policy staff from particular government agencies were highly energetic into shaping the dialogue on specific targets<sup>120</sup>. These policy officers were operating, in effect, as policy activists (Yeatman 1998). On the plus side, this is arguably an important development as technical expertise will be useful in ensuring the targets are able to be measured. In addition, agencies such as the South Australian Office for Women were active in both involving its stakeholders groups and also contributing directly to the process to ensure that gender-based outcomes were embedded into the Plan. However, this evidence of policy activism reinforces the government domination and control of the agenda. Government agencies are better resourced and in a potentially stronger lobbying position than their community sector counterparts. The argument is not that this is necessarily an undesirable outcome, but that the process and levels of engagement by the different participants mean that it is rather misleading to simply describe this overall as a 'community consultation' (as Rann states in his foreword to the 2007 version of the Plan).

Attendance lists of the different groups that took part in the planning days were compiled, and these appear to reflect a diverse range of groups.

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<sup>120</sup> This observation was made by a participant at several of the planning events, under the condition of anonymity (Anon, 2007, Interview, 15 March 2007)

Interestingly the amount of Aboriginal-specific groups remained very low, and arguably it was internal government lobbying that had the most impact for increasing the Aboriginal profile in the Plan, rather direct lobbying by the wider Aboriginal community. This is not to deny the agency and activism of those Aboriginal people who were involved in the process.

The only demographic profiling of the planning events was some monitoring of the gender of participants, by 'VivaSA', the consultants who helped coordinate the sessions. Female participation in the regional community planning events was disproportionately lower than the male participants (approximately 1:3). Yet, as noted above, a range of women's lobbying groups and organisations were mobilised and indeed made highly effective interventions. Perhaps the most significant outcome was a commitment by the government to disaggregate SASP targets by gender every two years. There are some parallels with the lobbying for additional Aboriginal targets in that there is a complex relationship here with the 'politics of presence' (Phillips 1998). In both cases women and Aboriginal groups were under-represented in the consultation process, and yet through effective lobbying – predominantly from government agencies – additional and more stretching targets were devised.

Some groups were clearly over (and under) represented. The number of regional-based participants was disproportionately high compared with metropolitan-based participants. Given that regional communities often feel marginal from government policy-making this was an important symbolic part

of the consultation. This is likely to have had a useful (if minimal) political pay-off. It was striking that the business community was under-represented in the consultation and this was mainly due to the structure of all-day planning sessions (SASP Update Team2006a, p.8). Business SA, the peak body for the private sector in South Australia was highly active on behalf of its members and the economic priorities in the Plan reflect Rann's pro-market, pro-business agenda. The pro-market bias of the Plan is not too surprising given that it emerged from the Economic Summit at the outset of this process.

The level of public involvement of individual South Australians (as opposed to community sector engagement) was minimal, and there was no demographic profiling of the people who participated at the community forums. It is highly likely that they were atypical members of the public, in that their own levels of civic engagement were likely to be disproportionately higher than most other groups. Crucially, there seems to have been no attempt to ensure that traditionally under-represented groups – predominantly those on low-incomes - were involved. The public involvement in the consultation remains the weakest aspect overall. On the one hand, it could be argued that this is not a significant cause for concern, insofar as the relevant peak, community and voluntary organisations were effectively engaged in the process and represented their issue or segment of the wider population. Yet, the effort to engage 'ordinary' South Australians was tokenistic, static, and unimaginative and was clearly not appreciated by the government as an important element of the process. Indeed the structure of the consultation process explicitly favoured community organisations voices over the voices of individuals in the

community, with the 'value' of organisation comments far outweighing those provided by individuals.

At best, the priority of equality of voice has an ambivalent status for the State government. This is not to say the government deliberately set out to exclude participants, rather that its approach entrenched the under and over-representation of some organisations and demographic groups. The difficulty is that the Rann government's discourse of 'community consultation' tends to obscure these underlying patterns of inequality of voice, and over-inflates the actual level of engagement and legitimacy of the Plan.

### **Responsiveness**

Responsiveness is the second main principle used to audit and evaluate the consultation of the Plan. The principle of responsiveness enables a critical discussion of how the consultation process links with the decision-making processes and the impact on policy making. In the context of the consultation, there are two main dimensions of responsiveness which are examined in turn:

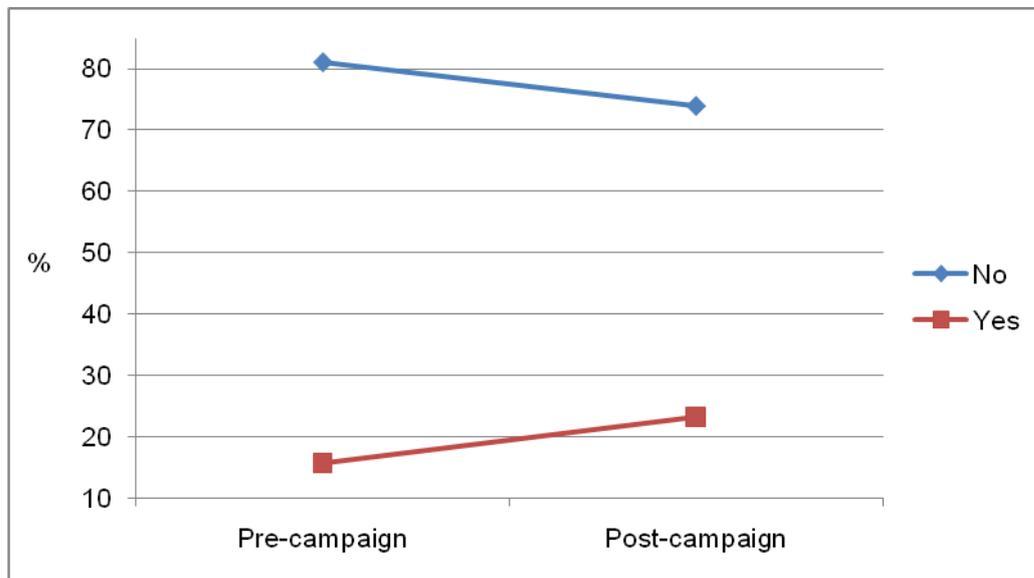
- community ownership and awareness of the Plan
- impact on government policy

Community ownership of SASP can be seen as the 'demand-side' of responsiveness – the degree to which key sections of wider South Australian civil society became increasingly more supportive of the targets in the Plan. Impact on policy refers to what could be termed the 'supply side' – the degree to which the State government acted on the comments and recommendations that arose from the consultation process.

### *Public Awareness and Ownership of the Plan*

There is a clear distinction between community awareness and ownership of the Plan. The Rann government commissioned surveys before and after the 2005 advertising campaign to track public awareness of the Plan. As figure 25 shows, randomly selected survey respondents' awareness of the Plan rose from 15.7 per cent to 23.2 per cent. A number of South Australian public servants were keen to point out that this figure is higher than that achieved after ten years of the 'Oregon Shines' Plan (Anon, 2007, interview, 15 March).

**Figure 25: Knowledge of SASP (2005-06)**



Question: Are you aware of South Australia's Strategic Plan?

Source: *Department of Health – South Australia 2006, p.9*

The survey data confirm that the largest increase in knowledge of the Plan was for South Australians aged 40 – 49 (Department of Health – South

Australia 2006, p10). At the end of the campaign more men (25.5 per cent) than women (21.1 per cent) knew about the Plan (2006, p.9). There was also a good deal of regional variation in knowledge of the Plan. In Adelaide City, Elizabeth and Noarlunga, knowledge of the Plan was 23.4 per cent compared with Riverland and Murraylands (18.6 per cent) and Central and Lower South East regions (18.2 per cent) (2006, p.11)<sup>121</sup>. This reinforces a common pattern where people based in more urban areas and older people tend to have more political awareness than younger people and people from regional and rural areas.

There is anecdotal evidence that since the consultation undertaken in 2006, knowledge of the Plan has decreased, although no survey data exist to support this. It is also noteworthy that while the State government was pleased with the increase in levels of awareness, it did not set a target for overall awareness of the Plan.

The survey respondents' familiarity with the Plan was much lower than their knowledge of its content. The number of those 'very familiar' with SASP rose from 2.6 per cent to 4.9 per cent (2006, p.13). However, those only 'somewhat familiar' with the Plan actually *fell* after the publicity campaign from 22.6 per cent to 18.8 per cent (2006, p.13).<sup>122</sup>

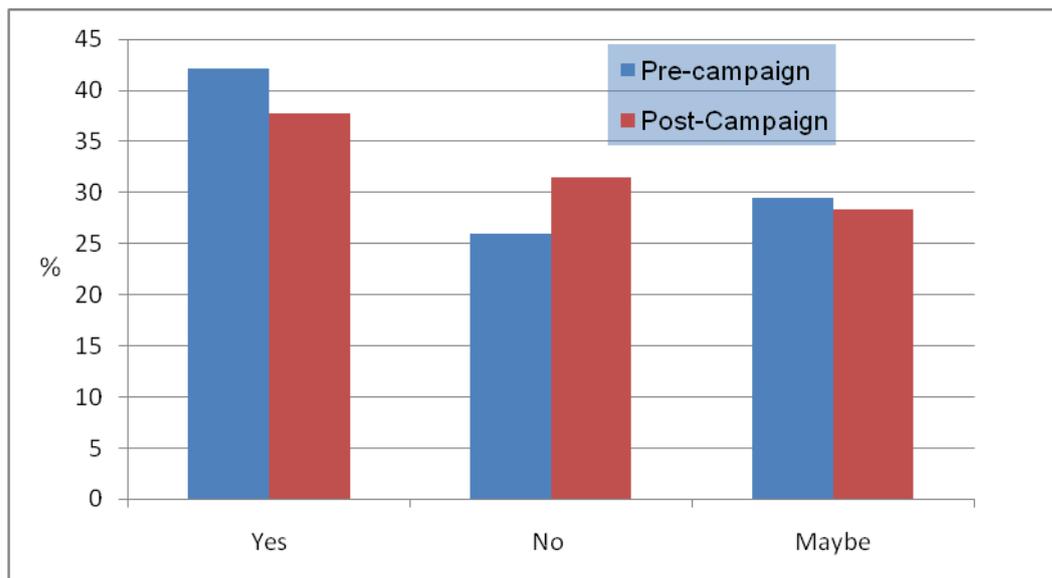
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<sup>121</sup> These are all Local Government Areas (LGAs) in South Australia.

<sup>122</sup> Caution should be exercised with this result as the sample size for the second survey was much higher (n = 17140) than the first survey (n = 1411) (Department of Health – SA 2006, p.5)

It is also interesting to compare respondents' levels of awareness and familiarity with the Plan with their overall support for such a Plan. Survey respondents were asked how worthwhile it is to have a plan of this nature. Post campaign, 88.4 per cent of respondents said it was either 'very' or 'somewhat' worthwhile (2006, p.20). This reflects the degree to which the public might broadly endorse the idea of a strategic plan, but leave the detail to the politicians and public service. Finally, respondents were asked if they would be willing to participate in community projects that would seek to achieve targets in the Plan (Figure 26). Over 40 per cent responded 'yes':

**Figure 26: Community Involvement with SASP (2005-06)**



Source: Department of Health – SA 2006, p.37

*Question: Would you be willing to participate in community projects that seek to achieve targets in the Strategic Plan?*

Interestingly, after the public awareness campaign, respondents were actually less likely to report that they would be willing to participate in community

events to support the Plan (42.1 per cent compared with 37.8 per cent) (2006, p.37)<sup>123</sup>. Overall, the findings from the surveys before and after the public campaign in late 2005 should not be over-stated. In general, knowledge of the Plan was less than a quarter of respondents and familiarity was much lower. Perhaps more significantly was the high level of general support for the Plan, and some suggested willingness to be involved in achieving the targets. Respondents also suggested that the State government and local governments are the main agencies responsible for the Plan (59 percent of respondents) compared with 23.4 per cent of respondents who reported that 'families and individuals' were also responsible for the Plan (2006, p.31). By 2006, the Plan was still predominantly seen as a government agenda.

An interesting factor related to the low level of public interest is the degree of media interest that was attracted to the consultation. In terms of print media, Adelaide has one main daily newspaper, the tabloid *Adelaide Advertiser*, and two other weekly newspapers. Tanya Smith, a senior public servant, who along with Jeff Tryens oversaw the SASP Update Team, notes the difficulty in engaging the interest of the South Australian media.

Parts of the local media are not helpful in encouraging people to lift their gaze...However, the regional media did pick up on the Plan and ran some interesting pieces. (Smith, T, 2007, interview, 28 March)

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<sup>123</sup> Again, caution should be exercised in interpreting these figures given the sample sizes in the two surveys were so different.

In addition, there were some insightful articles in Adelaide's weekly newspapers (Anderson 2007; Spoehr 2007), but it should be noted that these papers have a small circulation.

### *Community Ownership*

The level of awareness of the Plan by the wider public is distinct from the awareness and engagement from the South Australian community and voluntary sector. The main target groups for the consultation were predominantly community/voluntary sector peak organisations, broadly defined 'community leaders' and interested individuals. The ownership by these groups is therefore much more indicative of the governments focussed awareness raising than gauging the wider public awareness of the Plan. The preliminary engagement report on the consultation reports that after the main round of consultative events (but before the Community Congress):

The community is taking a 'wait and see' attitude regarding the government's willingness to share ownership of the Plan. (SASP Update Team 2006b, p.3)

This scepticism reflects the fact that the original Plan drawn up in 2004 was done without direct public involvement. By the final engagement report, the Update Team identified a shift in ownership of the Plan:

We consider that any initial scepticism about the extent to which there was a real commitment to achieve community ownership of the Plan

has long since faded, in large part due to the transparency of process.

(SASP Update Team 2006a, p.2)

The SASP Update Team also notes that expectations among the community sector were raised as a result of the consultation (2006a, p.8). In narrow terms it seems that by and large the experiences of the 1 600-odd South Australians involved in the consultation was positive. However, there is an apparent gap between the actual level of engagement with the Plan by the community sector and the Rann government's rhetoric about the overall level of engagement. In his foreword to the revised SASP, Premier Rann notes:

After nearly three years, our Strategic Plan has taken root in communities across South Australia. People from all over our state, from all walks of life, have taken part. The Plan has helped change the way South Australians see their future, and their idea of what they need to do to make a better future...We have changed the Plan to take account of the views and priorities of the thousands of South Australians we spoke to across the state. (Government of South Australia 2007, p.2).

In this account, community sector ownership is conflated with wider public ownership. Rann's use of the term 'South Australians' suggest the wider public, but the bulk of the consultation was with representatives from community sector organisations and local councils. Put another way, the South Australian government suggest that 'thousands' were involved with the consultation, and this inflates the amount of legitimacy of the Plan. This is not to disparage the consultation process, but rather contextualise understanding

about who is engaged with and 'owns' the Plan. There is a temptation to suggest that ownership of the Plan is much wider than actually exists. Engagement with the Plan is seemingly conflated with broad public ownership.

### *Political Ownership of SASP*

A further dimension of ownership of the Plan is to consider the engagement with the process by the other political parties, particularly the Liberal opposition. The Plan is a key instrument in Rann's consensual political approach. While the Plan is ostensibly a policy tool, there has been a useful political pay-off for Rann. The Plan has been a useful vehicle for drawing support and legitimacy from outside the ALP's traditional support bases.

When the Plan was originally released in 2004, there was little attempt by the Government to engage with the Liberals. Initially, under the leadership of Rob Kerin, the Liberal Opposition dismissed the Plan as the 'State Strategic Sham'<sup>124</sup>. A change in Liberal Party leadership, suggested a softening of its stance about SASP. Kerrin's successor, Martin Hamilton-Smith indicated that the Liberals, if re-elected, would keep the framework of the Plan<sup>125</sup>.

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<sup>124</sup> This quote was made by a senior South Australian public servant during the course of an interview and is based on an apparently publicly-made comment by Rob Kerin at that time. Despite numerous attempts, the author has not tracked down a copy of this article, but there is no reason to suggest that this comment was not made.

<sup>125</sup> In 2009, Martin Hamilton-Smith was ousted from the leadership of the South Australian Liberal Party, and was succeeded by Isobel Redmond.

During the consultation process, the SASP Update Team was keen to promote it as a bi-partisan agenda. Former National Party MP and elder statesmen of South Australian politics, Peter Blacker, was instrumental in selling the Strategic Plan agenda at the regional meetings (to predominantly Liberal supporters). Blacker heads the State's Regional Consultative Committee, and led the regional consultative meetings. After some initial cynicism that the Plan was a partisan political project, Blacker's view changes and he saw an opportunity for regionally-based South Australians:

My initial gut reaction was that is a government initiative but I changed my mind very quickly...The Premier was pretty generous in doing this.

(Blacker, 2007, interview, 28 March)

Blacker was highly energetic and active in the regional consultations, especially by inviting along local community leaders. The final recommendation to 'regionalise' the Plan by producing a series of regional sub-plans, is largely due to the efforts of Blacker. As noted in the section on representativeness, regional voices were actually over-represented in the consultation process, which produces a useful political benefit for the Rann government. Blacker now is the Chair of the SASP Community Engagement Board.

## **Responsiveness – Impact on Policy**

The South Australian government estimates that approximately 1 600 South Australians fed into the 'Have Your Say SA' consultation on the 84 targets of the Plan (SASP Update Team 2006a, p.1). Given the breadth of the consultation, it is pertinent to consider the outcomes in the two most relevant areas to this thesis:

- the outcomes relating to the overall community engagement approach of the Plan
- the specific changes to the targets on political participation.

The main tangible outcome from the consultation was that the Plan was updated and revised, with the new version launched on 25 January 2007. This confirms that the Plan remains a key focus of the Rann government, and that increasingly the State bureaucracy's policies and programs are being shaped around these targets. The annual departmental funding bids are now being aligned with the six main themes of the revised SASP targets and every Cabinet submission makes reference to the relevant targets.

The second (2007) version of the Plan is the Rann government's main statement on how they responded to the consultation. The revised SASP includes a useful appendix which details all the original targets and the revisions, along with the additional targets. Significantly, the updated version of SASP contains 98 targets, an increase of 14 from the 2004 Plan. These new recommendations can be clearly tracked back through the two main community engagement reports produced by the SASP Update Team – and

they closely correlate with the overall feedback garnered during the exercise. In summary, the views of the participants have been reflected in the key changes to the revised targets.

Table 23 summaries the main government responses to the eight key recommendations made by the SASP Update Team. As expected, by and large, the Rann government has addressed these recommendations. The most significant outcome is the increased Aboriginal profile in the Plan, and the new community engagement governance arrangements.

The creation of the new body the Community Engagement Board (CEB) is a characteristic Rann response to the community ownership of the Plan. The CEB comprises representatives from a range of 'government advisory boards and councils' (Government of South Australia 2007, p.40). Although the CEB is ostensibly an independent board, it does not have any direct representation from the community sector or unions. The South Australian Council of Social Services (SACOSS) lobbied—unsuccessfully—to have a seat on the CEB. As a point of comparison, the equivalent body in Tasmania is much more representative of the wider community (Crowley & Coffey 2007).

**Table 23: Rann Government’s Response to SASP Consultation**

Recommendation	Government Response
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Community Engagement Board should be set up to continue community engagement of SASP.	This was announced as part of the launch of the revised SASP and is Chaired by Peter Blacker
SASP should be regionalised	This is a key priority for SASP, and regional versions of the Plan are being drawn up. <sup>126</sup>
Over-arching vision	Revised SASP includes 'vision' statements framed around a series of questions at the beginning of each of the 6 objectives.
Key interactions between different targets	Some of these have been highlighted in the Plan, but beyond noting many of these, it remains unclear how these will be developed and managed.
Increased Aboriginal profile	Increase in number of Aboriginal-related targets, and also a target in each section of SASP.
Specific changes to the targets	These are outlined in the revised SASP, and helpfully the appendix gives summary information of the changes. Of the 98 targets in the new SASP, it is interesting to note that only 8 of these are indicated 'no change' or 'no substantive change'. However, in a number of cases the main change has been to extend or make more precise the deadline or measurement.
All comments arising from the consultation to be passed to relevant Ministers	As far as can be seen, this has been done. However, it remains unclear that there has been any substantive action on these comments at all.

*Source: SASP Update Team 2006a*

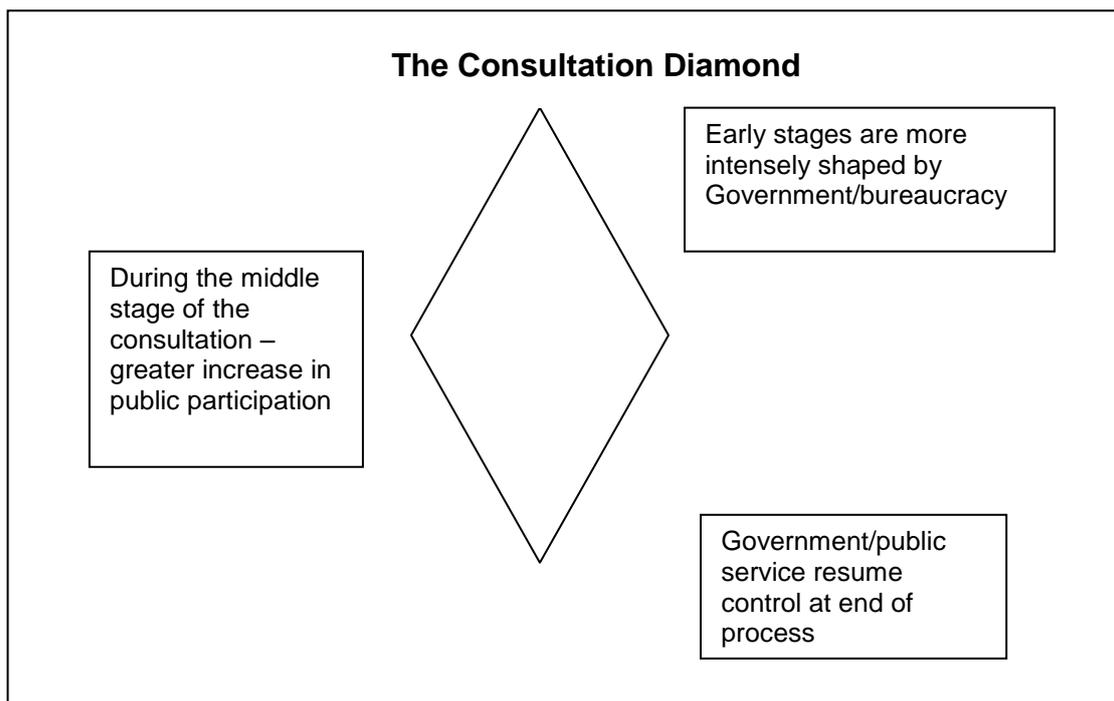
The degree of government responsiveness was shaped by the design of the consultation exercise. As noted above, there were underlying tensions in the scope and aims of the consultation, and the Rann government sought to find a balance between retaining government control of the agenda, while broadening community ownership. As the SASP Update Team note:

<sup>126</sup> At the time of writing, October 2009, only four of the 12 SA regions did not have a regional version of the SASP. The four regions were the Adelaide Hills, Northern, Western and South Adelaide. Given the population imbalance in South Australia with the bulk of the 1.2m population living in Adelaide, it is not surprising that Adelaide city and metropolitan plans have not been completed. It also remains a more open question as to how far the regional plans are 'owned' by the community and other sectors in the regional areas, or the quality of the consultation processes to agree the strategic targets and priorities.

...The State government was, and currently is, the final arbiter of the content of SASP. The recent establishment ...the Have Your Say SA consultation process presents possibilities for broadening community ownership of the Plan. (SASP Update Team 2006b, p.11)

In this respect, the consultation on the Plan was based on the common model of the 'consultation diamond' (Bridgman and Davis 2004, pp.79-80). In this model, government and public service control of the agenda is most tightly controlled at the beginning and close of the consultation process (Figure 27).

**Figure 27: The Consultation Diamond**



*Source: Adapted from Bridgman and Davis 2004, p.80*

At the outset of the consultation, the targets in the 2004 version of the Plan set the agenda for the consultation, and the consultation feedback shaped the *content* of this agenda, not the agenda itself. Put another way, the 84-odd

targets were up for discussion and refinement, but it was not an exercise designed to create a significant re-prioritising of issues or setting new policy directions. Likewise, the government's positive response to the recommendations from the SASP Update Team was largely due to the fact that State government officials were instrumental in ensuring that the final engagement report linked with the pre-set agenda.

Tanya Smith, Deputy Chief Executive of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, who was the main public servant who oversaw the 2006 consultation in her previous role, provides an interesting insight into the role of community engagement:

Advocates of community engagement need to acknowledge that to some extent the wider public are empty vessels. How questions are asked does shape the recommendations that emerge. For example, talking about priority concerns in an open-ended way produces a different response to a question about "targets" or "goals". (Smith, T, 2007, interview, 28 March)

This is an interesting insight as it suggests that the public or in the case of the 2006 consultation, the participants from the community sector, should be consulted in a strategic way. It links with a view shared by Roy Hattersley (2003) in his critique of the Big Conversation (Ch. 6). Hattersley suggests that the public tend to offer generalised feedback during a consultation, rather than specific policy responses. The characterisation of the public as 'empty vessels' links directly with the degree of government control of the

consultation agenda. On the one hand, perceiving the public as 'empty vessels' reinforces the rationale for the government to set and control the agenda. As outlined in the previous chapter on the Victorian plan, there can be valid reasons for having such a highly centralised and structured process. However, achieving a balance between government control and community ownership involves a fluctuating set of priorities. The consultation on the Plan was highly managed and centralised with little real devolution of power. The consultation, like the Victorian process, had a number of multiple and competing aims, blending promotion with consultation, legitimisation and education. The risk in setting narrow parameters for participant involvement is that it can diminish the other aim of achieving broader ownership.

To some extent, the tensions between the different aims of the consultation were underscored by the government's own ambivalence about how far to cede control. Examining the level of government transparency during the consultation is illustrative. On the whole, there was a high degree of transparency to the consultation process, with the SASP Update Team sending out regular email updates, a set of follow-up meetings in the regions, and perhaps most positively, the appendix in the final engagement report which set out the reasons for the changes to all of the 84 targets. This suggests a government keen to maintain overall ownership of the Plan, but willing to act transparently during the process. Yet, the commitment to transparency did not come easily for the State government. For example, the decision to publish the final appendix was highly controversial, and did not

initially have unanimous agreement<sup>127</sup>. Jeff Tryens made clear his frustration with the wider commitment to transparency:

I can't understand the level of government secrecy that exists here. You'd think South Australia was a NATO country guarding nuclear secrets! (Tryens, J, 2007, interview, 22 March)

### *Lack of Responsiveness*

The Rann Government formally accepted and implemented the eight main recommendations arising from the consultation, showing a good deal of responsiveness; but it is interesting to note the areas in which there has not been any action on issues arising from the process. While the Update Team initially recommended 'further consideration of how to engage more people at the 'grass roots' level' (SASP Update Team 2006b, p.5), this was not formalised in the final suite of recommendations. It may be that the CEB will take this agenda forward in the next update of the Plan, scheduled for 2010, but this is speculation. The risk is that when the consultation is re-run in 2010, the focus of activity will remain on securing community sector ownership rather than the wider public, or particular population groups. The CEB itself is not designed to be a 'grassroots' body for consultation and the danger is that this strand of the consultation could be marginalised. It is striking too that there is no Rann government (or commissioned) formal evaluation of the consultation which may have reinforced this limitation of the 2006 consultation.

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<sup>127</sup> This view was made by a senior public servant, under the condition of anonymity (Anon, 2007, 13 March 2007)

From the outset of the process, there was a clear signal by the Rann government that this consultation was the beginning of a wider attempt to open up the dialogue with the wider community (SASP Update Team 2006a, p.5). It is too early to say how far that culture change in creating a more dialogic government has taken place, although it is perhaps telling that Jeff Tryens notes:

My biggest disappointment is that the process has not brought about greater change in the hearts and minds of state officials about the benefits of working with the community. (Tryens, J, 2007, interview, 22 March)

The other issue, which has not yet seen concerted government follow-up action, is the recommendation to improve the overall quality of community consultations undertaken by the government. Again, this was an issue raised in the preliminary engagement report, but which was not explicitly articulated in the final engagement report. To date, there is little evidence to suggest a significant degree of activity in this area.

### **Specific Response to 'Political Participation' Targets**

In this final section, the political participation targets in the Plan are examined. Table 24 compares the 2004 targets with the 2007 updated targets, along with the status of progress in 2006. On the whole, the discussion on the political participation strand of SASP was a small part of the overall consultation. Participants at the regional meetings tended to highlight local issues such as

infrastructure, rather than directly address the 'building communities' section of the Plan. However, the political participation targets were directly addressed at the Talking Targets' meeting held on 25 May 2006. The Update Team noted that the participants at this meeting:

...demonstrated support for targets which could better capture the desire to build and measure social capital, community capacity and/or democratic participation. For example, the target on informal voting was not considered a particularly good indicator of quality of political participation. (SASP Update Team 2006b, p.27)

The notes of the smaller workshops during the course of this meeting also record a range of strategies and ideas to increase civic engagement. In common with the wider consultation, participants tended to make observations and raise issues rather than suggest concrete strategies. It is notable that many of the participants at this meeting were drawn from government agencies. In general, there seems a general appetite for democratic renewal, but without many specific recommendations. The SASP Update Team note that many of the participants argued that the emphasis on civic engagement should be more than 'just representation through formal political processes' (SASP Update Team 2006a, p.4).

**Table 24: Summary of Changes to SASP Targets following Consultation**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>2004 SASP Target</b>	<b>Status at 2006 Audit Progress Report</b>	<b>2007 revised SASP target (following Update Team Recommendation)</b>
<i>Women in Leadership</i>	T5.1	Increase the number of women on all state boards and committees to 50% on average by 2006	Progress but unlikely to be achieved	Change to: - extend deadline to 2008, and maintain or improve at that level thereafter. Also include commercial, community and not for profit boards
	T5.2	Have 50% of women chairs on state government boards by 2008	Progress but unlikely to be achieved	Change to: - extend deadline to 2010 (also include other types of boards as above)
	T5.3	Increase the number of female members of parliament to 50% within 10 years	Progress but unlikely to be achieved	Change to: deadline now to reach 2014
<i>Political Participation</i>	T5.4	Halve the number of informal votes as a percentage of total votes cast in state government elections over the next 10 years	Little/No/Negative movement made on the target	Replace with: Increase the proportion of eligible young South Australians (18-19 years) enrolled to vote to better Australian average by 2014
	T5.5	Increase voter participation in local government elections in South Australia to 50% within 10 years	Unclear	Change to: deadline is 2014 rather than 'within 10 years'
<i>Volunteering</i>	T5.6	Increase the level of volunteering in South Australia from 38% in 2000 to 50% within 10 years	Achieved	Change to: Maintain the high level of volunteering in South Australia at 50 % participation or higher
	T5.6 (i)			Supplemental measure to T5.6 – the number of people who report being engaged in their community
<b>New Targets</b>				New: Aboriginal leadership – increase number participating in Aboriginal leadership programs
				New: Multiculturalism – increase number of South Australians who see multiculturalism as a positive influence on society

Source: SASP Update Team 2006a

In sum, the existing 2004 targets were not radically revised and in most cases they were made more specific and measurable. By and large, these changes reflect the comments from the participants in the thematic event on 'building communities'. There are two additional targets in the revised Plan on Aboriginal leadership and multiculturalism. In this respect, the revised Plan increases the equality of voice, and encourages the State government to take further measures to meet the needs of traditionally excluded groups.

The most significant change is that the target on informal voting was dropped and replaced with another target on youth enrolment. This is an interesting development, as the participants of the consultation made a persuasive case that a better measure for wider political participation could be made. To some extent, this represents the effective lobbying power of the organisations which promote issues affecting young people. However, this new target on youth enrolment is not unproblematic; there is some suggestion that by 2007 it had been achieved.<sup>128</sup> <sup>129</sup> If this is the case, then it is a perhaps a missed opportunity for advocates seeking more stretching targets relating to democratic renewal in the State.

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<sup>128</sup> The new 'youth' target is a generalised target. While young people historically have low levels of engagement (see Ch.3), the target is not disaggregated by social class; in effect a surge in involvement by middle class younger people, while welcome, would still entrench inequality of voice.

<sup>129</sup> The suggestion that the target on youth enrolment was achieved in 2007 was made to the author by a senior South Australian public servant, under condition of anonymity.

Perhaps even more significantly, it is interesting to note that the Rann government did consider including a specific target on political participation into the revised Plan, but ultimately rejected this:

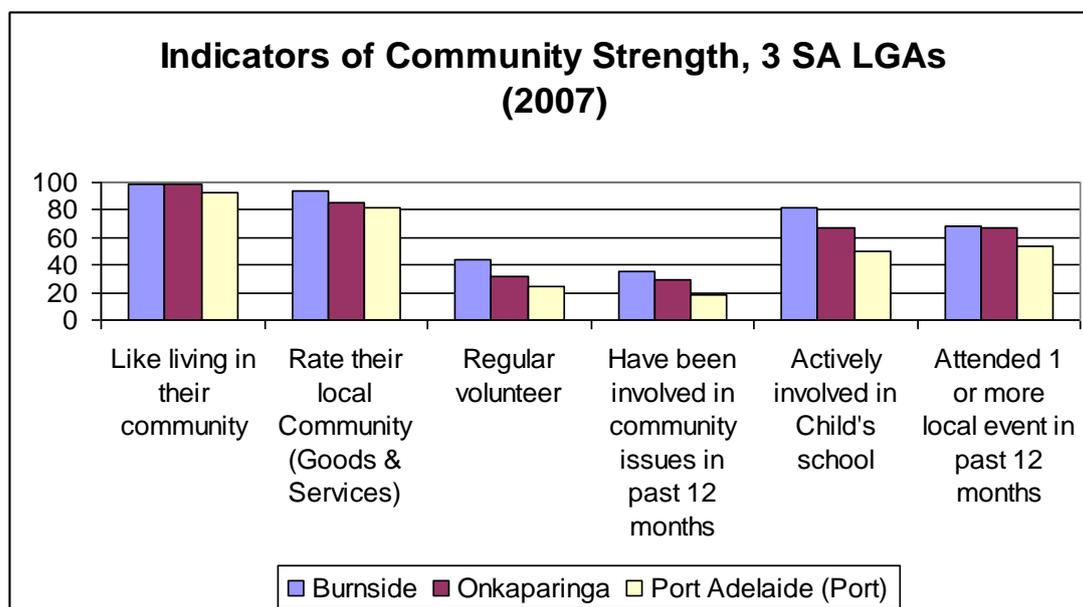
The Audit committee notes that the Executive Committee of Cabinet has considered whether a broader target about 'participation in civil society and democratic processes' should be included in the SASP rather than maintain this specific target as it is currently worded. A measure for informal voting could be retained. (SASP Update Team 2006a, p.72)

This reinforces a finding from some of the other case studies reported in this thesis—the difficulty in devising specific targets or mechanisms for democratic renewal. Participants at the consultation clearly indicated some appetite for devising such a target, but the government could not find one that was suitable. Like the Victorian government (Ch. 7), the South Australian government has taken the route of measuring political and civic engagement, rather than establishing a set of specific programs and projects to improve equality of voice in the broader area of democratic renewal. So while the South Australian government has included a new supplementary measure in the Plan to gauge the extent to which South Australians feel engaged in their local community, it is unclear what actions are being taken to measure this or specifically address any inequalities of engagement and involvement. There is

not any direct funding for specific measures that might address these issues<sup>130</sup>.

Following the Victorian Labor government's example, the Rann government commissioned a survey of 'Indicators of Community Strength' (Starr, Rogers, & Hirte 2007). This report confirms the overall patterns of inequality of participation. For example, figure 28 compares the findings from three Local Government Areas (LGAs) in South Australia: Burnside (one of the most affluent areas), Onkaparinga (which is partly a regional area) and Port Adelaide (one of the poorest metropolitan parts of the State).

**Figure 28: Indicators of Community Strength in three South Australian Local Government Areas (%) (2007)**



Source: Data extracted from Starr, Rogers, & Hirte 2007, pp. 26-27

<sup>130</sup> Although it should be pointed out that many of the SASP targets might indirectly reduce the patterns of inequality of participation across the state. For example, improving health outcomes or increasing access to public transport can facilitate more active engagement in a community.

As might be expected, Figure 28 confirms a common pattern of inequality of participation and engagement. People in more affluent areas (in this case Burnside) tend to rate their area more highly, volunteer, and be involved in their local community than people living in poorer areas (in this case Port Adelaide).

This picture of inequality of voice and engagement perhaps reinforces the missed opportunity for the State government to devise and include a target on civic engagement, or perhaps more precisely, reducing the levels of inequality of engagement across the State.

### **The Wider Democratic Renewal Agenda**

The lack of a specific and direct target for civic engagement or political participation raises an interesting set of issues. First, it is clear that there is no clear lobbying 'home' in the community sector for the wider democratic renewal agenda. Arguably, the main group that comes closest to seeking to deepen the democratic structures are the SA Greens, but there is no specific community sector organisation<sup>131</sup>. While groups like the Youth Affairs Council of South Australia (YACSA) or SACOSS have an interest in these issues, they are also have a wider set of policy goals. Groups like 'Get Up'—a NGO which campaign on a broad range of issues, including enhancing Australia's

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<sup>131</sup> The SA Greens are the South Australian Green Party. The Greens in Australia, like most of the other significant political parties are registered as separate parties in each of the State and Territories, and also at the Federal level. Each party operates as an autonomous entity, but with close links with the other sister parties.

democratic structures—are one possible outlet, but they tend to focus predominantly on federal issues. Second, the participants in the consultation on the Plan who might be called enthusiasts for democratic renewal (along with the State Government) struggled to find a specific and measurable target for this issue. This proves to be a common theme in a number of the case studies reported in this thesis. This links back to underpinning tensions and issues in the call for the ‘democratising of democracy’ by proponents of the NSD (Giddens 1998, pp. 70–7, 2000, p. 61). There is often a lack of detail either about the mechanisms or principles which could inform experiments in the democracy. Democratic renewal for the Rann government is a second tier issue, and a far lower priority than other policy areas, despite its professed interest in the problems of inequality of voice.

Ultimately, in narrow terms the consultation on the Plan can be seen as a success. Clearly a wide range of people were consulted, and within set parameters, their comments were used to underpin the revision of the Plan. It is arguably too early to describe this as community ownership, despite some rhetoric from the government to suggest otherwise. The planned consultation in 2010 will be an interesting opportunity to gauge the level of community sector and public familiarity and support for the Plan.

In terms of the democratic renewal agenda, the consultation of the Plan in 2006 was something of a missed opportunity. Inequality of voice was not a high priority, and the effort to engage with people from lower socio-economic groups was minimal and perhaps unimaginative. The Rann government, like

the Bracks Government in Victorian, are stronger in measuring the patterns of inequality of participation, as opposed to taking direct and specific steps to reduce the inequalities.

## Chapter 9

### *Case Study 5 - The Rudd Labor government's*

### *'2020 Summit' (2008)*

## **Introduction**

This thesis is a comparative study of five cases of innovative consultation by Labo(u)r governments in Britain and Australia. The first section of the thesis (Ch's 1–4) sets out the wider context and main themes for understanding the five case studies. The first two cases (Ch's 5 and 6) are consultation initiatives developed by the British New Labour government. The following two case studies are new forms of consultation instigated by Australian Labour State governments in Victoria (Ch. 7) and South Australia (Ch. 8).

The fifth and final case study in this thesis examines one of the most recent and innovative approaches to wider consultation – the 2020 Summit, which was designed and developed by the Australian Federal Labor government under the leadership of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. The 2020 Summit was held over a weekend in April 2008 in Canberra. It was attended by 1 000 delegates of Australia's 'best and brightest', with the aim of 'shaking the tree' for new ideas on the future of the nation (Rudd 2008a, 2008b). A year later, the Rudd government published its formal response to the Summit, committing to nine new proposals, including the development of the first bionic eye.

The Summit was divided into ten main streams, and was, in effect, a series of ten mini-Summits each comprising a hundred delegates. The most relevant stream to this thesis was 'The Future of Australian Governance'. In this stream, a variety of ideas and proposals were suggested relating to both the

renewal of democracy and enhancing political participation. The chapter examines these ideas and the Rudd government's response to them.

The 2020 Summit is included in this thesis for a number of reasons. First, it is one of the largest consultations ever undertaken by an Australian Labor Commonwealth government. The Summit received an unprecedented level of public and media attention. Second, the 2020 Summit also had a number of unique features, not least the scale of its main aim, which was to collate as many ideas as possible for potential adoption by the Rudd government. Third, the Summit was a key part of the Rudd government's push for democratic renewal in Australia.

The chapter is organised in the same way as the previous case studies. The first section sets the context for the Summit by outlining some of the key characteristics of the Rudd Labor government. This initial section will examine the extent to which Rudd's government fits within the framework of the 'New Social Democracy' (NSD). The middle section outlines the Summit in detail, with a particular focus on the governance stream. The final section is a summary evaluation of the 2020 Summit and the government's response.

### *Background – the Election of the Rudd Government*

On the 24 November 2007, the Australian Labor Party (ALP) won the Federal election, with Kevin Rudd sworn in as the 26<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister of Australia on 3 December. The ALP won convincingly securing 83 seats in the House of

Representatives, compared with the Liberal coalition's 65 seats (Green 2007). Hitherto, Labor had been in the electoral wilderness for 11 years, following the Liberal Coalition's defeat of Paul Keating's ALP government in 1996.

There is exhaustive commentary and coverage of the reasons for the demise of the Howard government, and the central issues that played out during the six week election campaign (Brett 2007; Green 2007). It is not the intention to outline these all in detail here, but highlight some of the main factors at play which brought the ALP to power. Arguably, Howard's strident 'Workchoices' industrial relations policy was instrumental in losing the Coalition vital electoral support (Brett 2007). Unusually, Howard at the 2004 election had won a majority in the Australian Senate, and forced through tougher reforms not previously outlined in the Coalition's Party platform<sup>132</sup>. Labor, backed up with a strong campaign run by the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), managed to translate public fears about the extent of Howard's reforms into electoral support<sup>133</sup>.

Second, this was seen as one of the world's first elections judged—in part—on the issue of climate change (Green 2007). Howard's Liberal Coalition was seen as increasingly out of touch with wider the Australian public on the issue of climate change. Australia was only one of two advanced industrial countries (the other notable exception was George W Bush's US government) which had refused to sign the Kyoto treaty. In a potent symbolic gesture, Rudd

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<sup>132</sup> As noted in chapter 4, a form of proportional representation is used for the Australian Federal Upper House – the Senate. The Howard Liberal Coalition were the first government in over a generation to have majorities in both Houses.

<sup>133</sup> Howard's Workchoices reforms are outlined in Chapter 4 (See footnote 41).

signed the treaty as his first act as Prime Minister ('Rudd signs Kyoto ratification document' 3 December 2007, *ABC News*).

Other domestic issues also featured prominently during the campaign, particularly health and education. Rudd's adopted the mantra of seeking an 'education revolution' as part of the ALP's policy package (Green 2007)<sup>134</sup>. The Liberal's strength was their perceived handling of the economy, which on the back of a resources boom had seen government finances go into surplus. For the Liberal Coalition, this was not enough to secure victory.

### **Labor and the New Social Democracy**

A central issue of this thesis is to examine how far the Rudd government promotes the ideas of the New Social Democracy (NSD). The NSD agenda is outlined in detail in chapter 1 of this thesis, but to briefly recap, it is a project to 'modernise' social democracy and it evolves from the Third Way debate encapsulated in the political thought of Anthony Giddens (Giddens 1998, 2000, 2002). Rudd's agenda has clearly been influenced by NSD ideas (and the British New Labour experience). However, it is inaccurate to describe the Rudd government as an archetypal NSD government such as its British New Labour counterpart.

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<sup>134</sup> Rudd's focus on an 'education revolution' has distinct echoes of Tony Blair's and New Labour's focus on education at the 1997 British General election. At the 1996 annual conference, Blair famously delivered his well-known mantra, "If you ask me my three priorities, I will tell you education, education, education" (Blair 1996).

Since the 1996 defeat, the ALP had seen four leaders, Kim Beazley – twice, Simon Crean, Mark Latham, and finally Rudd<sup>135</sup>. Labor in opposition was, at times, a shambolic spectacle and the process of rebuilding the Party was as painful as it had been for its British counterparts (see Crabb 2005). As outlined in chapter 1, Mark Latham was the most enthusiastic advocate for NSD and Third Way ideas, and his leadership was the most concerted attempt to adopt an explicitly NSD agenda (Latham 2001). Rudd’s approach is more cautious, although, since the Hawke-Keating era, it could be argued that the Party membership has become more tacitly supportive of a Labor Party which is more avowedly pro-market. For example, the issue of public ownership no longer dominates as it did in the 1970s, and there is no pressure on the ALP government to roll back some of the high profile privatisations that took place.

Rudd’s fiscal conservatism is one of the key signifiers of this adoption of part of the NSD agenda. As Manne notes,

...in macroeconomic matters, the government is “conservative” and “responsible”...In its fiscal conservatism, the trajectory of the Rudd government is consciously continuous with the Howard years. In microeconomic matters it is, however, different; creative and activist. (Manne 2008b, p.26).

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<sup>135</sup> Kim Beazley was leader from 1996-2001, and then 2005-2006. Simon Crean assumed the leadership from 2001-2003, succeeded by Mark Latham from 2003-2005. Rudd was elected leader in 2006.

As Johnson notes, however, this fiscal conservatism does have precedent within the Labor tradition, citing the Australian Scullin government (1929-1931), and Bill Hayden (Whitlam's final Treasurer) who 'questioned Keynesian orthodoxies' (Johnson 2008, p.1)<sup>136</sup>. Fiscal conservatism, in itself, does not fully define the NSD, but it is an integral part of its ideological underpinning.

Rudd's NSD-influenced economic outlook has clear parallels with the Blair government. Rudd's claim that he is a 'fiscal conservative' closely echoes the tight spending pledges made by New Labour at the 1997 General election ('Howard scorns Rudd's 'fiscal conservative' claim' *The Australian* 11 May 2007). In addition, a number of prominent New Labour figures were actively consulted by Rudd during the election (Button & Murphy 2007).

Rudd's Labor are undertaking a wide-ranging program of 'nation-building'—particularly as a neo-Keynesian response to the global economic crisis. Interestingly, '...much of this work will be undertaken in the form of public-private partnerships, the preferred model of the Labor States in recent years' (Manne 2008b, p.26). This model of PFI or PPP is arguably the main policy instrument of Britain's New Labour in economic matters<sup>137</sup>.

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<sup>136</sup> James Scullin was Australian Prime Minister from 1929-1931. Unfortunately for Scullin and Labor, two days after they took office, the New York stock exchange collapsed, and the onset of the Great Depression began. Scullin's government attempted a number of deflationary economic policies, much to the disapproval of the wider Labor membership.

<sup>137</sup> It should be noted that PFI was the brainchild of the Conservative government led by John Major (Prime Minister from 1990-1997). Much of the source of the antagonism about New Labour's use of PFI is rooted in the fact that it was seen as part of a conservative and neo-liberal policy programme. For critics of PFI see Pollock (2004)

Second, Rudd and many of his colleagues are influenced by the ideological repositioning of the role of Labo(u)r governments in the NSD. Rudd shares the same desire to transcend the traditional left/right political divide (Cooney 2008; Kelly 2007; Manne 2008b). In Rudd's words:

Watching the traditional Right and Left in today's policy debates sometimes reminds you of seeing your kid trying to put on last year's jumper only to realise it no longer fits. The old Right and Left thinking is often an ideological straitjacket. (Rudd 2008c, p.8)

As Manne (2008) notes, Rudd invokes the notion of appealing to the 'reforming centre'; and this strongly echoes the similar Blair-ite rallying cry to the 'radical centre' (Fitzpatrick 2003; Manne 2008b).

In essence, Rudd's reforming centre represents a position distanced from both the socialist left and the neo-liberal right. Unlike the traditional left, the reforming centre understands and embraces the significance of market forces. (Manne 2008, p.25)

This is a classic formulation of the appeal of the NSD. To some extent, Rudd's appeal to the 'reforming centre' draws upon Hawke's attempts to forge a consensus between the interest of labour and capital (Johnson 2008, p.8). Manne characterises Rudd's position as one of 'beyond neo-liberalism' and notes the influence of David McKnight's book 'Beyond Left and Right'

(McKnight 2005)<sup>138</sup>. Perhaps most significantly, Rudd himself used the 2020 Summit to search for political ideas outside this perceived political straitjacket:

...If as a nation we are genuinely practical and empirical in our approach to finding new approaches to tackle old problems then we can move forward. And many of these new discoveries will dissolve old debates between left and right based on outmoded versions of reality.

(Rudd 2008b)

In the same speech, Rudd also made an appeal to 'community' – which is a key thread in NSD thinking (Ch.1). These ideas resonate closely with the NSD. Rudd has also drawn inspiration from the more NSD-influenced Australian Labor State governments, including the Bracks, Beattie, Carr and Rann governments (Megalogenis 2008)<sup>139</sup>. A striking example is Rudd's adoption of Community Cabinets as a consultation mechanism.

While the Rudd government clearly has adopted some of the key ideas and influences of the NSD, it would not be correct to describe his government as a full embodiment of the NSD. The very slipperiness of defining the NSD makes this difficult. However, unlike the New Labour project under Blair, but like Keating, Rudd has never embraced the term, nor fully sold his government as a brand of 'New Politics' (Labour Party 1997). Rudd, as Johnson (2008) makes clear, operates within well-established social democratic precedents

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<sup>138</sup> Interestingly, Anthony Giddens – the so-called architect of the Third Way wrote a book with the same title before McKnight (see Giddens 1994).

<sup>139</sup> Megalogenis (2008) is critical of the records of Beattie, Bracks and Carr in office, and in turn, their value as a source of inspiration for Rudd. In Megalogenis' view, 'none was an agent of change' (2008, p.8).

within the Labor tradition. That said, Rudd has clearly shown an interest in democratic renewal and findings new ways of enhancing citizen participation and democratic renewal. The 2020 Summit was one of the most prominent early examples of this. Democratic renewal was also a (albeit low) policy priority in the ALP's 2007 Party platform, which under the chapter for 'reforming government' included the following commitment:

Labor will pursue new and innovative measures designed to foster greater participation and engagement of the Australian population in the political process. (Australian Labour Party 2007)

### **The Australia 2020 Summit**

This section outlines the main elements of the 2020 Summit, and also focuses on the governance stream. On 3 February 2008, the Rudd government announced the 2020 Summit would take place over the weekend of the 19 and 20 April. Professor Glyn Davis, Vice Chancellor at Melbourne University, was announced as the co-convenor<sup>140</sup>. The main features of the Summit were (Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC-CW) 2008a):

- A ten person steering committee, chaired by Rudd and Davis
- 1 000 leading Australians invited to debate Australia's long term future, and develop key ideas and proposals

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<sup>140</sup> In Australia, Davis is a well-known public policy specialist, co-author of the 'Australian Policy Handbook', and has also written on consultation issues (Althaus, Bridgman & Davis 2007; Davis & Weller 2001). There is a close professional link between Kevin Rudd, Glyn Davis and Terry Moran (Secretary for the Federal Department of Premier and Cabinet). Rudd and Davis are reportedly close personal friends (Grattan & Austin 2008).

- The ten streams included the economy, health, rural issues, social inclusion, and most critically for this thesis, Australian governance issues.
- Each stream would have 100 delegates selected by the relevant chairs
- Delegates would attend on a voluntary basis
- Participants were invited in their own right rather than as institutional representatives from any particular organisation
- The Summit was the main event in a 'package' of other initiatives including a web site for public submissions
- The government would respond to the ideas by the end of 2008.

From the outset, the government tried to set clear expectations about the role and value of the Summit:

The Government has no interest in a talkfest. The Government's interest is in harnessing and harvesting ideas from the community that are capable of being shaped into concrete policy actions. (DPC-CW 2008a)

The Rudd government was, not unsurprisingly, sensitive to the accusations of running a 'talkfest'. It remains an easy and obvious criticism of most consultation initiatives. As explored in the media coverage below, (and like the other case studies in this thesis) it was a criticism that was quickly levelled at the 2020 Summit (Haywood 2008).

The Rudd government, rhetorically at least, attempted to make the 2020 Summit a nonpartisan affair. The Summit was designed to draw in ideas across the political divide, and particularly the narrowness of party-politics.

The Rudd Government believes Australians, whatever their political views, can come together to build a modern Australia capable of meeting the challenges of the 21st century (DPC-CW, 2008a)

To this end, Rudd invited Brendon Nelson, then leader of the Liberal Opposition to the Summit, along with the State Premiers, Chief Ministers, and their Opposition counterparts. Whether or not the 2020 Summit can be considered bipartisan is examined in the summary evaluation at the end of this chapter.

The chairs of each of the ten stream areas were the final arbiters of who attended the main Summit. According to co-chair Glyn Davis, 'nearly 8 000 Australians either self-nominated or were proposed by others' (Davis 2008b, p.381). Perhaps the most high profile casualty of the selection was the President of the Australian Medical Association, who publicly aired her frustration for not being selected (Davis 2008, p.382).

### **The Future of Australian Governance Stream**

The chairs of the governance stream at the 2020 Summit were John Hartigan, the Chief Executive of New Limited, and former ABC journalist Maxine

McKew MP. The two chairs decided who attended the governance stream of the Summit. The governance stream was charged with seeking news ideas in the broad areas of

- open government
- the role of the media
- the structure of government
- rights and responsibilities.

These four areas encompass Rudd's broad democratic renewal agenda:

...the Government is also examining ways in which Australians can increasingly deliberate in the making of government policy through a range of mechanisms, including community cabinets, as a part of a commitment to contemporary democracy. (DPC-CW 2008a)

It is also interesting to note the focus on rights and responsibilities. As explored in Chapter 1, these ideas of mutual obligation are a central thread in NSD thinking (Blair 1998).

### *Inspirations for the 2020 Summit*

Co-chair Glyn Davis outlines the origins of the 2020 Summit as follows:

Earlier in the year the Prime Minister asked me for ways to connect with current thinking, and we talked about perhaps a series of dinners with interested groups of people who had expertise in particular areas, so

you can engage in that area. He came back on the Australia Day weekend of the suggestion of the Summit with 1000 people at Parliament House for a weekend. It was his idea, very much his idea. (Davis, 2009, interview, 23 June).

While the Summit appears to have been Rudd's idea, there do seem to be two indirect sources of policy inspiration. First, in common with the South Australian (Ch.8) and Victorian (Ch.7) case studies reported in this thesis, Bob Hawke's 'Accord' Summits were a source of inspiration. However, there are key differences between the Hawke Summits and the 2020 Summit. First, the 2020 Summit had a much wider focus than the Accord Summits. Second, the desired outcomes of the Accord Summits were much more clearly known, whereas the overall agenda of the 2020 Summit was more open. Third, Hawke's 1983 Summit was more organisation-focussed, whereas the 2020 Summit deliberately invited individuals to attend in a personal capacity. Katherine Murphy argues:

As 1983 was all about stitching together institution and power blocs to achieve outcomes—to the extent that newspapers identified Hawke's delegates not by their names but by their associations—2020 is a celebration of rampant individualism. (Murphy 2008)

Johnson identifies another key source of inspiration, '...the idea of the 2020 Summit seems to have been influenced by the 2020 vision forums held by Craig Emerson when he was a Queensland Labor government Minister, and which started as long ago as 1993' (Johnson 2008). As noted in Chapter 1 of this thesis, since the 1980s there has been a steady increase in the use of

such 'visioning' exercises and other innovative consultative methods. Pratchett argues that a key driver was the growing influence of New Public Management (NPM) ideas on governance (Pratchett 1999). The growing influence of NPM ideas in Australia is part of the general context in why the 2020 Summit took place.

### **The 2020 'Package'**

While the focus of this chapter examines the 2020 Summit held in Canberra, it is important to locate this in what might be called the wider 2020 'package'. The main Summit was primary source of media attention but there were a series of other associated activities which attempted to broaden the 'national conversation'<sup>141</sup>. These included:

- A Jewish symposium (14 April)
- An African community Summit in Melbourne (17 April)
- A National Youth 2020 Summit (12 April)
- '2020 Summits' held in 500 schools
- a number of locally organised 'Summits'

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<sup>141</sup> There were a number of minor controversies that took place in the lead up to, and over the course of the Summit weekend, such as the failure to provide halal food for the Muslim participants (Kerjab 2008). Adverse publicity was generated when the \$60,000 media contract was awarded to the company whose CEO was the wife of a government Minister (Topsfield 2008b). There was also a running dispute that 2020 summitters were heavily weighted in those in favour of creating an Australian republic (Grattan 2009; Maiden & Salusinszky 2008). This linked with a similar accusation that in the environment stream there was a hi-jack by the coal industry (Kerr 2008a). Finally, there were public criticisms of the cost of the Summit which one media report speculated reached \$1.9m ('2020 Summit cost tops \$1.9m – Wire Feed, *ABC Premium News*, 28 May 2008).

- More than 3 600 individuals and groups made almost 8 800 public submissions, including,
- 3 000 ideas posted on the Australia 2020 Summit web site

The Rudd government were adamant that the 2020 Summit:

...is not an end in itself but part of something broader – a public conversation in which all voices are welcome....(the main Summit) should not be the conclusion of the national conversation that has begun to develop over the past 10 weeks, but rather a stimulus to engage an even larger number of Australians... (DPC-CW 2008b, p. 1)

In truth, the main Summit dominated both the thinking and the main ideas produced at the end of the process. As explored in the summary evaluation there were a range of both stated and unstated objectives in devising the 2020 process, and these smaller meetings served a useful function, even if their impact on policy making was minimal. The National Youth Summit was perhaps the next most prominent initiative. A short film taken during the Youth Summit was shown at the opening of the main Summit. Furthermore, a précis of the main ideas from the Youth event was appended into the delegate's resource pack for the main 2020 Summit.

The 2020 Summit galvanised public input in a number of other ways. The Summit received a high level of media coverage, and in turn, ideas for the Summit filled the comment pages of the main newspapers, and were also a topic of a number of talkback radio programs. In producing their submissions,

a number of larger NGOs also undertook some consultation of their own to influence the agenda. The most prominent example of this was the series of local meetings organised by the progressive NGO 'Get Up!' which claims that over 3 000 of its members were consulted, resulting in a broad policy document sent to all the 2020 participants. The central issue is that while the main Summit dominated attention, it was underpinned by a series of other initiatives. This is important as it broadens the range of activities to consider in the evaluation of the 2020 'package'.

### **Format of the 2020 Summit**

The format for the Summit was an amalgamation of large plenary sessions, more traditional 'town hall' style meetings, and smaller group meetings. The event organisers offered a broad outline for how the ten streams could be organised. Most of the streams followed this common pattern, although others 'firmly went their own way' (Davis 2008, p.386). For example, the economy stream added an additional sub-group on Human Capital, and 'the Governance group decided to vote on matters of process and substance' (2008, p.386). Rudd opened proceedings addressing all the delegates. In all, there were three main plenary sessions in which all 1 000 delegates attended.

In the ten session streams, the 100 participants were divided into four groups. Participants could choose which sub-group they wished to attend, and there was a broad balance of numbers in each group. Participants were encouraged to stay with the same group to help formulate the policy proposals.

One of the main complaints from a number of delegates was that there was not enough discussion time (Kerr 2008b). According to former Western Australia Premier and 2020 Summiteer, Geoff Gallop:

...more discussion time would have been useful. There were too many “set pieces” at the Summit. (Gallop, 2009, telephone interview, 5 June).

A specific problem was the Sunday morning plenary session on ‘How does the world view us?’. The issue was not so much with the content of this session, but rather that groups were eager to reconvene from the previous day to continue their work. With the benefit of hindsight, co-convenor Glyn Davis argues that:

...the problem was the way we framed the programme as we hadn’t done this before so we had nothing to work with, so we were worried that...well, we decided that people might need a bit of time for a refresher so we put on this session, which the benefit of hindsight we probably shouldn’t have put it on...I think it is a fair criticism, but...only that...we did not have any experience to fall back upon. (Davis, 2009, interview, 23 June).

In effect, the 2020 Summit without the ‘set pieces’ was really a one-day event. The lack of discussion time, and sheer scale of the event was used by the Opposition to criticise the event itself, and suggested that ‘...individual contributions will last a total of 39 seconds’ (Murphy et al 2008). This claim however, is misleading, in that the smaller working groups enabled much greater individual contributions. However, the pressure to produce a certain

number of ideas did quickly exclude others, even if they were eventually recorded in the final report.

## **The 2020 Agenda**

Rudd in his opening address set the framework and agenda for the Summit:

Today we are throwing open the window on our democracy, to let a little fresh air in...What we are looking from this summit are new ideas for our nation's future...And if we succeed, a new way of governing our nation...To help focus the discussions. I have made three requests of the working group co-chairs: First to nominate at least one 'big idea' in their area for the future. Second, I am asking them to submit at least three, and I am sure there will be more, concrete policy ideas, at least one of which is to involve no cost or negligible cost. No cost, or negligible cost. No cost, or negligible cost. I have lost my place...Third, I am asking them to identify at least three specific goals for which we should aim by 2020. (Rudd 2008a)

Interestingly, Rudd hints in his opening remarks that the 2020 Summit is part of a new form of governance. The other theme worth re-iterating is the emphasis on pragmatism. Rudd and co-chair Glyn Davis attempted to straddle both the need for idealism and 'big picture' thinking along with more tangible quick wins. Rudd passed off the 'no cost' comment as a joke, but it alludes to a much harsher truth.

### *Facilitators and Scribes*

40 professional facilitators were used at the Summit, and as the government were at pains to point out, a majority of these had offered their services on a *pro-bono* basis (Davis 2008a). Five facilitators were allocated to the governance stream. To the consternation the public sector unions, a whole host of Federal public servants worked over the weekend as unpaid scribes (Murphy 2008)<sup>142</sup>. The use of facilitators proved both beneficial in retaining the groups' focus, but was also contentious. Some delegates raised concerns that facilitators either shut out more contentious discussions or the wording for some ideas was 'botched' (Manne 2008a)<sup>143</sup>.

### **Discussions and Ideas from the Governance Stream**

On the whole, many of the participants reported positive experiences of the Summit, with a few specific complaints outlined below. Robert Manne, Professor of Politics at La Trobe University, and a prominent Australian public intellectual, gives a very lively account of his experience in the governance stream (Manne 2008). It is worth recounting some of his comments at length as they give a flavour of how the discussions evolved in the governance stream (compared with the rather anodyne notes from the final Summit

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<sup>142</sup> Rudd is a notorious workaholic, and the 'Kevin 07' election slogan was quickly adapted to 'Kevin 24/7', and a number of concerns were made in the press about the impact on working hours for the federal public service (Hussein 2008).

<sup>143</sup> The concerns about the use of facilitators closely mirrored those directed at the British New Labour's 'Big Conversation' (Ch.6).

report). What is most interesting are Manne's observations about the *process* rather than the specific ideas discussed.

In this first session, all 100 of the governance participants were given three minutes to outline their 'ambit claims' (Manne 2008, p.3). After lunch on the first day, Manne opted for the group on parliamentary reform (the other main interest area was enhancing democratic participation). Manne reports that it was only at this point that '...the proceedings became, for me at least, seriously interesting...' (2008, p.3). Manne outlines some of the key ideas talked about in his group, which for brevity's sake are not outlined here. In Manne's view,

The suggestions of our small group were precise and concrete. If accepted, they would transform the relations between parliament and government. By now my hopes were high. (2008, p.3)

Following afternoon tea on the first day, the entire governance group of 100 reassembled. The ideas of all the subgroups were outlined:

..despite the experience and intelligence of those participating, the meeting was chaotic. It was not even clear whether the details of the small groups' decisions had been accurately recorded. As weariness set in, the hundred was asked whether anyone had thought we had uncovered one big idea. Only one hand went up. That moment was used to characterise the summit on the ABC nightly news. Next morning the governance stream reassembled to settle on an ideas wish list. My

attention remained narrowly fixed on what our small group had decided. The war proposal had been accurately recorded. The other concrete proposals for making government accountable had transmogrified overnight into meaningless motherhood statements. Some time was devoted to the resuscitation.

The hundred then turned to Ambitions, Priorities and Top Ideas. It was rather difficult to find out what was happening...The several proposals of our small group...apparently survived. As time began to run out, the level of chaos increased. The meeting now resembled a Mad Hatter's tea party rather than a symposium. Often the loudest voices prevailed. Sometimes it was not even clear what the vote was about. Even though there was a near-complete consensus about a two-stage program for the creation of the republic, at the very end of the meeting David Marr intervened with a dramatic plea that the republic be included. He was told that the idea was actually top of our list. Marr's confusion was understandable. In our haste, no could be certain what was decided. I certainly was not. (2008, p.4)<sup>144</sup>

In what Manne describes as 'heroic speed', the initial report was produced, although apparently the wording for the Republic was 'botched' (Manne 2008, p.4). Manne's experience seems to chime with other Summiteers. A useful summary of the Arts stream, perhaps a little less frenzied than the governance stream, is outline by Allison Croggon *The Australian's* theatre critic (Croggon

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<sup>144</sup> David Marr is an Australian writer and journalist, often writing for the Sydney Morning Herald. Marr also co-authored a book on the 2001 Federal election campaign, criticising the Howard Liberal Government, particularly over the 'Tampa' Affair (Marr & Wilkinson 2004). (Howard had refused the Norwegian freight ship the MV Tampa to dock in Australia as it had picked up in excess of 400 refugees in international waters. It prompted a furious and ugly racist debate about immigration control).

2008). Croggon describes the experience as 'exciting, frustrating and disappointing', and notes that, 'pragmatism was evident from the beginning' (Croggon 2008). Her general concern was how the ideas would be translated into the final document and the challenge of 'shap(ing) all these voices into coherent policy suggestions' (Croggon 2008). This was a common concern throughout the Summit in the other streams. It is also worth noting there was a view that the governance stream was more argumentative than some of the other streams. Co-chair Glyn Davis jokes:

...It was the most fractious of the groups in many ways, but that's partly because it had quite a number of personalities who thought that they should be in control! (Davis, 2009, interview, 23 June)

### **The 2020 Initial Report**

The 2020 Summit initial report was produced on the final afternoon of the conference, which was itself a remarkable achievement (DPC-CW 2008c)<sup>145</sup>. The initial report was a useful summary of the discussions and ideas, but by definition, it is only an interim document. The strength of producing the report so quickly is that helped foster trust with the participants and added credibility to the government's commitment to the agenda. It also had the additional pay-

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<sup>145</sup> It is useful to compare this with another case study in this research - the Growing Victoria Together Summit (Ch.7). The only significant document that arose from the GVT Summit was a brief 'communiqué' which the Victorian government issued a few days after the Summit. The lack of a formalised report or record of the GVT Summit was a notable feature of this Victorian exercise. In contrast, the 2020 Summit had a much higher degree of transparency. Although to be fair to the GVT process, this was a much more politicised initiative with different and more modest aims.

off of trying to set the public record straight rather than let media speculation fill the vacuum before the arrival of the longer and more detailed report.

The weakness of producing the report so quickly was that it led a number of participants to complain that it excluded key ideas, or watered down and misrepresented some ideas (Croggon 2008; Schubert 2008; Topsfield 2008a). Brett Soloman from the organisation 'Get Up!' publicly reinforced these concerns about the governance stream:

Certainly in the governance stream, which I was in, the final text was not exactly the same as the text that we had written, which was disappointing. ('More complaints arise about summit statements' *Australian Associated Press General News Wire* 27 April 2008)

A report in the *Australian* suggests that some more critical participants were marginalised from the debates, and that other more prominent participants had more influence (Salusinszky 2008a). In particular, it was alleged that World Vision Australia chief Tim Costello (who co-chaired the 'communities' stream) 'smuggled his personal agenda' into the initial report (Salusinszky 2008a). Professor Freda Briggs from the University of South Australia, complained that in this stream:

...from the very beginning, the discussion topics were preordained. Chris [Father Chris Riley from a community organisation 'Youth off the streets'] and I were systematically silenced. (Salusinszky 2008a).

The National Water Commissioner Chloe Munro also added to those who felt that the initial report did not 'reflect a lot of the ideas discussed in the sessions' (Topsfield 2008a). Participant Harry Evans, the Senate Clerk, suggested that the pressure to include 'big and exciting' ideas meant that more practical ones were excluded from this report (Topsfield 2008a).

Croggon argues that in the Arts stream, faced with Rudd's call for cost neutral ideas:

...delegates hijacked the agenda back to their own particular concerns and got down to some serious work outlining specific policy ideas. That work was barely visible in the interim report presented to all summiteers on Sunday afternoon, which left several creatives stunned and disappointed. ("There were issues with collation" one delegate noted)....Delegates were assured that the missing issues would be noted in the full 2020 report.... (Croggon 2008)

This final sentence is the salient issue. Delegates did not have the reassurance of the final Summit report, which was, as far as can be shown, comprehensive and included all the ideas. The pressure to produce a Summit snapshot invariably meant that some ideas were necessarily excluded. On balance, the positive effect of producing the report so quickly probably off-set the critical comments about its wording and content.

## **Key ideas from the Governance Stream**

Despite its flaws, the initial report signposts the major issues of the discussion. It argues that Australia's history:

...has left Australians with a faith that the public sphere has a crucial role in building the nation's future. Yet, in the twenty-first century, there is a sense that the role of government is changing...There is an expectation that civil society will strengthen as government becomes less central in our lives (DPC-CW 2008b, p.3).

This chimes with some of the key NSD themes (see Ch.1), and Rudd's wider democratic renewal agenda. Indeed, the initial report notes that the idea of 'strengthening civil society' is one of a number of themes which was identified across all the ten streams (DPC-CW 2008, p.3). This section focuses primarily on the Governance Stream and Table 25 highlights the 'priority themes' and 'top ideas'.

The initial report also outlines a range of ideas that emerged from the 800+ public submissions as part of the wider program of 2020 activities. The overarching theme was the call for 'greater civic participation for all Australians' (2008b, p.34). In the summary, there were few specific proposals but rather more generic pleas for improving state-civil society relations.

**Table 25: 2020 Governance Stream – Key Ideas**

Theme	Comment	Top Ideas
Australian Republic	There was overwhelming support for a Republic. A two stage process was proposed with wide community involvement	Stage 1 – a plebiscite on the principle of Australia becoming a Republic. Stage 2 - a referendum on the model of Republic.
Federalism	This needed to be ‘fixed’ and updated.	<p>A general review of roles and functions</p> <p>Expert Commission to propose new mix of responsibilities</p> <p>Convention by the people with a process of deliberative democracy.</p> <p>Implementation by inter-governmental co-operation or referendum</p> <p>National cooperation commission to register and monitor disputes</p>
Participation	Need to strengthen community participation in governance processes; A ‘revolution’ in community and government interaction	<p>Introduce mechanisms to increase civic participation and collaborative governance</p> <p>Universal automatic enrolment and re-enrolment of eligible voters</p> <p>Ourgov.au – direct community participation web site with one-stop shop of searchable government data</p> <p>AusSpan network – An Australian C-Span</p> <p>Deliberative processes; e.g. Democracy Day, citizens’ juries, participatory budgets</p> <p>Active citizenship training in schools, and for wider community</p>
Bill of Rights	Strong support for statutory Bill of Rights – particularly as a mechanism for greater reconciliation with Aboriginal Australians.	<p>National consultation on how best to introduce a statutory charter of rights</p> <p>Amend the constitution to formally recognise the traditional custodians</p>
Open government and strong independent media	Focus on improving and enacting strong freedom of information legislation; More government accountability	<p>Enhanced FOI legislation</p> <p>More accountable Parliament with measures such as independent arbitration of public interest immunity claims by Ministers, minimum time and process standards for passage of legislation “and other reforms”</p>
Public Sector workforce	A ‘strong and talented’ public sector workforce to carry out these ideas.	

*Adapted from: DPC-CW 2008b, pp32-34*

The initial report also outlines a range of ideas that emerged from the 800+ public submissions as part of the wider program of 2020 activities. The over-arching theme was the call for 'greater civic participation for all Australians' (2008b, p.34). In the summary, there were few specific proposals but rather more generic pleas for improving state-civil society relations.

The calls for the Republic, perhaps predictably, dominated media headlines. A number of commentators suggested that most of the ideas were neither that radical or indeed new (Hirst 2008; Roskam 2008). What is interesting was the concerted push for ideas and innovations around civic participation. Again, while suggestions such as the greater use of citizens' juries are not new in themselves, they do point to some appetite for reinvigorating the relationship between state and civil society. The final Summit report described this as 'collaborative governance [to] revolutionise the ways government and communities interact' (DPC-CW 2008c, p.349). In other words, there was some call for what Giddens has called in the British context, 'the democratising of democracy' (Giddens 1998, pp. 70–7, 2000, p. 61).

### **2020 Summit Final Report and the Government's Response**

On 31 May 2008, the Rudd government published the 2020 Summit final report (DPC-CW 2008c). This report outlined the proceedings in detail, and reports all the key ideas and priorities. The government committed to responding to all the ideas in the report by the end of the 2008. The Final report makes clear that, 'despite its title, the...[Final report]...is not the end: the Australian Government wants the national conversation to continue' (DPC-CW 2008c, p.2).

Several hundred ideas are outlined in the governance section of the final report, and for brevity's sake they are not all outlined here. As noted in the initial report, there was a clear set of recommendations and ideas relating to the themes of 'collaborative governance' and citizen engagement (DPC-CW 2008c, pp.308-309). Moreover, there is an explicit plea for using more deliberative mechanisms such as citizens' juries, electronic town hall meetings, and participatory budgeting. This was linked with the theme to 'augment representative democracy with deliberative democracy' (2008c, p.311).

The final report lists all the 'ideas', and also a summary record of the discussion (2008c, pp.318-336)<sup>146</sup>. It conveys the diverse array of concerns articulated by the participants. At the end of the second day, all participants were called to vote and support the key 'concrete proposals' in each area. Table 25 (above) outlines these, and it is worth reinforcing that, strengthening citizenship participation through 'deliberative, inclusive processes' enjoyed wide support from the stream (2008b, p.349). Usefully, and also in a clear commitment to transparency, 'areas of disagreement' were highlighted at the end of the report (2008b, p330-336). The main disagreements were over the following issues<sup>147</sup>:

- Making voting optional, not compulsory
- An agreed resolution by both Houses of Parliament before committing Australia to war
- Abolition of private donations to political parties

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<sup>146</sup> It should be noted that many of the 'ideas' are really just generic aspirations rather than fully developed concrete policy ideas.

<sup>147</sup> All these were recorded as 'other ideas' in the Final report (DPC-CW 2008c, p.350).

- Limits on government advertising before an election
- Reversing the onus for public interest immunity tests for Ministers that enable them to withhold information from Parliamentary Committees<sup>148</sup>

### *The Government's Response*

Initially, the government had committed to respond to the final report by the end of 2008 (Sparrow 2009). The government's response was published on the 22 April 2009<sup>149</sup>. The delayed response was noted by some commentators (Karvelas 2009). Some participants, notably Brett Soloman from 'Get Up!' suggested that a speedier response could have earned the government, '...a lot of capital by showing that are genuine about listening to the Australian public' (Caldwell 2009).

In his preamble to the report, Rudd argued that the government was 'already acting on many of...[the 962] ideas' raised at the Summit (DPC-CW 2009, p.1). A range of ongoing government initiatives such as the major review of the taxation system, the

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<sup>148</sup> Public Interest Immunity enables a Member of Parliament to withhold information from Parliament if it means they may be open to legal prosecution by revealing the information. One of the reasons this issue was raised at the 2020 Summit was due to the aftermath of the Australian Wheat Board (AWB) Scandal. It was discovered that the AWB was in breach of UN sanctions against Iraq and paying kickbacks to Saddam Hussein's government. There were complaints that government ministers were mis-using the public immunity defence to withhold information about the extent of the Government's knowledge of the scandal (see Bartos 2007). The disputed recommendation from the 2020 Summit was that the grounds for withholding information should be made stricter to force Ministers to make full disclosure.

<sup>149</sup> It has been suggested to the author by a prominent Academic based in Canberra, that 3 months before the Rudd government unveiled its official response to the Summit; an earlier version had been produced, and a press conference to announce its contents was scheduled to take place. Apparently, Rudd cancelled this press conference on the same day he was due to unveil the response document. It seems that this earlier version of the response contained much bolder ideas, with more significant funding attached than the current official version. As explored in the summary evaluation, it seems that the Global recession and financial crisis of 2008-09 has diluted many of the planned ideas. There is no other evidence to support this speculation that an earlier response document (and cancelled press conference) had been produced, but this information came from a well-informed source.

Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, and the White Paper on Homelessness touched upon many of these ideas.

Furthermore, Rudd announced a commitment to nine 'practical ideas', the most eye-catching included (2009, pp.1-2)<sup>150</sup>;

- a deployable civilian capacity to respond to emergencies
- 'first steps towards' an Indigenous Cultural Education Centre
- 'Golden Gurus' – mature age mentoring scheme
- research to 'support the development of the bionic eye in Australia'
- a dedicated ABC children's channel

The media response to these ideas was, at best, lukewarm (Drape, Jenkins & Salna 2009; Kerr 2009; Lunn 2009; Rehn 2009; Steketee 2009). Shortly after the Summit, a science report in *The Australian* examined the issues relating to the bionic eye, and one of its main criticisms was that 2020 Summiteers did not know what research was already taking place in Australia (Dayton 2009). Likewise, the 'Golden Gurus' ideas was also rather sceptically received (Lunn 2009). Rehn argues that:

A year on,... [the 2020 Summit]... appears to have been not much more than an enormous gobfest. But not for a lack of enthusiasm on the part of the summiteers, rather a lack of follow up from the government. (Rehn 2009)

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<sup>150</sup> The full list also includes an Awards Scheme to support scholarships for students in Australia and Asia; Business and Schools roundtable; 'Skills for Carbon Challenge' initiative to equip people with "green skills"; Vocational Education Broadband Network to build a single post-secondary high speed broadband network (DPC-CW 2009, pp.1-2).

Journalist Christian Kerr, perhaps rather peevishly, adds that since only nine of the 962 ideas generated have been adopted, ‘...that’s a success rate of 0.93555 per cent’ (Kerr 2008b). Although, as explored in the final section, this more accurately reflects Kerr’s lack of attention to Rudd’s opening address, in which Rudd clearly indicates that only up to twelve new ideas might be selected (Rudd 2008a). The other main complaint was that while the 2020 Summit overwhelmingly favoured the creation of an Australian Republic, and this was not included in the list of key ‘big ideas’ (Rehn 2009).

However, perhaps the most significant constraint on the Rudd government’s response was outside its control – namely the extent of the global financial crisis. By early 2009, and a year on from the 2020 Summit, the full extent of the world wide economic recession was becoming apparent. While Australia was in a relatively healthier position than some of its counterparts, it may have played a part in scaling down the most resource intensive ideas. Rudd argues that:

...none of us who gathered...for the summit could have fore-seen the severity of the global economic downturn that was beginning to develop. (DPC-CW 2009, p.1)

A cynical view might argue that it provided a convenient excuse for the government to down-scale the ideas, although it was clear that government borrowing increased significantly to continue to stimulate the Australian economy<sup>151</sup>. The 2020 Summit ideas will not be the only casualty in this harsher economic climate.

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<sup>151</sup> This cynical view is perhaps reinforced by the allegation made earlier that the Rudd government had, in fact, cancelled an earlier press conference and diluted the Response document.

## *Government's response to the Governance Stream*

A total of 183 ideas from the Governance stream were considered by the Rudd government in its response document. In reply, it grouped together many of overlapping and related ideas, and it made 68 separate responses to the 183 governance ideas. This means that only about half of the ideas are responded to on an individual basis.

The preamble to the governance section reinforces its commitment to 'increasing the transparency and accountability of government' (DPC-CW 2009b, p.214). The use of Community Cabinets as part of this process is cited as an example of this 'new approach' (2009, p.214)<sup>152</sup>. In five broad areas, the government indicated its ongoing or new action (Table 26).

It is striking to note the difference between the rather general statement relating to community engagement and e-governance, and the more concrete set of actions linked to the other major themes. The Rudd government respond to thirty community engagement ideas in one amalgamated and general reply. These thirty ideas include a whole range of specific proposals including:<sup>153</sup>

- Establish a Commission for Participatory Democracy
- A public digital channel with access to policy debate
- Establish a Charter of Community Engagement

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<sup>152</sup> The uses and limitations of Community Cabinets are explored in more detail in Chapter 7 of this thesis – the Victorian case study of the 'Growing Victoria Together' State Plan.

<sup>153</sup> It should also be noted that many of the broad community engagement themes were also endorsed by three other streams at the 2020 Summit.

- A Citizen’s Cabinet (based on a UK model, and currently trialled in Queensland)

**Table 26: The Rudd Government’s Overall Responses and Actions**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Outline of government response</b>
COAG Reform Council	The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) is undertaking a range of reforms, and agreed to an expanded role for the independent COAG Reform Council
Australian Council of Local Governments (ACLG)	The inaugural meeting of the ACLG was held on 18 November 2008, the government would also continue “dialogue” on a process ‘towards constitutional recognition’ of Local Government.
Human Rights	In December 2008, the government began a national consultation on human rights issues. The findings of the consultation were published in November 2009.
Freedom of Information (FOI) Reform	Broad reforms promised on FOI legislation (which was also an ALP Party Platform promise at the 2007 election)
Community engagement and e-governance	‘The government is acting to increase the community’s ability to interact with the parliament and the policy development processes of government, and to make information about policy issues available online’

*Adapted from: DPC-CW 2009, p.214.*

While there are a number of quite specific proposals, it should be reiterated that many of the ‘ideas’ are vague and generalised. This may be the fault of either poor transcribing, the difficulty of condensing complex ideas into simple catchy titles, or—most likely—they were general statements from the participants. Examples include:

‘Communities having a say in what happens’

‘Policy making at the local level and regional level’

‘Deliberative inclusive processes that feed directly into government decision-making processes’

‘Identify issues of national significance and a means to respond to them’

(DPC-CW 2009, pp.216-217).

The Government’s response to this suite of ideas is instructive and highlights its overall approach to this agenda.

The Government agrees with the idea of enhancing community engagement. The Government’s approach is to trial different and innovative mechanisms and draw specific suggestions across several streams in that context...the Government will develop better ways to increase interactive consultative processes using new technology to communicate and hear from people. Some aspects of this work will be guided by the statutory Information Commissioner position, which the government will be establishing as part of its Open Government reform agenda. The Department of Premier and Cabinet has sought expert advice...to the development of an e-governance strategy.

The government is also considering holding a set of forums that will bring together experts, business and community representatives and others with a strong interest in a number of topics to promote a collaborative approach to challenging issues and better inform government decision making. (DPC-CW 2009, pp215-216).

The Rudd government’s overall approach could be characterised as either ‘wait-and-see’ or lukewarm. It likes the ‘idea’ of enhancing participation, but there is very little specific action to drive the democratic renewal agenda forward. While the new

Information Commissioner role might be seen as a step in the right direction, the government's response to this agenda is disappointing and lacklustre. This is not to say that in the wider governance section there are not more tangible actions, but again many of these are perhaps best described as technocratic, such as strengthening the role of the COAG Reform Council.

This begs the question as to why the Rudd government's response to the calls for democratic renewal is so weak. A number of the following reasons seem plausible. First, as outlined above, many of the ideas themselves were rather general pleas. Participants, and indeed parts of the wider public may support this, but there is not a clear set of mechanisms that are readily adapted. As noted by Pratchett (1999), and throughout this thesis, suggestions such as citizens' juries and participatory budgeting are not without their own problems and internal tensions. Co-convenor of the 2020 Summit Professor Glyn Davis, concurs:

...In part because the mechanics of how to do it, how to build it into our system of representative democracy aren't clear...and not enough thinking has gone into that...but I was surprised by the agenda in how often it came up and how often I am reading about deliberative democracy, and... I felt that the Summit has a chance to show that you could do productive work with citizenship, albeit with a pretty skewed group of citizens, and, yes, we haven't had any real sense of whether there is going to be any real engagement with it. (Davis, 2009, interview, 23 June)

Second, the government's 'wait-and-see' approach to democratic renewal reflects its status as a second tier concern for Rudd and his colleagues. Community Cabinets

and the 2020 Summit are the limits of its action on this agenda. It is striking that even what might be called a 'stepping stone' (and rather technocratic) measure such as establishing a Commission for Participatory Democracy did not even appeal to a noted policy wonk such as Rudd. A new Commission could begin to examine more seriously the ways of introducing such deliberative and consultative mechanisms. The commitments made in the response document are tentative and suggestive, for example, the Rudd government agree to 'considering' holding a set of public forums on these issues (DPC-CW 2009, p.36). It remains unclear the degree to which the global economic recession is a mitigating factor in its cautious approach to democratic renewal. Despite the high profile attention attached to the question of a Republic, this issue was skilfully deferred to Labor's (potential) second term of office.

Third, it is arguable that the most radical ideas of democratic renewal require some significant devolution or delegation of power. The Rudd government is reluctant to travel further in this direction. As noted from the outset of this chapter, the Rudd government has embraced some of the ideas of the NSD, and the underlying ambivalence about democratic renewal seems to be one of them.

### **Summary Evaluation of the 2020 Summit**

This section offers a summary evaluation of the 2020 Summit. In common with the other case studies in this thesis, and as outlined in detail in Chapter 3 of the thesis, it draws upon the Beetham-Pratchett framework for auditing the consultation initiatives. To recap, Pratchett (1999) in his work on evaluating 'new fashions' in democracy

uses two principles of responsiveness and representativeness to critically evaluate a range of new mechanisms for public dialogue and involvement.

This thesis applies these two principles for evaluating the case of the 2020 Summit. The notion of representativeness translates into examining the main characteristics of the 2020 Summiteers and the degree to which they broadly reflect the wider demographics of Australia. The principle of responsiveness refers to the relationship between the Summit and its impact on government policy making. The key issue to reiterate with this framework is that no consultation initiative can give full expression to either of these two principles and that auditing the case study is not a 'tick box' exercise. Rather, the principles of representativeness and responsiveness are a lens to critique and understand the effectiveness of such exercises.

### **Representativeness and the 2020 Summit**

This section focuses predominantly on the demographics of the participants who attended the main Summit in Canberra. From the outset, it was clear that achieving a full and representative 'equality of voice' was not a determining factor for selecting the 2020 Summiteers, in that they were not drawn from a broadly representative sample of the Australian population. The main Summit was pitched predominantly at the wider political elites and experts from the ten stream areas. Rudd explicitly called for the 'brightest and the best', which was coda for those in the academia, the professions, and generally those already engaged in, or who had made a contribution to the wider public policy debate (Burchell 2009; Rudd 2008a; Salt 2008). Theoretically, it was quite possible for a member of the public with a new idea

to nominate him/herself to attend the Summit, but the selection process was skewed to draw in individuals from elite groups.

However, this was balanced by a clear stricture from the co-convener Glyn Davis that other characteristics of the selected participants should be broadly representative of the wider Australian community. Rudd was acutely aware of the issues around the representatives of the participants; particularly after the early furore about the lack of women on the steering committee ('Gillard deflects 2020 summit panel criticism' *ABC Online*, 27 February 2008). In his opening address to the Summit Rudd addresses these issues:

Some have said it is too big. Some have said it is too small. Some have said that it is not representative enough. I challenge anyone to find a group which could ever claim to be fully representative of any nation, it is very hard....Some say that consensus on anything is impossible because it produces the democratic divide. Whereas I say on certain fundamentals the challenge is in fact, to build a consensus around those things that really count for the long term (Rudd 2008a)

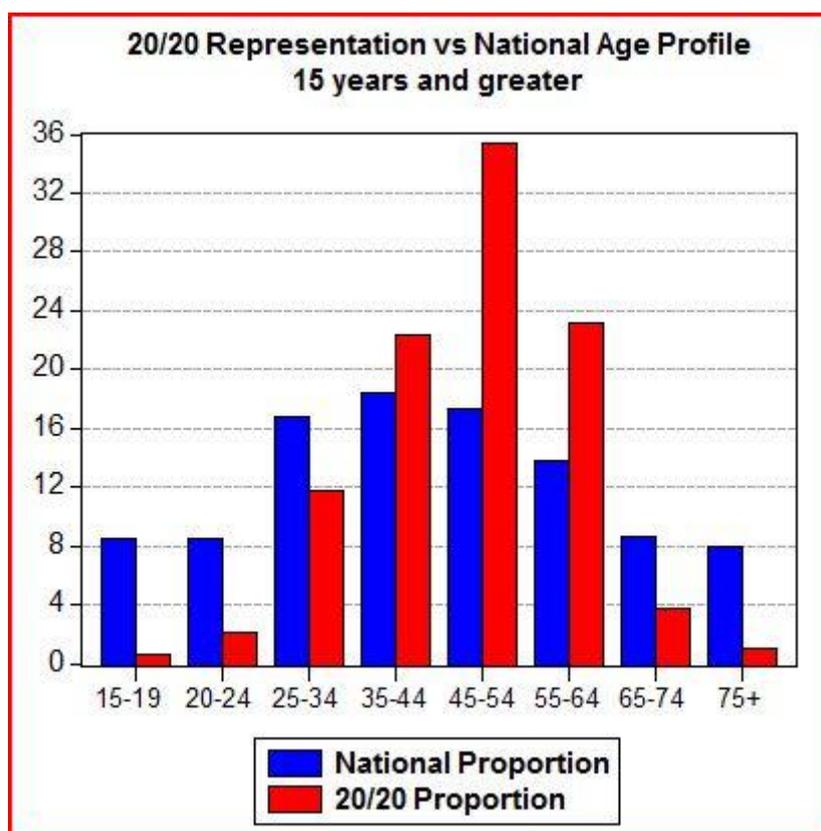
There was a requirement for a strict 50-50 split on grounds of gender, a broad range of ages, and also a balance of participants from all the States and Territories. In the end, women comprised 51 per cent of the participants (Nethercote 2008)<sup>154</sup>.

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<sup>154</sup> The data for the demographic profiling of the 2020 Summiteers is drawn from on-line Australian news source *Crikey* using data compiled from [www.pollytics.com.au](http://www.pollytics.com.au) (the blog site for Scott Steel) (Nethercote 2008). The data used examines the profile of 890 participants, and the supplementary notes on the data from this article are outlined. The reason 890 summiteers were profiled rather than the full 1 000 is this the, '...number of seats left vacant at the summit after accounting for federal and state politicians, governors, bureaucrats and youth summit delegates.)

A brief comparison of the age profile between participants and the wider Australian population (fig. 27) shows that the 45-54 age group were significantly over-represented compared with other age cohorts. This is to some extent a distorted picture as the Rudd government would claim that the separate 2020 Youth Summit was the main forum (along with the school summits) to gain the views of young people. Nethercote (2008) also notes that over 75s were also disproportionately under-represented (fig. 29):

**Figure 29: 2020 Representation by Age Profile**



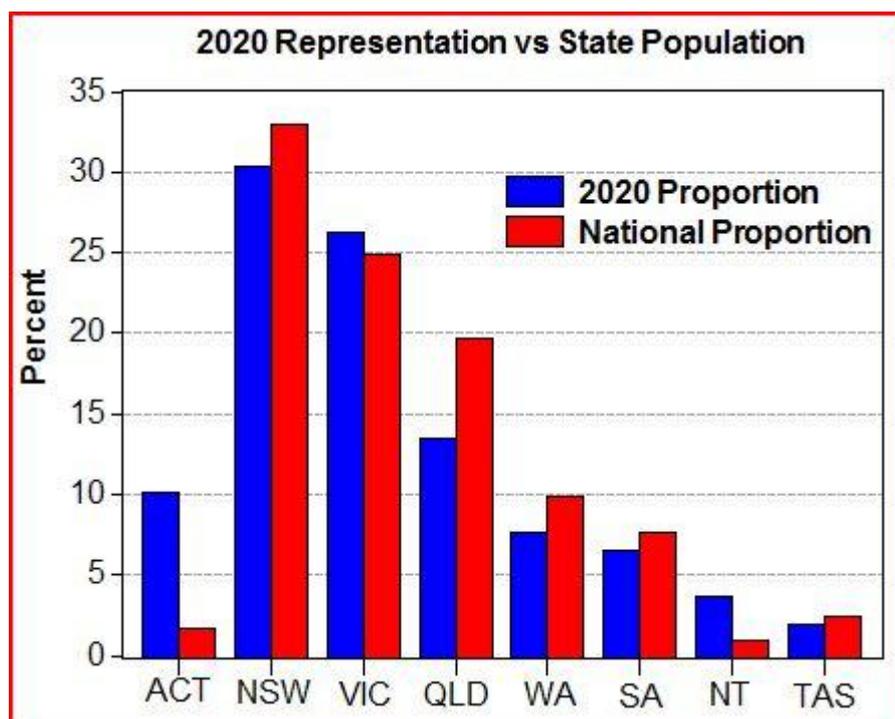
Source: Nethercote 2008

\*268 attendees were too shy to provide their age on the Summit form (!). We have drawn our figures only from those who fessed up. Possum only counted those 15 and over in the national profile since that's what the Summit used.

\*\* The figures only account for 863 delegates because the rest only provided an email address/are currently overseas/reside in multiple states" (Nethercote (2008)).

On a State-by-State basis, there were some stark gaps between the 2020 Summiteers and the wider Australian population (Figure 30):

**Figure 30: 2020 Representation by State Population**



Source: Nethercote 2008

Participants from the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and the Northern Territory (NT) were over-represented to the Summit. The over-representation of people from the ACT is explained by the fact that Canberra is the main home of the Australian political class. There was also a deliberately prominent Aboriginal ‘voice’ at the Summit, and this perhaps explains the over-representation of participants from the NT (Davis 2008, p.385). Queensland was the most under-represented State. In discussing the demographics of the participants of the 2020 Summit, co-convener Glyn Davis reports:

... as Maxine McKew wryly observed, the Summit created a group more closely resembling the Australian people than the usual occupants of Parliament House (Davis 2008, p.385)

For obvious reasons, the voting habits and intentions of the 2020 Summiteers were not recorded. It is useful, however, to speculate on the degree to which the Summit was a truly nonpartisan affair. It was evident that invitations were made to all the Liberal Opposition leaders, and there were a (very small) number of prominent conservatives such as commentator Gerard Henderson<sup>155</sup>. However, it seems likely that the participants were mostly 'critical friends' of the Rudd government. It was always likely Labor well-wishers would attend the Summit. There were some accusations that conservative participants were marginalised during the conference, and that the spirit of bipartisanship was 'superficial' (Steketee 2009). However, it seems that, while Rudd explicitly called for a nonpartisan affair, especially by arguing that the left/right divide was no longer useful for generating ideas, the Summit was attended by people broadly supportive of the ALP agenda. Moreover, as explored in the section below on responsiveness, the ideas generated that closely aligned to the ALP's agenda were those most likely to be adopted.

Nethercote (2008) also speculates on the socio-economic levels of representation at the 2020 Summit:

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<sup>155</sup> Gerard Henderson is Director of the Sydney Institute – a conservative think tank. Henderson is also a regular commentator on the ABC's Radio National program and writes for the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Henderson worked as Chief of Staff for former Liberal Prime Minister John Howard in the 1980s. He is a noted and prominent conservative, and described by critics as one of Howard's 'ideological foot-soldiers' (Hamilton & Maddison 2007, p.11).

Unfortunately, a socio-economic comparison isn't feasible, but given Summit attendees mostly need to pay their way, it's evident that it would be significantly skewed. And the heavy Canberra contingent wouldn't help -- the average weekly household income there is almost \$500 more than the national average. (Nethercote 2008)

This speculation is arguably right. It was an elite exercise. However, it is important to reiterate that the 2020 Summit was part of a wider program of activities including the Youth Summit, and the Jewish Symposium and so on. In this respect, the level of representativeness does better reflect the demographics of the Australian population. Seen in these broader terms, the 2020 'package' is more representative than just the main Summit. However, given that there was no specific attempt to engage with people from lower-socio-economic groups, it seems a fair assumption to make that inequality of voice was also a feature of the wider 'package'. Moreover, these additional events and activities served the purpose of legitimising the main Summit, which was the principal outlet for the 962 ideas generated about Australia's future.

'Equality of voice' for impoverished and deprived Australians was to be achieved by having their concerns aired for them in the 'social inclusion' stream by the participants from the relevant NGOs and Peak bodies. Only one participant publicly raised the issue of the lack of direct voice of disadvantaged groups:

The chief secretary of the Salvation Army, James Condon, criticised organisers for seeking to champion the cause of the oppressed, the marginalised and the

disadvantaged without actually including any of their ranks in the summits working groups. (Maley 2008)

This raises a series of complex issues for advocates of such political consultation exercises. Prime Minister Rudd did stipulate that among the Summit there should be a number of 'ordinary' Australians. There is an inherent difficulty and challenge in bringing together people with expert forms of knowledge, and those who make contributions either based on personal experience or with localised forms of knowledge. As co-chair Glyn Davis explains:

...Interestingly, the Prime Minister decided to arrange that there were some 'ordinary Australians' there by allowing talkback radio and others to pick a few, they were a small number, and a number of them were just badly out of their depth which was a fair indication that if you have not participated in policy discussions there was a lot to take up...you might think you know a lot about schools but in a room full of people who really lived and breathed this stuff your view about how schools should operate was just a little uninformed...so there was a minimum threshold for expertise that was needed to make the policy discussion worthwhile. (Davis, 2009, interview, 23 June)

The desirability of including members of the wider public into such discussions is a reasonable question. It raises the issue of how more socio-economically disadvantaged groups (or those outside well-established public policy circles) can seek to have their voices directly heard. While there were some local 2020 forums and meetings along with a dedicated web site, none of these mechanisms was targeted at the poorest Australian population groups. There was no attempt made to

gain the direct and unmediated views of the poorest groups to supplement the views emanating from the main Summit.

In one of the most thought-provoking articles about the initiative, Academic David Burchell considers the 2020 Summit through the prism of Michael Young's classic 1948 satire 'The Rise of the Meritocracy' (Burchell 2009; Young 1958). Burchell summarises Young's central argument that whilst in previous societies brain power was:

....distributed randomly among the classes. But in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the professional middle classes wrested the education system out of the hands of the old elites, and reorganised the ladder of success according to their own preferred criteria: those of academic cleverness...The outcome in 2036 was the most oppressive social system of all: an aristocracy of self-defined merit, made unbearably smug and patronising by the distinctive combination of smarty-pantness and success....People forgot (Young's book) was a satire, and took meritocracy to be a virtue. In the 1990s Tony Blair went so far as to declare his goals to be the creation of a meritocratic Britain...Australian Labor is in danger of falling into the same trap. After all, what was the 2020 Summit if not a celebration of the triumph of the meritocracy, a ritual homage to the best and brightest, in all their ceremonial glory? (Burchell 2009)

One of the risks of elite consultation events is that they privilege technocratic and 'expert' forms of knowledge over local, anecdotal, and culturally diverse forms. The difficulty is that the formal representativeness of the 2020 Summit (for example the 50/50 gender split) masks this privileging process. Elite exercises reinforce the

notion that elites have most of the answers to complex policy questions, in effect, weakening the case for involving the non-elites in shaping their own lives and destinies.

### **Responsiveness of the 2020 Summit**

The second principle of the Beetham-Pratchett framework is responsiveness (Pratchett 1999). This invites a critical discussion of the links between the consultation and the influence on policy outcomes. There is a clear and tangible link between the 2020 Summit and the Rudd government's wider policy agenda. The most positive feature of its response document is the high level of transparency in recording all the ideas. The Rudd government clearly indicate the proposals to be taken forward, those which it will consider further, those that others may wish to pursue, and the ideas not being acted upon (DPC-CW 2009)

It is interesting to note the category of ideas that the Rudd government considers that 'others may progress'—as it gives an indication about its views on the role and limits of government. The notion of government as an enabling agency is evident, which closely links with the prescription for the role of government in the politics of the NSD (see Ch.1). The Rudd government deserve some credit for providing a rationale for those ideas not to be taken forward, for example, the call to create a Minister for Democracy. While a critic may disagree or consider the reasons unacceptable or inadequate, the Rudd government deserve some credit for at least addressing each idea.

## **Response to the Democratic Renewal Agenda**

A specific focus for this thesis is the set of ideas and themes that were raised around enhancing citizen engagement and democratic renewal. These were outlined in the previous section, but it worth recapping the major themes. First, it should be reinforced that augmenting representative democracy was a clear and popular demand in the 2020 Summit. Second, while there numerous calls for better mechanisms for dialogue and exchange between the state and civil society, there was a corresponding lack of specific proposals for achieving this. Where specific proposals are made (such as the greater use of citizens' juries) it was not always clear how they should link with the existing architecture of representative democracy.

Third—and for a number of reasons outlined above—the Rudd government's response to this agenda was timid and lacklustre. There was not much direct commitment to the issue of democratic renewal beyond holding Community Cabinets. There is little in the way of zeal for radical or reforming action on the democratic renewal agenda, although the Rudd government has signalled an interest in it. This reinforces the status of the democratising of democracy as a second tier concern in the politics of the NSD. It is unlikely to be an agenda radically pursued by Rudd while the full impact of the global financial recession is pre-eminent.

### *Influencing the Rudd Government's Agenda*

A central issue relating to the issue of responsiveness is to the degree to which 2020 participants were able to influence the Rudd government's agenda. There were a

number of (mostly unstated) criteria which governed whether some ideas were more likely to progress than others. These include:

- Electability - any ideas which lacked significant wider public support were always likely to gain less traction than more popular ones
- ALP Party Platform commitments – ideas that linked closely with pre-existing commitments were more likely to be adopted (or more likely to be subsumed within existing policy agendas).
- Cost – a strong preference for ‘cost-neutral’ ideas.
- Publicity – Ideas that attracted good publicity were always likely to be an increasingly media-focussed government. The Bionic Eye scored well in this respect.
- Consensus – ideas receiving broad support from the 2020 participants would bolster the case for eventual adoption.

There are a number of claims that the 2020 Summit agenda was already ‘fixed’ or ‘foisted’ upon participants (Salusinszky 2008a; Topsfield 2008a). These claims perhaps over-simplify the unstated criteria outlined above. The accusation of a pre-set agenda was mostly directed at the call for an Australian Republic, a charge that co-convenor Prof Glyn Davis dismisses:

People asserted afterwards that it was a set up for a Republic, there was no set up. If that’s what came out of it’s because that’s what they said. (Davis, 2009, interview, 23 June).

While this is correct, it does somewhat down-play the fact that most of the 2020 Summiteers were broadly supportive of the ALP’s agenda. While the agenda was not

overtly fixed by the Rudd government, there was a much more subtle underpinning process about which ideas were taken forward. Moreover, the type of participant was also a factor as Geoff Gallop, governance stream participant and former Premier of Western Australia, observes:

There were two types of people at the Summit, those with an “idea” (pure and uncomplicated by the necessities of compromise) and those with ideas but keen to find a politically acceptable middle ground. This second group was more consensus-minded. As open as the Summit was it was always difficult for the first group to get leverage. The limited time available for them to advocate and explain was also a constraint. The fact is middle-of-the road ideas that looked achievable always occupied the best position, even if some pushed the limits of Australian politics (for example the Republic). (Gallop, 2009, telephone interview, 5 June)

The issue of consensus is contentious. Co-convenor Glyn Davis is adamant that the ‘Australia 2020 Summit was not designed to produce a consensus’ (Davis 2008, p387). At one level, this is correct, as the Summit did not have the same function as Hawke’s Accord Summits as a way of comparison. However, given that each of the streams had to endorse three specific goals this presupposes the consensus support of the participants. Glyn Davis’ claim that the Summit was not an exercise in consensus obscures the underpinning *political* aim of the Summit, which was to foster legitimation for the new Rudd government. While its response to the 2020 Summit was not ‘fixed’, it was underpinned by a set of unspoken assumptions and ideas. Moreover, for the all talk of the Summit being non-partisan, it served a highly politicised purpose. Like some of the other case studies in this thesis, it blended a

range of overall aims including, educational, promotional, legitimising, as well as consultative functions.

## **Overall Summary**

The 2020 Summit is the most robust and well developed consultation initiative in the NSD reported in this thesis. It was a genuinely innovative attempt at consultation, and there were significantly high levels of transparency and accountability. The Rudd government were, to a certain extent, open and receptive to the idea of a 'national debate', and the 2020 Summit was a useful focal point for this aim. While it was designed to influence government policy it also served a specific political function. The 2020 Summit was a highly effective 'circuit-breaker' from the legacy of the Howard Liberal government era<sup>156</sup>.

Nonetheless, this was a top-down and elite exercise, with these inherent tensions and difficulties. Moreover, the Rudd government's response to the wider call for democratic renewal is, at best, measured and cautious, and at worst lacklustre and disappointing. Given the changed economic circumstances; the democratic renewal agenda—always a second tier concern in the NSD—has been pushed further down the government's policy agenda. The 2020 Summit may have inched Australia a little closer to the goal of a Republic, but in the interim, the opportunities for further experiments in more deliberative and dialogic government has been deferred. As Megalogenis (2008) notes the genuine achievements of the past four Australian

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<sup>156</sup> The analogy of the 'circuit-breaker' was suggested to the author by Associate Professor Anthony Langlois from Flinders University during a seminar delivered on the 2020 Summit to the School of Political and International Studies in October 2009. I am grateful for the wider comments and suggestions. It is also useful to note, that the political function of the 2020 Summit also has similarities with other case studies in the thesis, especially, the Growing Victoria Together Summit (Ch.7).

Prime Ministers occurred in their first terms. In this context, the prospect for the Rudd government to make the goal of more dialogic government a reality and embed democratic renewal is receding rapidly. The 2020 Summit itself may remain its key, albeit flawed, achievement.

## Chapter 10

### *Conclusion - Evaluating and Comparing Five Cases of Experimental Consultation*

## **Conclusion: The New Social Democracy and Democratic Renewal**

The New Social Democracy (NSD) is a political project which seeks to reinvigorate and modernise social democratic politics (Giddens 1998, 2000, 2002). As outlined in Chapter 1, what was originally termed the Third Way has evolved into a wider set of ideas that have been adopted, to varying degrees, by Labo(u)r governments in Britain and Australia. To some extent, the origins of the NSD lie with the Hawke–Keating Labor governments from 1983 to 1996 (O’Reilly 2007). The British New Labour government is arguably the purest form of the NSD in action (Callincos 2001; Fitzpatrick 2003). The Australian Labor State governments scrutinised in this thesis, along with Kevin Rudd’s Commonwealth Labor government, have adopted elements of the NSD.

A central theme of the NSD is the ‘democratising of democracy’ (Giddens 1998, pp. 70-77, 2000, p. 61). NSD-influenced Labo(u)r governments seek to reinvigorate the relationship between the state and civil society. Inherent in the process of the democratising of democracy is a call for ‘experiments with democracy’ (Giddens 1998, p. 72). There is a strong demand for new forms of exchange between the state and the citizenry to supplement the existing apparatus of representative democracy. A significant driver for the call for democratic renewal is connected to the changing structural patterns of political participation in a number of advanced industrial societies including Britain and Australia (see Ch. 3). In response to these underpinning structural changes, proponents of the NSD argue for experiments with democracy, which include citizens’ juries, local referenda and the use of more deliberative methods of engagement. In carrying out these experiments with

democracy, the proponents of the NSD seek to cultivate a form of active citizenry (Blair 1998).

Experimenting with democracy by introducing new consultative and dialogic mechanisms can create new sets of complexities (Giddens 1998, p. 78). There are underlying tensions inherent in the call for the democratising of democracy (Barnes, Newman & Sullivan 2007; Newman 2001, 2005; Newman & Clarke 2009). What Barnes, Newman, Clarke and Sullivan make clear is that some of these issues are not resolved just by changing the mode of dialogue and consultation.

Despite these difficulties, Labo(u)r governments have shown a genuine willingness to innovate and create new forms of consultation. The case studies reported in this thesis are only a few examples among a much broader range of attempts to reconnect with the citizenry. For New Labour this has been evident in its program to 'modernise' public services and its constitutional reforms (Cabinet Office 1999a). Gordon Brown's 'Governance of Britain' White paper seeks to put new life into this agenda<sup>157</sup>. In Australia, the State governments have been leading the charge in this

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<sup>157</sup> Shortly after Tony Blair resigned as Party leader on 27 June 2007, Gordon Brown initiated a whole swathe of policy initiatives with the aim of injecting fresh impetus into the New Labour 'project', and also stamping out his own policy terrain. In July 2007, Brown delivered a speech to Parliament setting out the key themes of the 'Governance of Britain' Green paper (Brown 2007). Brown is much more interested in constitutional and democratic renewal issues than Blair, and his statement explores a range of governance questions including the need to address citizen disengagement, and also whether the UK should develop a written constitution (Coates 2007). The 'Governance of Britain' agenda has continued with a number of consultations on a range of these themes. In July 2008, the Government launched a consultation on the discussion paper 'A National Framework for Greater Citizen Engagement', which explores the greater use of citizens' juries and the like (Ministry of Justice 2008a). As noted in chapter 1, in 2008, New Labour began 22 pilots of participatory budgeting across England and Wales (Ministry of Justice 2008b). In addition, the Civil Renewal Unit in the Department of Local Government and Communities is rolling out the 'Together We Can' strategy for civic renewal. In sum, there is evidence that Brown is perhaps more interested in these than Blair, but given that the 'National Framework' is a discussion paper, the actual amount of clear experimentation is limited. Given that New Labour (as of November 2009) were lagging behind in the polls and a Cameron-led Conservative victory is looking increasingly likely in 2010; for many of these ideas on civic renewal, it may be a case of 'too little, too late' for New Labour.

respect. 'Tasmania Together', Western Australia's 'Dialogue with the City' and the use of Community Cabinets, pioneered by former Premier Peter Beattie in Queensland, are all prominent examples of attempts to reconnect with civil society (Carson 2001; Wiseman 2004). Kevin Rudd's Labor government achieved a huge amount of public (and other) engagement with the 2020 Summit.

### **Restating the Research Questions**

In comparing the five cases reported in this thesis, it is useful to restate the research questions:

- How far have the Labo(u)r governments addressed the principles of representativeness and responsiveness?
- How effective have the five case studies of consultation been in opening up new paths of dialogue and enabling citizens to influence the policy process?
- How effective can the state be in reinvigorating the relationship with wider civil society through 'top-down' mechanisms of consultation?
- Have these experiments been able to transcend some of the contradictions and tensions within the NSD thinking?
- How do the cases of consultation reported in this thesis fit in with the existing institutions of representative democracy?

This concluding chapter addresses these questions in the following way. First, the case studies are compared through the prism of the Beetham–Pratchett framework, focusing on the principles of representativeness and responsiveness (Pratchett 1999). Second, the common themes and issues with the case studies which fall

outside of this framework are considered. Finally, the thesis concludes with reflections on the potential future direction of the NSD democratic renewal agenda in Britain and Australia.

### **Comparing the Case Studies**

As outlined in Chapter 3, the two main criteria for evaluating the case studies are the Beetham–Pratchett principles of representativeness and responsiveness (Pratchett 1999). Responsiveness is derived from the concept of popular control, while representativeness comes from the notion of political equality. Pratchett adopts these two principles as an auditing tool for examining new ‘fashions’ in engagement (Pratchett 1999).

Table 27 summaries the comparison between the case studies using these two main principles, along with a number of other criteria considered later in this chapter.

**Table 27: The Five Case Studies in Comparison**

	<b>Representative?</b>	<b>Responsive?</b>	<b>Government-dominated agenda?</b>	<b>Deliberative?</b>	<b>Innovative?</b>
New Labour: <b>'People's Panel'</b>	Highly. Evidence of attrition.	Yes, at the micro-level, but not really at the macro-level.	Yes. Panel members were passive recipients of government-set questions.	No.	Moderately. Citizens' panels are not new mechanisms for consultation, but this was the first time one was used by a national government.
New Labour: <b>'Big Conversation'</b>	Mixed. Targeted at Labour members and the wider 'interested' public.	Informed the content of the internal working document for drafting the manifesto, but impact on specific policy was minimal.	Mixed. Set broad parameters for thematic discussions, but some topics—such as Iraq—were off limits. In other areas there was a willingness for participants to lead the agenda.	Not much, although highly discursive features.	Mixed. Improved on 'Labour Listens'. Use of the internet for comments was an early attempt at e-government. The regional meetings were not particularly innovative in format.
Victoria: <b>Growing Victoria Together (GVT) Summit</b>	Mixed. Targeted at main stakeholder and issue groups in the Victorian community.	Mixed. Government forged some consensus for the GVT plan.	Mixed. Government set the agenda, but there were clear outlets for participants to highlight issues.	No.	Not really. It was a reformulated version of Hawke's Accord Summits.
South Australia: <b>Consultation on South Australia's Strategic Plan (SASP)</b>	Mixed. Targeted at key stakeholders and community leaders. Some groups overrepresented regions; others were underrepresented—for example, women. Poor public response.	Yes, within strict limits. A highly transparent process in many respects.	Mostly. Government did not seek a radical overhaul of the Plan. Many amendments were minor, often technical changes; although new targets were included.	Not much, although some evidence in working parties on targets.	Wide-ranging, and to some extent, a new approach for South Australia. However, it reapplied some traditional formats, such as poorly attended public meetings.
Australia: <b>2020 Summit</b>	Mixed. Elite exercise, but with a strong representative dimension at the Summit.	Mixed. Clear impact on a small number of policies. Democratic renewal response was rather weak.	Mostly not. Government set the broad areas; participants gave concrete proposals; and government decided on the final ideas.	No, although it was a highly discursive interchange.	Mostly. The 2020 Summit had its origins in earlier models, but it had some innovative features in scope and design.

## **Representativeness**

As reviewed in Chapter 3, inequality of voice remains a consistent and enduring feature of politics in advanced industrial societies (Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley 2004; Verba, Scholzman & Brady 1995). Groups from lower socio-economic backgrounds are far less likely to participate and engage than people from higher socio-economic groups. Comparing the case studies shows how far the Labo(u)r governments recognise inequality of voice as a policy priority, and secondly, it shows the steps they take to mitigate against this.

Not only is representativeness a complex concept but even when it has been identified as a high policy priority, it remains an elusive goal (Barnes, Sullivan & Newman 2009). The fate of the 'People's Panel' is instructive. This is the only case study which actively sought to engage a broadly representative sample of the British population. Yet, the Panel suffered from high levels of attrition (where Panel members from lower socio-economic groups increasingly dropped out) and some lesser evidence of conditioning (where Panel members were becoming decreasingly representative of the wider public by the very fact of their involvement in the Panel). So, even the case which 'scores' highest in representativeness is found wanting.

The other four cases are interesting in that seeking equality of voice was not a high priority in their overall aims. In these cases, the intended target groups tended to be those who were already engaged in the policy process, or those

members of the public who were most able and keen to engage. The South Australian example is typical. The 2006 consultation on South Australia's Strategic Plan (SASP) was targeted at key interest groups in the State, along with a loosely defined group of community leaders. The engagement of the public was minimal, and notably, one public event scored a nil attendance. That said, the consultation still engaged over 1 600 South Australians—not an unimpressive feat. Likewise, the Growing Victoria Together (GVT) Summit and the 2020 Summit were, in effect, elite events. The spectre of Michael Young's *Rise of the Meritocracy* haunts the 2020 Summit (Burchell 2009; Young 1958).

There are, of course, sound policy (and political) reasons for engaging those people who are already engaged (Skidmore 2006). Yet, when the case studies are considered in light of their innovation; they are found wanting. The methods and incentives to attract people who might not traditionally engage in such events (particularly in the SASP and 'Big Conversation' cases) were not particularly inspiring or innovative. The barriers that people from lower socio-economic groups face were not adequately addressed. In the case of SASP, the public forums were almost an afterthought, without any real attempt to think through and develop forms of engagement better suited to the needs of people from disadvantaged groups.

There are a number of risks and unstated problems with the relative low priority placed on addressing inequality of voice. First, there is the danger that public officials can become convinced that the public are disinterested in what

might be seen as esoteric debates and consultations. Without concerted efforts to engage with people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, a mutually reinforcing gap between policy makers and citizens can be created. The NSD champions different forms of co-production and governance, and yet, these policy agendas are 'top-down', not citizen-driven. NSD governments may well be pursuing (perhaps diluted) social justice agendas, but in its 'big picture' consultations, they are not making clear efforts to engage with those groups most likely to be affected. For Labo(u)r governments, where the link with the working classes is weakening, these consultative practices actually do very little to re-establish direct links with the most disadvantaged groups.

Second, the incentives for people from lower socio-economic groups to participate need to be reconsidered. If 'publics' are conceived as multi-dimensional and heterogeneous groups of individuals and collectives, then it follows that different sets of incentives are needed to achieve a better expression of equality of voice (Newman 2001). When attempts are made to engage the public, the use of traditional methods, such as public meetings, has failed to provide an adequate set of incentives.

Third, the risk is that expert forms of knowledge become privileged. This was a concern relating to the GVT summit. Local anecdotal forms of knowledge can be displaced. A very interesting feature of the 2020 Summit was that—apparently—the few 'ordinary' participants in each stream struggled to engage with the policy debates. This remains something of an unresolved tension in

the NSD thinking for democratic renewal. The democratising of democracy, at least in the case studies considered here, aims to cultivate an activated and 'responsibilised' citizen, but it privileges the use of experts as intermediaries in the connection between the state and civil society (Clarke 2005, p.463). The consultations considered in this thesis seem to offer little in the way forward for establishing stronger links and forms of dialogue between the policy community and the wider public.<sup>158</sup>

These problems are evident in other attempts at consultation by Labo(u)r governments. The increasing use of Community Cabinets, both in Britain and Australia, is instructive. They are generally considered a good thing by government, but the issue of inequality of voice is given very little attention. The problem is masked by some of the rather grand, rhetorical claims made by the Labo(u)r governments about how far the community are engaged in these mechanisms. By not placing a higher priority on inequality of voice, these consultation efforts are in danger of entrenching existing inequalities.

## **Responsiveness**

What impact did the consultations make on policy? Before the cases are considered in comparison, it is useful to strike a cautionary note. Consultation, by definition, is not decision-making (Catt & Murphy 2003). Seeking a direct causal impact on policy might well be a quest destined to fail. More often,

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<sup>158</sup> Research by Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker (2006) may go some way to addressing these issues and providing a framework for governments to use when planning their consultative work (see footnote 32).

consultation only works to better inform the decision makers: a view reinforced by New Labour Minister Jack Cunningham about the People's Panel (Cunningham 1999a). Yet, examining the link between consultation and decision-making is important as it indicates the degree to which there is a genuine commitment to engage and seek input.

In all five cases, there was some clear evidence that the consultations had an impact, to varying degrees, on government decision-making processes. For the People's Panel, this was more evident at the micro level rather than the macro level. Similarly, the Big Conversation provided useful background 'noise' to the formation of the Party's 2005 manifesto. The impact was greatest where the feedback from the consultations made specific, limited and technocratic recommendations. This was particularly apparent in the cases of SASP and the 2020 Summit. At this level, most of the cases can be considered successful.

An additional feature of government responsiveness relates to the issue of transparency. Among the case studies, there were a small number of commendable examples of a commitment to openness and transparency. The appendix to the revised SASP is one example where a clear rationale was given for all of the changes to the 80+ targets. The quick turnaround of the 2020 initial report was a good measure in building confidence, and like SASP, the government response document at least attempted to respond to all 946 ideas. The research reports from the People's Panel were made publicly available through the Cabinet Office web site. However, transparency was a

far less prominent feature of the other cases. In some cases, the commitment to transparency was short-lived. For example, there was some despondency because the openness in the SASP consultation did not lead to a wider 'culture change' of greater transparency across the South Australian public service.

However, these positive features from the cases risk masking a more complex picture. There are a number of underpinning themes which complicate the evaluation. First, a central question to ask is how closely the consultations were linked to existing decision-making structures. The picture is mixed. Arguably, the People's Panel is the case which was most removed from decision-making processes. Ultimately, the Panel was closed because it lacked widespread support, both within Blair's Cabinet and across the public sector. The GVT Summit was not designed to link closely with the decision-making functions in any explicit way, but arguably, it served a legitimising function for the broad policy agenda already initiated by (former) Premier Bracks. SASP and the 2020 Summit were more closely linked to the decision-making functions, and this is reflected by the fact that these are the cases with the highest degrees of transparency.

Second, a number of the cases of consultation were attempts at consensus-building, particularly the Big Conversation, SASP and the 2020 Summit. Ideas and suggestions that had broad support, particularly where they dovetailed with Labo(u)r political goals, were much more likely to succeed. This focus on consensus carries hidden risks. Activist or radical counter-politics can be

managed out of the process (Newman & Clarke 2009; Young 2003). Problematic agendas can be sidelined out of the process. For example, in the view of South Australian Council of Social Service (SACOSS), the Peak community sector body in South Australia, the consultation on SASP marginalised calls for a stronger focus on poverty. Despite Rudd's claims that he wished the 2020 Summit to be non-partisan, consensus ideas were likely to get more traction. The People's Panel was the clearest example of the degree to which New Labour was prepared to receive negative feedback.

The third feature of a number of the consultations was the blending of promotional, educational and consultative aims. In some cases, this blending took on an overly political focus. The Big Conversation was designed, in part, to shift the national debate away from the Blair government's deployment of troops in the invasion of Iraq. Moreover, the Big Conversation was an exercise in downplaying public expectations while also teaching the public about the tough grind of politics—or to use Weber's famous phrase—'the strong and slow boring of hard boards' (Rawnsley 2003; Weber, Gerth & Mills 1977, p. 128).

This promotional aspect was also apparent in some of the other cases. The South Australian case is illuminating in this respect; where there was a significant disparity between the funding for a broad-based public awareness campaign and the much more limited funds allocated for the consultation itself. The public awareness campaign cost between \$700 000 and \$1m, and to a large degree, it was a promotional device for the Rann government (as

well as the State Plan). A lack of funds was cited as one of the reasons why the State government did not engage in a more 'grassroots' campaign. At some of the public events during the SASP consultation, consultation and feedback was blended with promotional aspects of the South Australian government's activities. Likewise, Crowley and Coffey (2007) see the GVT Summit as serving a highly politicised function, not least as a vehicle for pushing (former) Premier Bracks onto the national stage.

The key issue is that the political rhetoric used by the Labo(u)r governments, often tends to inflate the achievements of these limited exercises in consultation; suggesting that they achieved a much richer form of community engagement and support than the evidence indicates. Consultation is confused with deeper community engagement, and this has the effect of masking the often multiple and conflicting processes taking place. Consultation is fused with education, political legitimacy and promotion. The interplay of these processes has the effect of limiting the impact on policy-making.

### **Consultations as Deliberation**

None of the case studies sought to be formal exercises in deliberative democracy. Therefore, to then criticise them for failing to meet standards of deliberation is misleading. However, deliberation is a useful prism for examining the discursive practices across the cases. A general theme is that, at their best, some of the cases facilitated meaningful discussion, but not

deliberation (to the standard of an exercise in deliberative democracy). The Big Conversation, particularly the regional meetings with smaller groups, did feature a good deal of authentic discussion and debate, which stands in stark contrast to the rather woeful 'Labour Listens' event that was attempted in the 1980s. However, a concern is that discussion was between participants rather than with policy makers. To some extent, this enabled New Labour to neutralise and manage potentially difficult discussions and deflected responsibility away from New Labour. At times, the Big Conversation was between participants but not always with New Labour.

The SASP working parties that formulated the final recommendations from the consultation were highly discursive. With a specific focus, these small groups, comprising both public servants and non-government stakeholders, did facilitate a degree of deliberative activity. Similarly, the smaller group discussions and the final stream discussions at the 2020 Summit apparently featured a minimal aspect of deliberation. However, the pressurised deadline at the 2020 Summit was a severe constraint on it being a fully deliberative experiment.

In some of these cases, there were promising examples of discussion and limited deliberation. However, none of these cases was fully discursive, and the risk is that discussion can be used as a tool to manage out activist agendas. These consultations suggest a two-way exchange between government and citizenry, but in reality, aspects of the case studies were one-

way mechanisms for input. Feedback to participants was limited, and in many cases, it did not take place at all.

### **Institutionalising and Sustaining the Consultation**

A key theme which connects all of the case studies is the inherent difficulty in institutionalising forms of consultation and community engagement, and then sustaining dialogue with civil society. A striking case is the Victorian Economic Environmental and Social Advisory Council (VEESAC). VEESAC was established after the GVT Summit, but was disbanded a year later. In South Australia, the Rann government set up the Community Engagement Board (CEB) to continue the dialogue with South Australians. The Rann government established a program of ‘alliance partners’—loose partnership arrangements with an array of non-government organisations (NGOs). Yet, the CEB comprises chairs of other government Boards, and in reality, it could not be said to be grounded within wider South Australian civil society. It is not ‘community-owned’.

Both Blair during the Big Conversation and Rudd at the outset of the 2020 Summit, claimed that they wanted their national debates to continue. In both cases, this did not happen. For Blair, new policy priorities displaced much of the Big Conversation’s agenda. For Rudd, the one-year anniversary of the Summit passed, by mostly unremarked. Ultimately, the Global Financial Crisis has displaced much of the momentum generated by the 2020 Summit. The

People's Panel was a relatively short-lived institution which lacked wider legitimacy and staying power.

With the exception of the People's Panel, a key element of the other cases of consultation was to seek ways of institutionalising or setting targets for political participation. In all cases, political disenchantment (and a number of issues outlined in Chapter 3) was seen as a policy priority, along with the need to find new mechanisms to invigorate the relationship between the state and civil society. In all cases, the responses were rather weak and timid. The 2020 Summit response document is perhaps something of a 'damp squib' in its governance section. With a reliance on Community Cabinets, the Rudd government takes a 'wait and see' approach to democratic innovation. Victorian and South Australian Labor governments are limiting its activities to the measurement of indicators of community strength, rather than proceeding with more experimental or deeper forms of engagement. The key issue is that both institutionalising and sustaining momentum from these consultations is inherently difficult.

### **Consultation 'On-The-Run'**

Many of these consultations were forged—to borrow a phrase from former Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson—in the 'white heat' of the policy environment. More often than not, policy is developed and implemented at high speed to link in with short-term political aims. The architect of the Big Conversation, Matthew Taylor, recalled his surprise when Blair announced the

national debate at Labour's annual conference. Likewise, the 2020 Summit was developed quickly and without a clear model to guide the organisers. This explains—in part—why a number of the cases of consultation were not fully thought through and could not be described as full democratic experiments.

It is tempting for academics to lament the inability of policy makers to fully work through initiatives from clearer guiding principles—such as the Beetham–Pratchett auditing framework applied in this thesis. However, this ignores a reality of policy development. Policy is often done 'on-the-run', at high speed, and without full consideration to its impacts. The difficulty is that without attending to issues, such as inequality of voice, new 'innovative' consultations are likely to continue to replicate the same problems.

### **The Future of Consultation as part of the Democratising of Democracy**

Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try Again. Fail again. Fail better. (Beckett 1996)

Geoff Mulgan, former Head of the No.10 Strategy Unit, describes the Big Conversation as:

... an oddly sort of mixed experience, quite good in many ways in terms of conception; problematic in execution ... symbolising, in some ways the more controlling 'spin' era of politics, rather than a more open dialogic one. So, I think it was very much a transitional device rather than being a kind of end-point. (G Mulgan, 2007, interview with author, 13 December)

The motif of this case as a transitional device is a powerful one, and in many respects, it is tempting to apply this label to all of the case studies in this thesis. It is accurate to see all of these 'big picture' consultations as part of the process of achieving a more dialogic government. However, the label of transitional device implies a path-dependent, and seemingly inevitable, movement towards a more dialogic politics. This view casts the cases in this thesis as bold experiments, albeit with significant flaws, but with Labo(u)r governments continuing to experiment and in Beckett's words, 'fail better'.

However, for a number of reasons, the future of the democratising of democracy agenda in Britain and Australia may be stalling. In the case of New Labour, at the time of writing (late 2009) it seems highly likely that it will fail to win a fourth consecutive General election: trailing nearly twenty points behind the Tories in the polls. On 1 June 2009, Prime Minister Brown established a National Council of Democratic Renewal—which is, in effect, a Cabinet sub-committee (Wintour 2009). Yet, while the new Council has been welcomed, and it is evident that Brown has more interest in these issues than Blair, it is perhaps a last desperate throw of the dice. The Council is not embedded with wider civil society groups, such as the Joseph Rowntree sponsored Power Inquiry or the 'Open Democracy' organisation.<sup>159</sup> New Labour's limited experimentation with democracy is looking increasingly as if it is drawing to a close. Giddens' verdict on New Labour's democratic renewal agenda is telling:

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<sup>159</sup> See the web site (<<http://www.opendemocracy.net/about>>) for more detail.

I don't think New Labour did an awful lot, I mean I got a lot more from other experiments in other countries. (Giddens, 2007, interview, 10 December)

In Australia, the Bracks GVT agenda is drawing to a close, and the extent to which new Victorian Premier John Brumby will promote this agenda remains unclear. In South Australia, the next consultation on SASP is due in 2010, and the Rann government looks fairly secure for at least another term in office. Yet, there seems little indication of a genuine reforming zeal in this area. The Rudd government is still in its first term, with a second term looking like a real prospect. Yet, Rudd has adopted a 'wait and see' approach to democratic renewal, perhaps best exemplified in the 2020 Summit response document. These are cautious, pragmatic, fiscally conservative Labo(u)r governments, that seemingly want to strengthen the 'democratic impulse', but with very limited appetites for experimentation (Blair 1998).

### **The NSD and the Democratic Renewal Agenda**

Finally, it is useful to reflect on the future of the democratic renewal strand of the NSD. The case studies reported in this thesis have all underscored the apparent tensions and contradictions in the call for the democratising of democracy by the proponents of the NSD (Blair 1998; Giddens 1998, 2000; Latham 2001). With the NSD democratic renewal agenda:

- There is an ambivalence about how high the priority for democratic renewal should be for Labo(u)r governments pursuing a broad NSD agenda. For the most part, democratic renewal is a second tier and

underdeveloped strand of NSD politics. As a result, this can lead to inconsistent and paradoxical outcomes—perhaps most exemplified in New Labour’s constitutional reform program (Driver & Martell 2002, 2006; Flinders 2004; Gamble 2003a; Norton 2007).

- There is a devolution of responsibility, but a centralisation of power (Fitzpatrick 2003). The process of devolution is one-sided and it reduces the incentives for local communities to engage in the new mechanisms for dialogue.
- There is a formal concern about inequality of voice, particularly of lower socio-economic groups, but in practice, it does not seek to engage these groups directly.
- There is a fusion of consultative and promotional practices in the initiatives, where promotional activity can undermine the authenticity of the consultation (Fairclough 2000, p. 124). Labo(u)r governments use such mechanisms to promote their own successes and propagate their own narrative, without an equal, reciprocal movement to openly engage.
- There is a tension and simultaneous push for both centralisation and decentralisation (Newman 2001). Furthermore, it is unclear how the experiments with democracy link with the existing architecture of representative democracy.
- There is a static notion of representation (Newman 2001, 2005; Newman & Clarke 2009). The risk is that policy makers employ a static and homogeneous use of social characteristics, such as gender and

race. The process of consultation can reify the complex interplay of factors that create a 'public'.

As outlined in the previous section, it seems that the British and Australian Labo(u)r governments reported in this thesis have a limited appetite and opportunity to continue experimenting with democracy. While the desire of the proponents of the NSD to foster democratic renewal is laudable, they may do better to seek democratic renewal in initiatives devised by wider civil society for a more lasting impact, rather than impose 'top-down' solutions. A starting point may well be to seek new forms of engagement with people from lower socio-economic groups; and to make a reduction in patterns of inequality of voice and participation the policy focus, rather than the more generalised form of 'active citizenry' (Blair 1998).

There is a risk, of course, from generalising about the prospects of the NSD agenda for democratic renewal from the basis of five case studies of consultation. However, it is worthwhile speculating on the future of the NSD agenda. As outlined in chapter 1, the NSD evolved out of the Third Way debates encapsulated in the political thought of Anthony Giddens (Giddens 1998, 2000, 2002). A number of commentators noted on how quickly the Third Way label was dropped (Clift 2004, p.36; Hamilton 2006). Giddens' preferred label, 'New Social Democracy' has not gained anything like the same amount of political currency as the 'Third Way'. Yet, fundamental *raison d'être* for the NSD—how do Labo(ur) parties respond to the dominance of neo-liberalism—is still an ongoing set of unresolved debates. The lack of a coherent answer to

the democratic renewal strand of those debates has perhaps left some of the Labo(u)r governments considered in this thesis struggling to enhance the links between state and civil society. In effect, the 'big picture' consultations are a glittering façade to these deeper problems. The NSD concept of the 'enabling state' has not provided a clear enough blueprint for a genuine engagement with civil society. For some, the NSD has meant a weakening of New Labour's formal commitment to equality and redistribution of wealth and resources (Shaw 2007). With the Labo(u)r Parties in Britain and Australia no longer 'mass parties', there has been perhaps an attendant weakening of their direct and unmediated engagement with the poorest and most deprived groups, supplanted by a more generic interest in 'democratic renewal'.

The NSD has been, for a time at least, one powerful response to the dilemmas facing Labo(u)r parties with the neo-liberal orthodoxy. As the influence of NSD ideas appears to be on the wane (particularly with the impending demise of New Labour—NSD in its 'purest' form), then other competing paradigms will be needed to exert an influence over Labo(ur) politics; with a renewed focus on addressing the problems of inequality of voice and participation. Democratic renewal is not the sole preserve of Labo(u)r politics; and in a clear echo of New Labour, David Cameron, the British Conservative Party leader has called for a 'new politics' (Cameron 2009). However, the linkage between enhancing civic engagement and inequality is most closely located in Labo(u)r traditions, and if the case studies reported in this thesis are to be salutary lessons, then there is a case for these ideals to be re-awakened.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1

In chapter 2, the varying role of political participation in democratic theory is briefly outlined. This section in the chapter draws heavily from the work of David Held (1996) and his classification of different models of democracy. These models are summarised in table 28.

**Table 28: Held’s Models of Democracy—Role of Political Participation (1996)**

<b>Model</b>	<b>Level of Participation; Role of Participation</b>	<b>Conditions</b>	<b>Key Thinkers</b>
<i>Classical democracy</i>	Direct participation by citizens; highly exclusive	city–state; slave economy	Aristotle, Pericles
<i>Protective republicanism</i>	Political participation as an essential condition of personal liberty; citizen participation achieved through election of consuls	Small city economy; women and labourers excluded	Machiavelli
<i>Developmental republicanism</i>	Citizens must enjoy political and economic equality so all can enjoy freedom; direct participation of citizens in public meetings	Small industrial community; domestic service of women to free men for (non-domestic) work	Rousseau
<i>Protective democracy</i>	Citizens require protection from the governors; sovereignty lies in ‘the people’ but is vested in representatives, ‘competing power centres and interest groups’ (Held 1996, p. 99)	Private ownership of means of production; autonomous civil society; patriarchal family	Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu, Madison
<i>Developmental democracy</i>	Participation essential to protect individual interest but also to create informed citizenry; citizen involvement in different branches of government; extensive participation in public debates and jury service	Independent civil society; competitive market economy; political emancipation of women but traditional division of labour	JS Mill
<i>Direct democracy</i>	Freedom requires the end of exploitation and ultimately, complete political and economic equality; public affairs regulated by communes or councils	Abolition of scarcity and private possession of the means of production; end of all class privileges	Marx, Engels

<i>Competitive elitist democracy</i>	Participation limited to election of political leadership; freedom to compete for political leadership	Industrial society; poorly informed and emotional electorate; organised bureaucracy	Schumpeter, Weber
<i>Pluralism</i>	System of checks and balances; citizenship rights; diverse range of competing interest groups	Power contested by numerous groups; poor resource base for many groups prevents full political participation; balance between active and passive citizenry sufficient for political stability	Dahl
<i>Legal democracy</i>	Political life, like economic life, should be a matter of individual liberty	Constitutional state; minimal state intervention in civil society; free-market capitalism; restriction of interest groups—particularly trade unions	Hayek, Nozick
<i>Participatory democracy</i>	Highly participative; direct participation in regulating key institutions	Redistributive government and society; open information systems to ensure informed decisions; childcare provisions to enable full participation by women	Pateman, MacPherson
<i>Democratic autonomy</i>	People should have equal rights and obligations to determine the conditions of their own lives, as long as that does not negate the freedom of others; reflexive community and public services enabling participation and citizen input	Open information systems; Bill of Rights enshrines autonomy; bicameral	Arendt
<i>Cosmopolitan democracy</i>	With intensifying regional and global relations—principle of autonomy needs to be entrenched in regional and global networks; participation in wider mechanisms such as trans-national referenda; active and diverse civil society	Reform of the United Nations; Global Parliament; International Human Rights Court; experiments with different democratic organisational forms in the economy	Held, Archibugi

Adapted from: Held. 1996.

## Appendix 2

In chapter 3, the work of Pippa Norris (1999) is used to understand and differentiate the different levels of citizen support for political systems. The central argument of Norris' work is that while citizens in advanced industrial societies generally have high levels of support for democratic countries (the level of the 'political community' and 'regime principles' in the framework outlined in table 29), they generally have far less satisfaction with the lower levels such as 'regime institutions'.

**Table 29: Framework of Political Support**

Object of Support	Definition/Comment
Political community	This is usually taken to mean a basic attachment to the nation "beyond the present institutions of government and a general willingness to co-operate politically" (Norris 1999, p.10). However, as Norris notes the boundaries of the political community can be defined more narrowly, for example in terms of a local community, or a community defined by differences in ethnicity, class, etc.
Regime principles	These are the core regime principles representing the values of the political system. Norris argues that in a democratic society what constitute the values remain contested. However, Norris argues that the basic principles are understood to mean, "values such as freedom, participation, tolerance, and moderation, respect for legal-institutional rights, and the rule of law" (p.11). Surveys can measure this by agreement with the idea as democracy as best form of government.
Regime performance	This concerns judgement about how well the political system functions in practice. This is a 'middle level' of support difficult to gauge.
Regime institutions	This level of support includes attitudes towards governments, parliaments, the executive, the legal system, the police, state bureaucracy, political parties and the military. Surveys which measure this tend to focus on "generalised support for the institution" (p.11). So the focus is on support for the powers of the Prime Minister rather than the incumbent. Norris notes that this can also overlap with the other levels of support.
Political actors	This means support for politicians as a class and the performance of particular leaders.

*Adapted from: Norris 1999, pp. 10–11.*

### Appendix 3

In chapter 3, it is reported that Nye (1997) examines 17 different hypotheses for explaining declining trust in the United States. These seventeen hypotheses, with explanatory comments, are as follows:

**Table 30: Hypotheses for Falling Political Trust**

<b>Hypotheses for falling trust in the advanced industrial societies in the United States</b>		
<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Relevance</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Scope of government has grown too fast (as measured by size of government to GDP)	Low	While scope of government has increased, in the US this has largely been areas of welfare which are popular. This does not explain decline in trust in other institutions
Scope of government grown too intrusive (measured by new subjects)	Low/mixed	Views are divided on this hypothesis. For example, increase in areas of environment and safety regulation are seen as popular, and some opinion data that 40% in US see government 'interfering too much'. Yet does not explain decline on other institutions
Performance of government has weakened	Low/mixed	Mixed evidence here, and again the hypothesis does not explain decline in other institutions
End of Cold war	Low	Largest decline in US occurred from 1964-74
Vietnam and Watergate	Mixed	This may fit with the trends in the US, but additional reasons are needed to explain the persistence of falling trust.
World War II effect	High	1950s seem abnormally high, may also explain falling trust in other institutions

<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Relevance</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Political re-alignment and polarisation of elites	High	Fits timing of onset. Explains growth of conservative coalition, although does not explain other institutions
TV effects on politics (party decline, negative marketing)	High	Fits timing and persistence. Distancing of elites.
Changed role of Media	High	Fits timing and persistence.
Increased corruption/dishonesty	Mixed/Low	Little evidence of increase, but perception grows.
General economic slowdown	Mixed	Some variation with unemployment and inflation, but does not fit timing of onset
Rising economic inequality	Low	Does not show variation by winners and losers
Globalisation and loss of control	Mixed	This affects the general mood, but timing is unclear and effects indirect
Third World Revolution	High	Explains changes in the economy and communications, but direct causal links are unclear
Decline of social capital (measured by voluntary groups)	Low	Evidence in dispute, and causal links to government are unclear
Decline of social capital (measured by family cohesion)	Mixed	Timing about right regarding onset and persistence. Causal link somewhat indirect. Relation to other institutions and countries
Authority patterns and 'postmaterialist values', particularly since 1960s	High	Fits all institutions and countries. Does not explain variations

Source: Nye 1997

## Appendix 4

Chapter 3 examines arrange of indicators of political participation in Britain and Australia. Some of the key trends are summarised in this chapter. Table 31 outlines additional data to support the overall patterns of participation outlined in chapter 3. Broadly speaking, the levels of participation for many types of participation, for example attending a political meeting, have remained stable since the late 1960s. The picture is somewhat distorted by the fact that the AES data , which is the source for this information, does not ask the same question in each survey, and often the wording changes, making comparison difficult.

**Table 31: Political Participation in Australia (1969-2005) (%)**

	AES	WVS	ANSS	AES	IMAS	AES	WVS	AES	AES	AES	Au SSA
	1969	1983	1984- 5	1987	1988	1993	1995	1996	1998	2001	2005
Attend a political meeting	3.4				7	2.1		2.3		3.9	
Donate to Party	3							2	0.15		
Worked for party or candidate	2.4		6		10	2.9		2.2	2	2	
Attend meetings or rallies			10		7	3.3					5.2
Attend Lawful demo		12.2		13.2	26		17.8				

	AES	WVS	ANSS	AES	IMAS	AES	WVS	AES	AES	AES	Au SSA
	1969	1983	1984- 5	1987	1988	1993	1995	1996	1998	2001	2005
Join unofficial strike		5		2.5			8.1				
Join Boycott		5		9							
Sign a petition		70		71			78.4				
Contact a politician or Gov. official			13		22						13.3
Taken part in protest, march or demonstration		12									5

Source: AES: 1969, 1993, 1996, 1998, 2001 (analysis by Author) (NB: The 2001 AES posed different questions which yield greater responses when compared with previous AES surveys)  
World Values Survey: 1983, 1995 cited by Papadakis (2001)  
ANSS: 1984-5 cited by Bean (1989)  
IMAS: 1988 cited by McAllister, (1992).

## Appendix 5

Chapter 5 examines British New Labour's 'People's Panel in detail – the first time a national government has ever used a citizens' panel. The chapter discusses the main uses of the panel. Table 32 outlines all the main uses of the Panel, with some explanatory comments:

**Table 32: Use of the People's Panel (1998-2002)**

<b>Use of the People's Panel – 1998 to 2002</b>			
<b>Wave/Theme</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Comment</b>	<b>Sample/Method</b>
<b>First wave</b> research	June-Sept 1998	Results from the first wave were published – public attitudes to public services. This was the benchmark survey	5,064 (Face-to-face, at home).
<b>Second wave</b> research	Aug-Nov 1998	Attitudes to public services with focus on transport, local government and complaints handling	3,003 (Interviews, by telephone)
'Modernising Government'	Feb 1999	Used by the Cabinet Office to look at practical problems faced when accessing services	
Scottish comparative data	July 1999	Data used by the Scottish Executive to compare Scottish responses with the English and Welsh data from the first and second wave research	
Biosciences	July 1999	The office of Science and Technology used the Panel as part of heir consultation to examine attitudes to developments in the field of biosciences	
School Performance Tables	July 1999	The Dept. for Education and Employment commissioned six focus groups to understand parent's attitudes towards 'value added' information in performance tables	
<b>Third wave</b> research	July 1999	The third wave research examined panel members expectations of public services	1,003 (Interview, by telephone)
Listening to Women	Oct 1999	The Women's Unit commissioned 24 focus groups to supplement its wider consultation with women	
Access Pages	Oct 1999	The Cabinet Office used the panel to prepare a new directory of the main government help-lines	
Older People	Jan 2000	MORI and the Cabinet Office used data from the first three waves to examines the views of older people	

Wave/Theme	Date	Comment	Sample/Method
Change of address portal	Apr 2000	Panel members were invited to workshops on proposals for informing government about change of addresses on-line	
<b>Fourth wave research</b>	Apr 2000	The Cabinet Office used to Panel to identify which services the public were keen to access out of usual office hours	1,034 (Face-to-face, at home)
Ethnic minorities and services	June 2000	Research was commissioned to look at responses from ethnic minority members of the panel, and benchmark attitudes against the wider population.	
People in Deprived Areas	Sept 2000	Re-analysis from the first wave data of response from people living in deprived areas	
<b>Fifth wave research</b>	Sept 2000	This wave focussed on public satisfaction with public services, including complaint handling, and comparisons between the public and private sectors.	1,086 (Face-to-face, at home)
Supplementary research on various issues	Feb 2001	Throughout 2000 various agencies including The office for Public Appointments, Commission for Integrated Transport, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food used focus groups from the panel to supplement discrete projects of research in their fields	Panel members were invited to join focus groups
Human Genetics Commission (HGC)	Mar 2001	The HGC used the panel to investigate public attitudes towards human genetic research	1,038 (Interviews)
<b>6<sup>th</sup> Wave Research</b>	Mar-May 2002	Final benchmarking research	1,044 (Face-to-face, at home)

*Adapted from: Cabinet Office 1998, 1999a-c, 2000a-b, 2001, 2002.*

## Appendix 6

Chapter 6 examines British New Labour's 'People's Panel. As the chapter makes clear, the main aim of the Panel was to track public satisfaction with key public services. In summary, it appears that for many of the public services polled, there was some decline in satisfaction levels from members of the People's Panel. The following tables (33 and 34) are the more detailed analysis of responses undertaken by MORI in their comparative analysis:

**Table 33: The People's Panel - Satisfaction with Public Services**

<b>Q How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the quality of....?</b>				
	<b>1998 Wave 1 Net satisfied</b>	<b>2000 Wave 5 Net satisfied</b>	<b>2002 Wave 6 Net satisfied</b>	<b>Change W1 to W6</b>
<i>Base: All/service users</i>	±%	±%	±%	
Your GP	+85	+87	+85	0
Local Primary Schools	+83	+83	+85	+2
Libraries	+84	+85	+82	-2
Refuse/ Waste Collection Services* (a)	+79	+80	+81	+2
Museums and Art Galleries	-	+71	+79	+8 (w5)
Local Adult Education*	+73	+80	+77	+4
Passport Agency	-	+63	+76	+13 (w5)
Local Nursery Schools/Classes	+78	+75	+73	-5
Parks and Open Spaces*	+69	+71	+71	+2
Local Secondary Schools	+74	+71	+65	-9
Local Sports/Leisure Facilities*	+72	+64	+64	0 (w5)
Recycling Facilities	+67	+71	+62	-5
NHS Hospitals	+69	+71	+62	-7
Benefits Agency/Department of Social Security (DSS)*	+52	+57	+58	+6
Street lighting (a)	+64	+63	+54	-10
Employment Service	-	+48	+53	+5
Inland Revenue	+53	+48	+48	-5
Ambulance Services (a)	-	+57	+47	-10 (w5)
Local Bus Service	+38	+44	+43	+5
Fire Service (a)	-	+58	+41	-17 (w5)
Police (a)	+63	+49	+38	-25
Street cleaning (a)	+39	+34	+34	-5
Your local Council (a)	+34	+27	+25	-9
Council Housing Service*	+52	+30	+22	-8 (w5)
Youth Clubs and Other Facilities for Young People*	+41	+32	+21	-20
Train Companies	+32	+36	+17	-15
Pavement maintenance	-	-3	*	+3 (w5)
Road maintenance and repairs	-	-7	-5	+2 (w5)

\*NB Different wording used in Wave 1 and Waves 5 and 6. See MORI (2002) for detail. Source: MORI 2002, p. 4.

**Table 34: The People's Panel – Access to Information**

<b>Q</b> <i>How well informed, if at all, does ..... keep you about the services it provides?</i>	<b>Wave 1 Informed</b>	<b>Wave 5 Informed</b>	<b>Wave 6 Informed</b>	<b>Change to Wave 6</b>
<i>Base: All/service users</i>	%	%	%	±
Local Primary Schools	89	87	70	-19
Your GP	66	-	68	+2
Local Adult Education*	79	77	65	-14
Local Secondary Schools	83	87	65	-18
Refuse/ Waste Collection Services* (a)	64	62	63	-1
Local Nursery Schools/ Classes	77	74	59	-18
NHS Hospitals	54	-	52	-2
Local Sports/ Leisure Facilities*	61	65	52	-9
Libraries	63	64	51	-12
Recycling Facilities	51	56	50	-1
Local Bus Service	49	51	50	+1
Benefits Agency/DSS	-	54	49	-5(w5)
Museums and Art Galleries	-	44	46	+2(w5)
Your local Council (a)	50	51	45	-5
Inland Revenue	55	54	44	-11
Employment Service	-	47	44	-3(w5)
Passport Agency	-	39	43	+4(w5)
Council Housing Service*	63	53	42	-21
Train Companies	46	41	38	-8
Parks and Open Spaces*	32	36	37	+5
Youth Clubs/Young People's Facilities*	50	46	37	-13
Police (a)	33	32	31	-2
Ambulance Services (a)	-	24	25	+1(w5)
Fire Service (a)	-	27	23	-4(w5)

\*NB Different wording used in Wave 1 and Waves 5 and 6. See MORI (2002) for detail.

Source: MORI 2002, p.6.

## Appendix 7

Chapter 6 examines British New Labour's 'Big Conversation' initiative in detail. To launch the consultation, New Labour produced a prospectus with a wide range of questions to stimulate debate and discussion. This appendix lists all the main questions asked (for example, 'How do we do more to reconnect politics and people?'—reflecting their interest in democratic renewal), and also all the sub-questions asked in the democracy and citizenship chapter of the prospectus. These questions provide an interesting insight into what New Labour considered to be the main priorities for democratic renewal, and the issues and agendas that they were more likely to respond to.

### **Questions from a Future Fair for All – Prospectus for the Big Conversation (Labour Party 2003)**

#### **Main questions:**

- How do we build on economic stability?
- How do we do more to tackle poverty and inequality?
- How do we lead healthier lives?
- How do we make our communities safer?
- How do we give every child an excellent education?
- How do we balance work and family life?
- How do we ensure security and well-being in older age?
- How do we provide a modern transport network?
- How do we create a fair asylum and immigration system that benefits Britain?
- How do we safeguard our environment for future generations?
- How do we do more to connect politics and people?
- How do we make Britain stronger in Europe?
- How do we develop our concept of international community?

#### **Questions from 'How do we do more to connect politics and people?' section:**

What lessons can we learn from the experience of devolution in Scotland and Wales as we extend the option of devolution to the regions in England?

Can we extend the public right of access to government information as Whitehall becomes more accustomed to working with the Freedom of Information Act?

Is there greater scope for greater flexibility on access to information than the current 10 year rule?

What should be the role and functions of a second chamber – today's House of Lords? How should it be constituted? What would be the best way to provide a route into politics for those people and groups who might not be otherwise represented?

Should consideration be given to making more public funds available to political parties to improve links with the public. If so what duties should be placed on parties to ensure money is spent in ways that will contribute to wider democratic engagement?

How can we ensure that the relationship between politics and the media supports a vibrant, healthy democracy, in which people are informed and engaged in public debate?

How should we approach the BBC royal charter review?

Should we experiment with all-postal ballots in general-election constituencies?

Should we lower the voting age to 16? What other measures such as weekend elections or text voting could help engagement?

Many local authorities have successfully experimented with new forms of engagements ranging from citizen forums and youth parliaments to deliberative panels to consider controversial issues. Should we be bringing more of these ideas into central government?

Currently, local government raises locally only a quarter of what it spends, much less than in other countries. In this the right balance between national and local revenue sources, and should we consider new ways of financing local government?

What more can be done to encourage more citizen engagement in the local political process?

What else can be done to improve the quality and responsiveness of local political leadership?

In those places where Mayors have worked well, what factors played a part in it and could these lessons be applied elsewhere?

Should we give neighbourhoods more direct power over public spaces and community safety – with a power to raise small sums of money from local residents if there is consent?

How can we provide better support and encouragement for voluntary activity, including financial incentives for the young and those groups in society currently least likely to volunteer?

How can we best work with faith groups and community organisations so that we can build communities that are both open and diverse but also secure and cohesive?

How could we do more to expand the role of the community and voluntary sector in the provision of public services – for example through Community Interest Companies?

What more should we be doing to shift resources from bureaucracy into frontline services? Should Whitehall departments be cut back – as power is devolved? Is it right that all Ministers are based in Whitehall? Should major functions be relocated out of London into the regions?

What balance should be struck between developing the skills of civil servants to improve delivery of public services and bringing people in from outside?

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