The Australian Settlement at the Polls: Aspects of Electoral Behaviour in New South Wales 1928-32

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1. Introduction:

This paper employs quantitative techniques to explain aspects of the history of Australian public policy and electoral behaviour during the Great Depression. I first attempted such an analysis of electoral behaviour in New South Wales for 1930-32 in my 2002 Monash PhD thesis: How Labor Governed: Social Structures and the Formation of Public Policy During the New South Wales Lang Government of November 1930 to May 1932. This paper reports some preliminary results from a comprehensive reworking of the data set employed in the thesis and an extension of the analysis to 1928-29. My interest is not merely historical but also attempts to provide a historical context for two interrelated tropes of recent Australian political commentary: the demise of the 'Australian settlement' and the perceived erosion of Labor's 'traditional base'.

In recent years concepts of an Australian settlement have occupied a leading position in various formulations of the history of Australian public policy. Descriptions of the recent history of Australian public policy have been cast in terms of the dismantling of a settlement allegedly based around principles of tariff protection and industrial arbitration. This settlement is taken to have coalesced before the First World War.

At the federal level Australian politics since 1996 has been characterised by an electoral ascendancy of the conservative parties and the high profile of issues around ethnic identity, this has been combined with a stronger Labor performance on the state level, conventionally this has been attributed to the higher profile of issues around government services at the state level as opposed to non-economic or 'wedge' issues at the federal level. Particularly since 2001 Labor's position on electoral dominance on the left has been challenged by the rise of the Greens.
2. The Australian settlement under challenge: 1928-32

In some historical uninformed judgments these political patterns constitute a historically unprecedented set of circumstances. This is not the case. In fact there are clear historical parallels.

No sooner had the class alignment of Australian politics emerged in 1910-14 then it was subject to major challenge. At the 1917 federal election Labor was heavily defeated, and some mining areas showed extraordinary swings against the party, whilst many rural areas swung towards Labor. Issues around imperial loyalty, and religious identity had a high profile in interwar Australian politics, particularly in the 1920s. They seemed to disadvantage Labor, which won only one federal election in 1929. However at the state level the party rapidly recovered from the conscription split, and was the dominant party in state politics in the 1920s.

In 1928 the Bruce-Page Nationalist government was comfortably re-elected. In 1929 the government made a dramatic break with past policy when it proposed the abolition of federal industrial arbitration. This was the most direct challenge to the Australian settlement before the economic liberal reforms of the 1980s. The result was a split in the Nationalist party and its crushing defeat at the 1929 federal election. Labor was swept to power on a platform of maintaining the status quo. In opposition the federal conservatives rapidly moved back to the political centre and rediscovered an enthusiasm for federal arbitration that anticipated the enthusiasm of their political successors for Medicare. In December 1931, now rebranded as the United Australia Party, the federal conservatives swept to a landslide victory. Voters had rallied to defend the Australian settlement.

The 1929 reform proposals of the Bruce-Page government challenged the Australian settlement from the right but this period also saw a major challenge from the left. By 1930 the only state branch of the ALP controlled by the left was in NSW. In October 1930 Jack Lang led Labor to a landslide victory in
NSW. Up until its dismissal in May 1932 the Lang government charted a course of erratic but genuine radicalism. In 1931 the NSW branch broke from the federal ALP in support of its program of currency inflation, debt repudiation and other radical measures. These policies encouraged the rapid growth of a paramilitary right that challenged the democratic underpinnings of Australian politics.

From March 1931 there were two Labor parties in NSW: the state branch or 'Lang Labor' which controlled the state government and had the allegiance of nearly all unions and most party members and 'Federal Labor' with the support of the Australian Workers Union and most federal Labor MPs. At the federal elections of 1931 and 1934 and the state elections of 1932 and 1935 the two parties competed with each other in NSW. Not until the rise of the Greens from 2001 would such a significant force to the left of official Labor emerge in Australia.

In April 1932 the Lang government was dismissed, and at the May 1932 election the Lang party was crushingly defeated with a 15% swing from the 1930 ALP vote. Lang's defeat ended this period of extraordinary electoral and public policy upheaval. Labor's record in government, particularly in NSW, drove the conservative parties to the centre: to oppose the principles of arbitration and protection was to risk a Labor victory.
Table 1: NSW Elections 1928-32

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>November 1928 Commonwealth House of Representatives Election</th>
<th>October 1929 Commonwealth House of Representatives Election</th>
<th>October 1930 State Election</th>
<th>December 1931 Commonwealth Senate Election</th>
<th>June 1932 State Election</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labor</td>
<td>52.1%</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Labor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State (Lang) Labor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Party</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalist &amp; United Australia Party/ Country Party Coalition</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
<td>52.8%</td>
<td>49.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Interpreting Australian electoral history:

The electorate rejected the radical policy initiatives of Bruce and Lang. If we are to understand the longevity of the Australian settlement we have to consider electoral behaviour: who voted against Bruce in 1929 and against Lang in 1931-32.
Today we use survey research to consider these questions. However public opinion surveys did not commence until the late 1940s. We have to resort to comparison of the voting behaviour of areas with their social composition. This paper is an exercise in quantitative electoral history. I undertake a series of linear regressions of areal electoral data in 1928-32 against social data for these areas derived from the 1933 census and electoral data for individual subdivisions from election to election. Given the quality of the data, the basic analytical tools employed and the problem of the ecological fallacy I do not attempt to estimate the voting behaviour of particular groups. My objective is to identify some possible trends. I also draw on the large literature on electoral behaviour in Weimar Germany.

With a few exceptions Australian political historians compared to the US have made very little use of these techniques. On major reason is the fact that electoral and census data in Australia are reported by different areas: subdivisions and/or polling places for electoral data and local government areas (LGAs) for census data. It is an arduous exercise to match the data to the same areas.4

4. The raw data:

The May 1933 census reported a wide range of social data for the 319 LGAs in NSW and other for the large part of western NSW at that time without local government.

I have sought to adjust the census data to provide an approximation to the voting age population, for at this period a large number of workers were below the voting age. I have adjusted the census data for each LGA by the state-wide age ratios.

The same electoral subdivisions (348 in total) were in existence at the 1928 and 1929 federal elections. Boundaries of the 28 federal electorates were unchanged in 1931 but subdivision boundaries were altered to provide for 417 subdivisions. At the state elections of 1930 and 1932 the 90 state electorates
were constructed from the same subdivisions. For the state elections but not the federal data is available by polling place. For reasons of time and lack of information on the location of many polling places I have not used these figures and worked with subdivisions. Absent, section and postal voters are not available by subdivision. For this paper I have ignored these.

Labor and the Coalition contested most but not all electorates in this period. In 1928 I have used the Senate vote where the electorate was uncontested by one or both of the major parties. In 1929 there was no Senate contest and I have omitted the uncontested electorates. In 1930 two sitting Independents were unopposed by the Coalition and I have counted their vote as a Coalition vote. In 1930 and 1932 some mining seats were only contested by Labor and the Communists. This inflated the Labor vote but as they were the same electorates in 1930 and 1932 I have included these electorates in the analysis of the Labor vote. In 1931 the Lang and Federal Labor parties did not contest all electorates. The Federal Labor House of Representatives vote was also inflated by personal loyalty to sitting MPs and a tendency of conservatives in safe Labor seats to vote tactically for Federal Labor against Lang candidates. In the analysis of 1931 I have used the Senate vote. I have included in the Federal Labor vote the vote for former Labor premier Jack Dooley who contested the Senate as an Independent on an anti-Lang platform and polled 1.4%. The informal vote was high for the Senate and this affected the Labor vote, particularly for the Lang party, but Lang group had first place on the ballot and this countered this effect. All references to the Nationalists or the United Australia Party (UAP) include the Country Party.

I was able to match the census and electoral data to 120 units in 1928-29 and 121 in 1930-32. The only difference between the two sets is that in 1930-32 I was able to split the subdivisions in the federal electorate of Warringah into two units. The number of female voters in each subdivision is reported in the electoral data.

There is a five-year gap between the 1928 election and the 1933 census. However apart from the unemployment level, and possibly the numbers of
self-employed, some of whom were probably disguised unemployed, it is reasonable to assume that the social composition of the units changed little in 1928-33.5

5. Australian electoral history:

Apart from the technical difficulties, and a general distaste for qualification, I suspect the major reason why Australian political historians have not undertaken quantitative analyses of Australian electoral behaviour was a belief that that Australian politics was simple: it was about 'class'. This meant manual wage earners. In the early versions of this model the question of who voted against Labor was ill defined. It was John Rickard who highlighted the problem that the votes of capitalists alone or even the self-employed as well, could not account for the non-Labor parties' levels of electoral support. Later versions identified a middle-class of white-collar employees and the petty bourgeoisie as the support base of non-Labor. The consensus view might be summarised as being that manual workers voted Labor because that was (manual) workers did.6 Sometimes the self-employed and farmers were identified as potential Labor allies. Their presence in the Labor camp was either welcomed or condemned; this depended on the political position of the author.7 Conservative political allegiance on the part of women or white-collar workers was identified as a reflection of their absence from the real world of material production and wage labour.8 The fact that simple arithmetic demonstrated that there were insufficient white-collar workers to account for the non-Labor electoral dominance between the wars and the fact that survey evidence from the 1940s consistently showed that Catholics were more likely to vote Labor and that women of all occupations were less likely to vote Labor was ignored.

The conventional understanding of Australian politics has been challenged. The impetus has been the crisis of working-class politics and the revaluation by feminist historians of the political agency of women and their critique of Labor masculinism. Recent scholarship has stressed that Australian conservatives had a positive appeal.9
However this scholarship has remained qualitative and long-term it sheds little light on short-run political shifts such as those in 1928-32. Class is not just an occupation or a cultural meaning but an economic process. In Marxian terms this can be understood as the extraction of surplus labour.\textsuperscript{10} In NSW this extraction took place under widely variant conditions: households were women undertook domestic labour for their spouses, domestic service where workers were employed by households but did not produce commodities for sale; state capitalist enterprises, where workers were employed for a wage and produced market commodities, but where a large share (in the 1930s often all) of profits was paid to the holders of government debt, and private capitalist enterprises. These different processes affected workers' calculation of their interests.

6. Aggregate electoral shifts:

This is a period of major electoral shifts. However the distribution of the vote remains remarkably similar from election to election. This suggests that voting shifts are largely uniform across most social groups. It is usually the case national swings towards or against a particular party and swings across particular groups are largely unrelated.\textsuperscript{11} The exception is where the very foundation of the party system is challenged by the introduction of a new crosscutting cleavage. One notable example was the 1917 federal election, but in 1928-32 voters moved in the same direction towards and away from (Lang) Labor. There were systemic divergences in how far they moved but these were modest. The partial exception was Federal Labor. Simple scatter diagrams can illustrate this.

In 1928-29 despite the split in the Nationalists and Labor's overt appeal to middle-class voters the swing to Labor was largely uniform with only a slight tendency to be higher in middle-class electorates.
Chart 1:

Regression Plot

$Y = -4.1041 + 0.929890X$

$R^2 = 82.9\%$

From 1930 to 1932 despite the split in the ALP, a 15% swing against the party and the polarising personality of Lang the distribution of the ALP vote in 1930 and the Lang Labor vote in 1932 was remarkably similar:
It is a similar pattern with the Coalition vote. The major exception to this was Federal Labor. Its 1931 vote was only weakly related to the 1930 ALP vote. It was not a 'chip off the Labor block'. In some aspects Federal Labor, as W. K. Hancock, argued at the time, was a centre party. A distinguishing feature of such a party is that it drew support fairly evenly across the electorate, it was the Coalition who were the 'middle-class' party.
These scatter diagrams only reflect changes in percentage votes in each unit. Some further light on voter flows from election to election comes from a regression of absolute votes per subdivision from election to election:
Table 2: Vote flows 1930-31 (Independents and Australian Party separate)\textsuperscript{13}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1930 Labor + Communist</th>
<th>1930 Australian Party + Independents</th>
<th>1930 Coalition</th>
<th>1930 Absent, Non-voters &amp; Informal</th>
<th>1930-31 New Voters</th>
<th>Numbe of cases</th>
<th>R-Sq(adj)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1931 Lang Labor + Communist</td>
<td>0.59 (51.62)</td>
<td>0.15 (4.25)</td>
<td>-0.13 (2.74)</td>
<td>0.16 (2.74)</td>
<td>0.38 (9.62)</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>97.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931 Federal Labor</td>
<td>0.22 (17.8)</td>
<td>0.11 (2.89)</td>
<td>0 (0.16)</td>
<td>-0.01 (-0.24)</td>
<td>0.13 (3.21)</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>81.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931 Coalition + Independents</td>
<td>0.02 (0.8)</td>
<td>0.18 (2.67)</td>
<td>1.08 (29.95)</td>
<td>0.25 (2.29)</td>
<td>0.1 (1.4)</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>97.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Vote flows 1930-31 (Coalition, Independents and Australian Party combined)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1930 Labor + Communist</th>
<th>1930 Coalition + Australian Party + Independents</th>
<th>1930 Absent, Non-voters &amp; Informal</th>
<th>1930-31 New Voters</th>
<th>Number of cases &amp; R-Sq(adj)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1931 Lang Labor + Communist</td>
<td>0.56 (38.42)</td>
<td>-0.08 (-4.27)</td>
<td>0.15 (2.03)</td>
<td>0.29 (7.06)</td>
<td>413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931 Federal Labor</td>
<td>0.21 (18.78)</td>
<td>0.05 (3.65)</td>
<td>-0.09 (-1.52)</td>
<td>0.07 (2.36)</td>
<td>413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931 Coalition + Independents</td>
<td>0.08 (7.19)</td>
<td>0.91 (62.58)</td>
<td>0.23 (3.81)</td>
<td>0.33 (10.08)</td>
<td>413</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Vote flows 1931-32

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1931 Lang Labor + Communist</th>
<th>1931 Federal Labor</th>
<th>1931 Coalition + Independents</th>
<th>1931 Absent, Non-voters &amp; Informal</th>
<th>1931-32 New Voters</th>
<th>Num of cases &amp; R-Sq(adj)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1932 Lang Labor + Communist</td>
<td>0.93 (26.56)</td>
<td>0.70 (11.42)</td>
<td>-0.08 (-2.75)</td>
<td>0.33 (3.84)</td>
<td>0.37 (8.15)</td>
<td>402 93.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932 Federal Labor</td>
<td>0.15 (3.30)</td>
<td>0.33 (3.75)</td>
<td>-0.03 (-0.61)</td>
<td>-0.08 (-0.73)</td>
<td>0.13 (0.73)</td>
<td>190 33.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932 Coalition + Independents</td>
<td>-0.09 (-2.29)</td>
<td>-0.05 (-0.82)</td>
<td>1.01 (35.88)</td>
<td>0.41 (4.59)</td>
<td>0.41 (4.59)</td>
<td>384 95.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This analysis does show a stronger relationship between 1931 Federal Labor support and the 1930 ALP vote than the scatter diagram suggests, but it remains weaker than for Lang Labor or the Coalition. It suggests that Federal Labor may have attracted some support from 1930 non-Labor voters.

7. Bivariate analysis:

This analysis has shed some light on how voters changed their electoral behaviour from election to election but we now need to consider who these voters were. I will now consider levels of support against economic and social variables. I distinguish between two regions: 1) urban-mining region comprising Sydney, Newcastle, Wollongong, the northern and western coalfields and Broken Hill and 2) rural comprising the rest of the state.
(a) the variables:

The variables used are:

1. Manual: all breadwinners (that is Employers, Own Account, Wage & Salary earners, including the unemployed) in the census categories of Industrial, Mining, Transport & Communications.


3. Domestic: all breadwinners in the Domestic category. This includes employers and the self-employed as well as workers but there is no way of identifying workers alone at an electorate level. Domestic servants (most of this category) have been neglected by historians, but they are obviously manual workers. Most are not employed by capitalist employers.

4. Self-employed: all reporting as employed on their 'Own Account'.

5. Agriculture: all breadwinners in Agriculture.

6. Catholic: all respondents claiming to be 'Roman Catholic' or 'Catholic'.

7. Women: female voters from electoral data.

It is reasonable to assume to take categories 1 and 2 as close to the numbers of manual and non-manual workers, but for Agriculture this is not the case.

The first observation to note is that class position in the pure Marxist sense of being a wage and salary earner regardless of occupation does have a relation to party allegiance. Labor support tends to be highest in areas where high portions of the population are wage and salary earners.
Chart 4:

Regression Plot

\[ Y = -13.0511 + 1.57868X \]
\[ R^2 = 40.1\% \]

Chart 5:

Regression Plot

\[ Y = 107.232 - 1.50285X \]
\[ R^2 = 42.5\% \]
In 1932 the correlation between the Labor vote and participation in wage labour appears weaker:

Chart 6:

Regression Plot

\[ Y = -17.6522 + 1.35931X \]

\[ R^2 = 36.4\% \]

(b) urban-mining:

However it is clear that a stratificationist typology demonstrates a clearer pattern:
Chart 7:

Regression Plot

\[ Y = 91.2433 - 1.7933X \]

\[ R^2 = 78.8\% \]

For Labor the pattern is reversed:

Chart 8:

Regression Plot

\[ Y = 4.04362 + 2.12586X \]

\[ R^2 = 81.2\% \]
For Federal Labor again we see evidence of a weaker social base:

Chart 9:

Regression Plot

\[Y = -9.85 \times 10^{-1} + 0.529239X\]

\[R^2 = 39.5\%\]
It is useful to look at these patterns of polarisation from election to election:

Chart 10:

Regression Plot

\[ Y = -10.4969 + 2.03728X \]

\[ R^2 = 80.3\% \]

Chart 11:

Regression Plot

\[ Y = 3.53832 + 1.93237X \]

\[ R^2 = 77.8\% \]

Labor's 1929 campaign was very heavily targeted at white-collar voters. Election leaflets declared that Labor stood for security not bolshevism,
defence of Australia's happy families, and that it all wanted was for the worker to have a chance to be a decent citizen. Nevertheless the swings to Labor were almost as high in working-class areas as in the more middle-class suburbs.

Another valuable comparison is that between 1930 and 1932. The later election was conducted in conditions of unprecedented polarisation. Lang attracted adulation or hatred, but as David Kemp has argued in the context of 1975 ideological polarisation does not imply social polarisation. The swing against Lang was higher in working-class areas. Coalition campaigning explicitly appealed to manual workers (illustration on p.23)

Chart 12:

Regression Plot

\[ Y = -11.2090 + 1.79640X \]

\[ R^2 = 73.8\% \]

Unemployment is highly correlated with the manual working class population and hence it is of little use in a multivariate regression, but in 1931 it is much more associated with Lang Labor.
"Workers, we've been fooled long enough!... Let's have a Government that's HONEST"

Every day Lang remained in power more Workers lost their jobs, more went on the dole, while hangers on were given Government posts at enormous salaries. To-day New South Wales has the highest percentage of unemployed in Australia. Lang could do nothing, yet, in one week, the Stevens Government obtained £600,000 to provide jobs at once, and with another £600,000 to follow. This will make work for 30,000 men. That's the only kind of Government for the workers.

_Honest Government is the Only Government that Pays!_

---

Work and Vote for

UNITED AUSTRALIA

(Truth, 22 May 1932).
Chart 13:

Regression Plot

\[ Y = -4.07520 + 2.77649X \]

\[ R^2 = 72.0\% \]

Chart 14:

Regression Plot

\[ Y = 6.63054 + 0.627276X \]

\[ R^2 = 16.5\% \]
(b) rural:

The rural pattern is quite different. Party votes seem to have a weaker relation to social cleavages:

Chart 15:

Regression Plot

\[ Y = 27.7562 + 1.00906X \]

\[ R^2 = 10.6\% \]
Nor is there a clear pattern apparent for participation in agriculture:

Chart 16:

Regression Plot

Y = 48.1360 + 0.150596X
R-Sq = 0.9%

The one pattern that does emerge as significant in rural area is Labor's stronger support in Catholic areas. Federal Labor seems to have done better with this core Labor group than it did with urban workers. In 1932 when Lang Labor lost all its rural seats the swing was less in Catholic areas. As the multivariate analysis will suggest in 1932 the electoral polarisation reflected more than class.
Chart 17:

Regression Plot

\[ Y = 7.93926 + 0.468411X \]
\[ R^2 = 14.6\% \]

Chart 18:

Regression Plot

\[ Y = 5.71776 + 0.370247X \]
\[ R^2 = 12.2\% \]
Chart 19:

Regression Plot

\[ Y = 7.59761 + 0.889088X \]

\[ R^2 = 37.0\% \]
8. Multivariate analysis:

In developing a multivariate analysis I have distinguished between urban-mining and rural areas. The results are:
Table 5: Determinants of NSW Electoral Behaviour 1928-32. Urban-Mining:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>62.68</td>
<td>-10.6</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>61.02</td>
<td>6.63</td>
<td>98.8</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>44.52</td>
<td>17.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>-0.34</td>
<td>-0.26</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.58</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>-0.53</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.175</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>-2.65</td>
<td>-0.45</td>
<td>-1.77</td>
<td>-0.73</td>
<td>-1.6</td>
<td>-1.89</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>1.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manual</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>-1.03</td>
<td>-1.32</td>
<td>-0.77</td>
<td>-1.14</td>
<td>-1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Manual</td>
<td>-1.91</td>
<td>-0.64</td>
<td>-1.45</td>
<td>-0.64</td>
<td>-0.94</td>
<td>-1.43</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestics</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>-1.42</td>
<td>-0.78</td>
<td>-0.45</td>
<td>-1.58</td>
<td>-2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>0.137</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholics</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>-0.46</td>
<td>-0.61</td>
<td>-0.46</td>
<td>-0.44</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-Sq(adj) %</td>
<td>90.1</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>86.2</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>86.9</td>
<td>88.5</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>83.2</td>
<td>89.8</td>
<td>76.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significant at 5% in bold.
Table 5: Determinants of NSW Electoral Behaviour 1928-32. Rural:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>-10.88</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>-10.4</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>-7.7</td>
<td>92.1</td>
<td>92.1</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>108.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>-0.6</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>-0.6</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>-0.67</td>
<td>-0.44</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agric</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>-0.32</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>-0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manual</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>-1.29</td>
<td>-1.08</td>
<td>-0.62</td>
<td>-0.81</td>
<td>-1.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Manual</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>-0.69</td>
<td>-0.41</td>
<td>-0.24</td>
<td>-0.47</td>
<td>-1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>-1.05</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>-1.4</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>-0.41</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>-0.7</td>
<td>-0.56</td>
<td>-0.68</td>
<td>-0.66</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significant at 5% in bold.
I had initially assumed that there would be a strong correlation between agriculture breadwinners and self-employed and for this reason included agriculture in the rural regression and replaced it by self-employed in the urban-mining regression. Further investigation revealed that this was not the case. A rural regression including Self-employed found this consistently strongly negatively correlated with the Labor vote.

(a) overall patterns:

In urban areas it is clear that party support was strongly based in social factors. The exception was Federal Labor, which as a centre party, had a weaker social base. In rural areas the social basis of party support is weaker. The exceptionally low R-Sq for 1931 for the Labor parties probably reflects the fact that the impact of sitting rural Labor MPs (all of whom supported Federal Labor) in bolstering the Federal Labor vote in their electorates has not been taken into account. The fluctuations in the constant term can be taken as representing the overall swing towards or against a political party. It is important to remember that the changes in the coefficients must be interpreted against this background. Lang Labor's vote in 1932 was probably more Catholic than the 1930 Labor vote, but there is little doubt that a higher percentage of Catholics voted for Labor in 1930 than in 1932.

(b) social variables:

(i) Women:

Recent political history has highlighted the congruence between aspects of liberal-conservative ideology and women's lived experience. However a multivariate analysis such as this is based on the assumption that all women voted the same. This is not a meaningful assumption. Little significance can be attached to these coefficients. Not surprisingly the coefficients for female voters, although generally negative for the ALP and positive for the Coalition, have high standard errors. In 1929 however the coefficient for the ALP is
positive, although not statistically significant. Middle-class subdivisions tended to have higher portions of female voters. Perhaps Labor's defence of the social-liberal Australian settlement may have struck a chord with some female voters.

(ii) Self-employed and agriculture:

(1) urban self-employed

If Labor was a populist party of the petty-bourgeoisie there is no evidence here. The pattern seems similar to Germany where the self-employed recorded very low levels of support for the left parties at this time. Self-employment correlates negatively with the Labor vote and positively with the Coalition. The election where this pattern is least apparent is 1929. This may be evidence of a response to the increasing financial pressure on the self-employed that led some to be sympathetic towards seeking the protection of the arbitration system.

In 1933 the self-employed recorded incomes well below employed wage and salary earners. This may indicate they were disguised unemployed, but whatever their 'objective' position their subjective identification as self-employed is a pointer to their probable political allegiance. Recent research has concluded that the German unemployed were particularly unlikely to vote for the Nazis.

(2) rural agriculture:

In my dissertation I argued against the thesis that Labor attracted significant support from farmers. However there is no evidence of a negative relationship between agricultural breadwinners and Labor support. The fact that self-employment correlates negatively with the Labor vote in rural areas however suggests that a Coalition vote among farmers may have been balanced by a Labor vote among agricultural workers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1930 coefficient</th>
<th>1932 coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>-1.74</td>
<td>-1.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(The coefficient for agriculture is not statistically significant).

(iii) Manual:

(1) urban-mining:

This vote is strongly correlated with the ALP and with Lang Labor in particular. The relatively stronger support for Lang Labor (which was probably higher among unemployed workers) is somewhat similar to the German pattern where the more radical of the left parties (the Communists) had a more working-class electorate than the more moderate Social Democrats. The increase in the coefficient from 1928 to 1929 (along with the increase for non-manual) is compatible with the hypothesis of a rally of employees to Labor in defence of arbitration.

In 1932 however the coefficient although positive is less than in 1930 and in 1931. The result of the multivariate analysis is similar to that suggested by the bivariate analysis (Charts 8 and 12). In 1932 employers ran a sustained campaign to encourage workers to vote against Lang in the interests of their own employment security. A sample address to employees provided by the Chamber of Manufactures began: ‘Every vote for Lang is a vote for loss of your employment’. This result suggests they had some success.
If miners are counted separately from other manual workers then a clearer pattern emerges:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1930 coefficient (ALP)</th>
<th>1932 coefficient (Lang)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Miners</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manual</td>
<td>(excluding Miners)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the fall in the coefficient for miners is due to an increased Communist vote.

(2) rural:

Manual workers are strongly correlated with the Labor vote, unlike in urban areas the coefficient increases 1930 to 1932. It may be that the disproportionate representation of state employees, particularly on the railways, among the rural working class bolstered Labor support. An examination of residuals does suggest a higher than predicted Labor vote in some railway towns. Unfortunately Transport & Communications employment is too closely correlated with other working-class employment to be included separately in a multivariate analysis.

(iv) Non-manual:

(1) urban-mining:

This is almost the obverse of the pattern for manual workers, but in 1929 Labor's performance seems to have improved. This is compatible with the hypothesis of an employees' rally to defend arbitration. From 1930 to 1932 the negative coefficient remains stable. In 1932 it was manual workers who were targeted by employers with threats of dismissal if Lang won. In 1932 working-class identities were recast in a more feminised and middle-class manner in
which workers were encouraged to put loyalty to their family and to their employer (as the source of family income) first.\textsuperscript{28}

(2) rural:

In a reversal of the urban-mining patterns non-manual workers show no correlation with the non-Labor vote. One explanation may be that large portions were state employees who were probably more likely to support Labor.

(v) Domestics:

(1) urban-mining:

Domestic employment correlates strongly with the Labor vote, although there is however a high standard error in most years. In Germany household and domestic employees do not seem to have identified with the working class and probably gave strong support to the Nazis, in Australia this does not seem the case.\textsuperscript{27} Because domestic employees were not employed by capitalist enterprises they escaped the employers fear campaign of 1932.

(2) rural:

Domestic employment correlates with the Labor vote but is not statistically significant in any year.

(vi) Catholics:

(1) urban-mining:

A clear pattern of a strong correlation with Labor is apparent for Catholics. The stability in the coefficient from 1928 to 1929 was a surprise. I had hypothesised that Billy Hughes' defection from the Nationalists might have encouraged Protestants, especially war veterans, to shift against the
Nationalists. From 1930 to 1932 although Lang lost support disproportionately among manual workers he made up relative ground among Catholics. The dismissal of a Labor premier by a British governor may have helped to shore up Labor's support among Catholics.

(2) rural:

Catholicism stands out as the only consistently significant factor here. Federal Labor, despite Scullin's staunch Catholicism and Australian nationalism, does not seem to have an edge over Lang Labor in appealing to Catholic Labor voters in 1931.

9. Conclusion:

This analysis confirms the crucial role of class (in the sense of the manual/non-manual division) and religion in structuring electoral behaviour. However these divisions were overlaid by general swings that largely reflected responses to economic factors and the federal arbitration issue in 1929. Labor's apparent disproportionate loss of manual workers' support in 1932 demonstrates that neither the manual/non-manual nor the employee/capitalist polarities are sufficient to fully explain political alignments. Clearly religion was important, but as Judith Brett has argued religion was more than a simple expression of personal belief. The Catholic/Protestant division spoke to divergent concepts of responsibility, identity and citizenship. Among some Catholic publicists Federal Labor attracted support as a potential anti-socialist Catholic centre party, but Catholic voters preferred Langism. Even at the level of 'objective' material self-interest a fuller understanding of Australian electoral history will require a closer attention to the divergent impact of labour and product markets on social identity, calculation of interests and consequent electoral choice. As I have argued elsewhere such a historical analysis will shed light on the strange death of Australian labourism.

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1 As this paper is a work in progress I should be contacted before quoting any numerical results.

The Australian Party was a centrist party formed by Billy Hughes. The apparent fall in the ALP vote from 1928 to 1929 is a result of nomination patterns.

Electoral rolls identify the occupation of enrolled voters at this time. It would however be a massive project to make use of this data.


These are based on linear regressions of absolute votes by subdivision (t-statistics are in brackets). New voters are the increase in enrolment. Independents and minor parties did not contest all electorates in 1930. The Communist vote was small and counting it separately from (Lang) Labor reduces substantially the number of cases for comparison. Federal Labor includes the anti-Lang Labor independents John Dooley in 1931 and 1932 (Hartley) and J. P. King in 1932 (Temora).

This is apparent from the 1929 ALP electoral leaflets in at Voltaire Molesworth Mitchell Library MSS 398, Box 2(2)


Launching the 2004 Coalition election campaign on 26 September 2004 John Howard referred to the growth in real wages under the Howard government (http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/s1207318.htm). It could be argued that one reason for the Coalition's electoral success in the 1920s was that, unlike in Britain and the US, the federal arbitration system largely protected workers from a fall in wages after the breaking of the postwar boom (Robinson, How Labor Governed, p. 30). The appeals of Howard and Bruce on national security have certainly struck a chord, but it is important to remember the economic backdrop.


King, 'Ordinary Economic Voting' is an example, for a more recent example: H. Kitschelt, The Transformation of European Social Democracy, Cambridge, Cambridge, 1994.


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