

# ANTIDOTE

**TRADE UNIONISM AS A VACCINE  
AGAINST FAR-RIGHT POLITICS**

**OSCAR KASPI-CRUTCHETT    VICTORIAN TRADES HALL COUNCIL    2026**





## **This report was produced by the Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC).**

The VTHC is the peak body for unions in Victoria, representing 40 unions and 500,000 workers and their families. [www.weareunion.org.au](http://www.weareunion.org.au)

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# Executive Summary

The most consequential political contest of our time is the competition between left-wing and far-right forces over the workers' vote. All over the world, the far-right is winning this competition. In Germany, France, Czechia, the United Kingdom, the United States, Sweden, the Netherlands, Belgium, Israel, Austria and Italy far-right parties have made deep inroads into working-class communities: displacing both centre-left and centre-right groups in the process.

Far-right parties exploit long-term discontents of production and service workers. This makes them capable of 'coming out of nowhere' and winning significant electoral support extremely fast. In a single electoral cycle, the far-right's vote share went from:

- Italy: 6.05% to 21.7%.
- The UK: 2.08% to 14.3% (now polling at ~31%).
- Spain: 0.2% to 15.08%.
- Norway: 12.75% to 24.57%.
- Austria: from 16% to 28.9%.

The factors that allow the far-right to accumulate rapid support like this are all in place in Australia. Everywhere, the rise of these parties follows remarkably similar patterns: they advance the same general narratives about society, they deploy the same persuasive techniques, and they target the same specific occupational groups.

We are in a position today where we understand enough about the far-right to halt its ascent. Antidote describes the processes by which the far-right wins public support and how these processes can be disrupted by organisers, citizens and policymakers.

In near-all international examples, once the far-right reaches a critical point in terms of its vote share (around 15%) - its presence becomes entrenched. Typically, this results in a breakdown of democratic norms, the violent deterioration of social cohesion, and rising inequality: setting in motion a self-perpetuating cycle which only increases their appeal. Australia is on the precipice of such a turning point, with the far right winning 12% of the Senate vote in 2025. Australia is also, however, uniquely situated to act preventively. No other advanced democracy has the essential conditions that we do for taking decisive action.

1. A commanding progressive majority in both houses of parliament,
2. A popular, recently re-elected incumbent progressive government, and
3. A progressive government which retains ties to the working class and unions.
4. Compulsory, preferential voting.

*Antidote presents both a diagnostic framework and a manual for action for Australians who recognise the threat of the far-right and are determined to prevent Australia from meeting the same fate as like-minded democracies.*

*Antidote describes the underlying logic of far-right political thinking and the specific rhetorical strategies it uses to win over workers. From this, the report identifies the political shifts that need to be undertaken in order to prevent their strategies from succeeding.*

**The far-right's path to power leads through the working class. Only the union movement can defeat them on this terrain.**

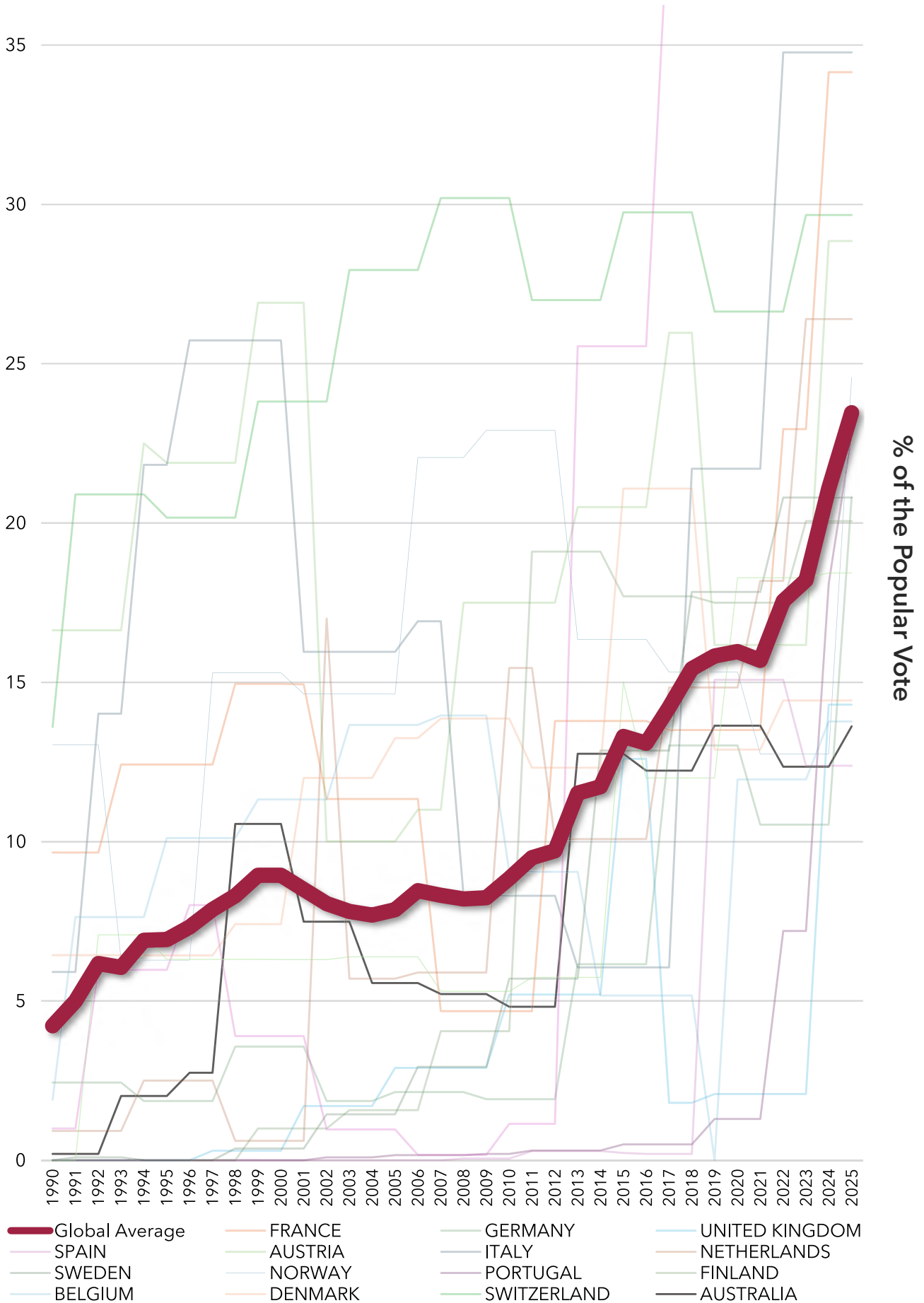
Union activity, combined with worker-focused policymaking, provides Australia's best against an emboldened far-right. Unions produce individual-level and society-level effects that directly block persuasion. Unions produce these effects in the exact voter groups that the far-right most needs to win over.

Unionism connects disadvantaged people to public life, reduces racial resentment, limits grievance-based identity politics, enhances civic trust, improves living standards, and, most crucially, instills a system of personal identity that neutralises the appeal of far-right politics. Antidote recognises the urgency of Australia's position.

**We face the same conditions that have fueled the far-right globally. What Australia does have, uniquely, is the chance to learn the lessons from abroad and stop this potential from being realised. The time for action is now.**

Figure 1: Vote Shares for Far-Right Parties (Global, 1990-2025).

## The Rise of the Far-Right in Advanced Democracies 1990-2025



# Introduction

## About this Report

This report will analyse the rise of far-right politics in Australia with a particular focus on Victoria.

The report will demonstrate how trade unionism functions as a vaccine against far-right politics both at the level of the individual and across the entire social body.

The report will draw on a range of international and local case studies, demographic patterns, electoral data, longitudinal surveys and theoretical frameworks to examine five key questions:

### **1. Context:**

What recent developments can account for the rise of far-right politics in Victoria and nationally?

### **2. Logic:**

What is the logic of far-right political thought? How does it work?

### **3. Rhetoric:**

How does the far-right convert people to its worldview?

### **4. Structural Causes:**

What long-term trends can help explain the rise of the far-right?

### **5. Antidote:**

What is the role of the union movement in combatting this crisis?

Throughout the report, three themes emerge as consistently relevant for answering all five of the above questions.

### **Voter identity and political choice**

That is, how voters think about their personal identities while making political decisions.

### **Issue salience and prioritisation:**

That is, what considerations are strongest in shaping how workers vote.

### **Class voting and occupational segmentation:**

That is, how the conditions and features of work impact voter choice and political behaviour.

# Context: The Far-Right in Australia

## The Far-Right Public Sphere

In Australia as elsewhere, the far-right is not defined by a particular set of policies, a list of demands or the interests of a certain group.

Instead, it represents a loosely connected ecosystem: an ideological stadium where organisations, personalities and media entities compete to represent their constituency against the external world, where alliances form and dissolve around particular personalities, and competing factions jostle to set the movement's terms of debate.

Far-right movements advocate a broad range of positions often in conflict with one another. The term 'far-right' has been used to describe all from the most hardline elements of the Liberal Party, to One Nation, to outright Neo-Nazis. Within this ecosystem, there is no agreed position on many questions of policy.

What the far-right has in common is a unified political language characterised by one key assumption and three resulting claims. These provide a shared basis for framing policy, even if the policies themselves diverge significantly.

## Cultural Protectionism (Key Assumption)

The core question separating the far-right from the centre-right is as follows:

**In order to survive, do you believe Australian values need to be defended and enforced through the use of state power?**

On the centre-right, it is assumed that Australian values are self-perpetuating, organic and enduring. With free markets, 'common sense,' and national sovereignty, Australian values will survive and persist.

On the far-right, by contrast, national values are framed as extremely fragile: they are perpetually under threat from both internal and external contaminants.

The far-right believes that the resourcing, regulatory and disciplinary powers of the state need to be constantly deployed to defend 'Australian values.' The role of the government is to enforce cultural order on a naturally chaotic and confused population through 'discipline and instruction.'<sup>1</sup> We can call this: **cultural protectionism**.

This fundamental belief in the need for the state to actively enforce 'national values' sets the far-right policy agenda, which at the most recent Federal Election included:

- Prohibiting immigration from countries without 'compatible values.'<sup>2</sup>
- Placing the 'primacy of Western Civilisation' at the centre of education.<sup>3</sup>
- Abolishing Welcome to Country ceremonies.<sup>4</sup>
- Enforcing the use of one national flag only.<sup>5</sup>
- Mandatory anti-abortion lessons in public schools.<sup>6</sup>
- Incentivising and rewarding heterosexual monogamous marriage.<sup>7</sup>
- Allowing 'conversion therapy' to be performed on transgender people.<sup>8</sup>
- Banning the 'shaming' of white people from the education curriculum.<sup>9</sup>
- Defending Australian Christians from 'persecution.'<sup>10</sup>

1. Abou-Chadi, Tarik, Mitteregger, Reto and Mudde, Cas. 2021. "Left Behind by the working class? Social Democracy's electoral crisis and the rise of the radical right." The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Institute, p. 7.

2. Trumpet of Patriots. 2025. "Trumpet of Patriots Key Policies 2025." 2025. Trumpet of Patriots. Available at: <https://trumpetofpatriots.org/policies>

3. Family First, "Our Policies."

4. Trumpet of Patriots, "Key Policies."

5. Trumpet of Patriots, "Key Policies."

6. Family First. "Our Policies." 2025. Family First Party Australia Ltd. Available at: <https://www.familyfirstparty.org.au/policies>

7. Family First, "Our Policies."

8. Libertarian Party. 2025. "A Libertarian Vision." The Libertarian Party. Available at: [www.libertarians.org.au/a\\_libertarian\\_vision](http://www.libertarians.org.au/a_libertarian_vision)

9. One Nation. 2025. "One Nation Policies: Our Policy on Important Issues." Pauline Hanson's One Nation.

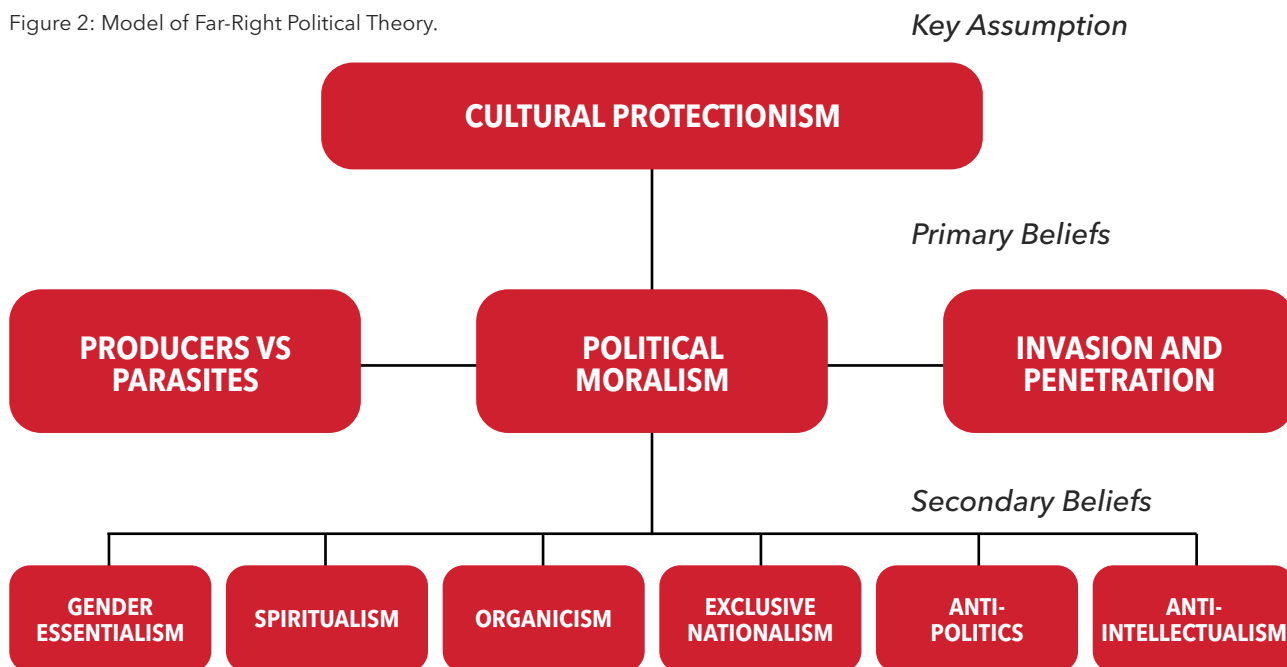
Available at: <https://www.onenation.org.au/issues>

10. Senator Ralph Babet, Trumpet of Patriots. (UAP).

## Three Key Claims

From this core belief in aggressive cultural engineering, the far-right asserts three claims about political society. These claims set the basis for their political language.

Figure 2: Model of Far-Right Political Theory.



### 1. The Producer/Parasite Struggle:

The fundamental divide in society is framed as between the hardworking, productive, moral and underappreciated ‘people,’ versus the morally inferior, parasitic, and alien elite (which allegedly dominates the media, public institutions, the civil state, the universities and the means of production).<sup>11</sup>

### 2. Political Moralism:

The conflict between ‘people’ and ‘elite’ is not driven by competition over resources but over intrinsic moral differences. The ‘people’ are morally pure, good, authentic, and traditional. The ‘elites’ are evil, unscrupulous, deceptive, wrong and alien. This is the basis for their conflict.

### 3. Invasion, Contamination and Penetration:

The elite is framed as waging its war on the people with astonishing effectiveness. The people are subject to cultural persecution. The language of penetration tends to become more intense the more extreme the right-wing radical is. Examples of this persecutory rhetoric include:

- Invasion of the body by vaccines.
- Invasion of public space, beaches and parks by ‘outsiders.’
- Invasion of the family by gender ideology and progressive bureaucrats.
- Invasion of civic institutions by immigrants, aliens and outsiders.
- Invasion of the child by indoctrination and medical intervention.
- Invasion of the media by diverse individuals and ‘woke’ ideology.
- Invasion of the national memory by truth-telling and reconciliation.
- Invasion of national sovereignty by transnational entities (UN, WHO, IMF).

11. Benvenuto, Sergio, Howarth, David and Norval, Aletta. 2012. “On Populist Reason by Ernesto Laclau,” *Iris: Philosophy and Public Discussion*, Volume 25, no. 3, p. 633.

Other secondary features of far-right ideology may include:

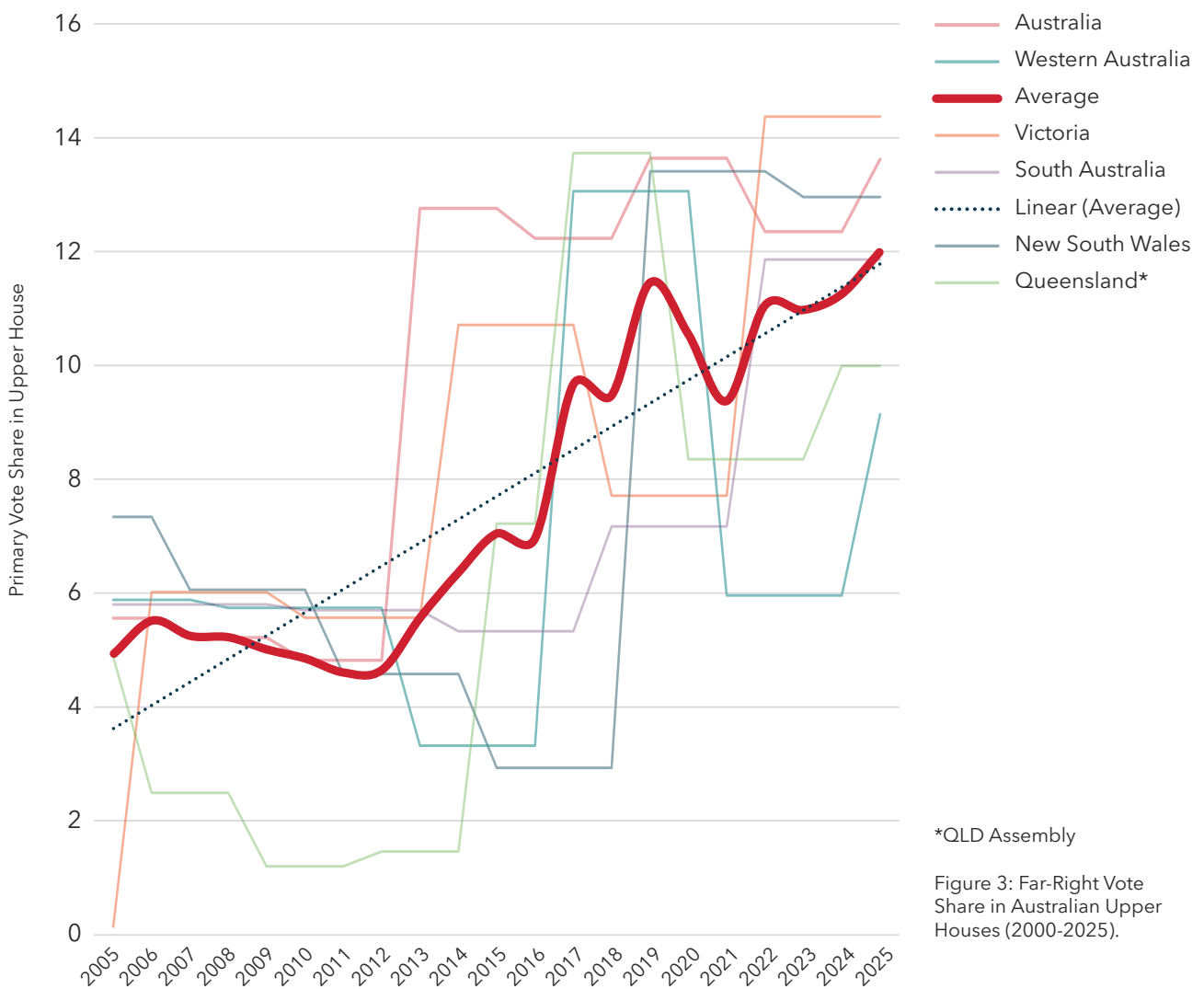
- i. Exclusive nationalism:** The rejection of cosmopolitan/multicultural imaginations of national identity in favour of a closed view of the nation as bound together by blood, white heritage, or strict adherence to cultural codes.
- ii. Gender essentialism:** A belief that the reproductive sex binary forms the basis for men and women's appropriate roles in society.
- iii. Anti-intellectualism:** A reflexive suspicion of experts and an assumption that the solution to social problems can be derived from common sense, tradition, lived experience and gut-feeling.

**iv. Anti-politics:** A self-belief of right-wing radicals that, even in power, they are never elites but anti-politicians who act as stand-in representatives for 'the common people'.

**v. Organicism:** A view that social inequalities have a natural/organic basis. White people and men, for example, may not be seen as privileged so much as intrinsically more capable than women or ethnic minorities. There are 'simplistic and 'natural' distinctions of value between groups of people.<sup>12</sup>

**vi. Political spiritualism:** Politics is treated as a 'substitute religion,' with a strong emphasis on emotional intensity, cultural identity, lifestyle-ism, devotion to the leader, martyrdom, deindividuation, and the pursuit of personal salvation.<sup>13</sup>

## National Context



\*QLD Assembly

Figure 3: Far-Right Vote Share in Australian Upper Houses (2000-2025).

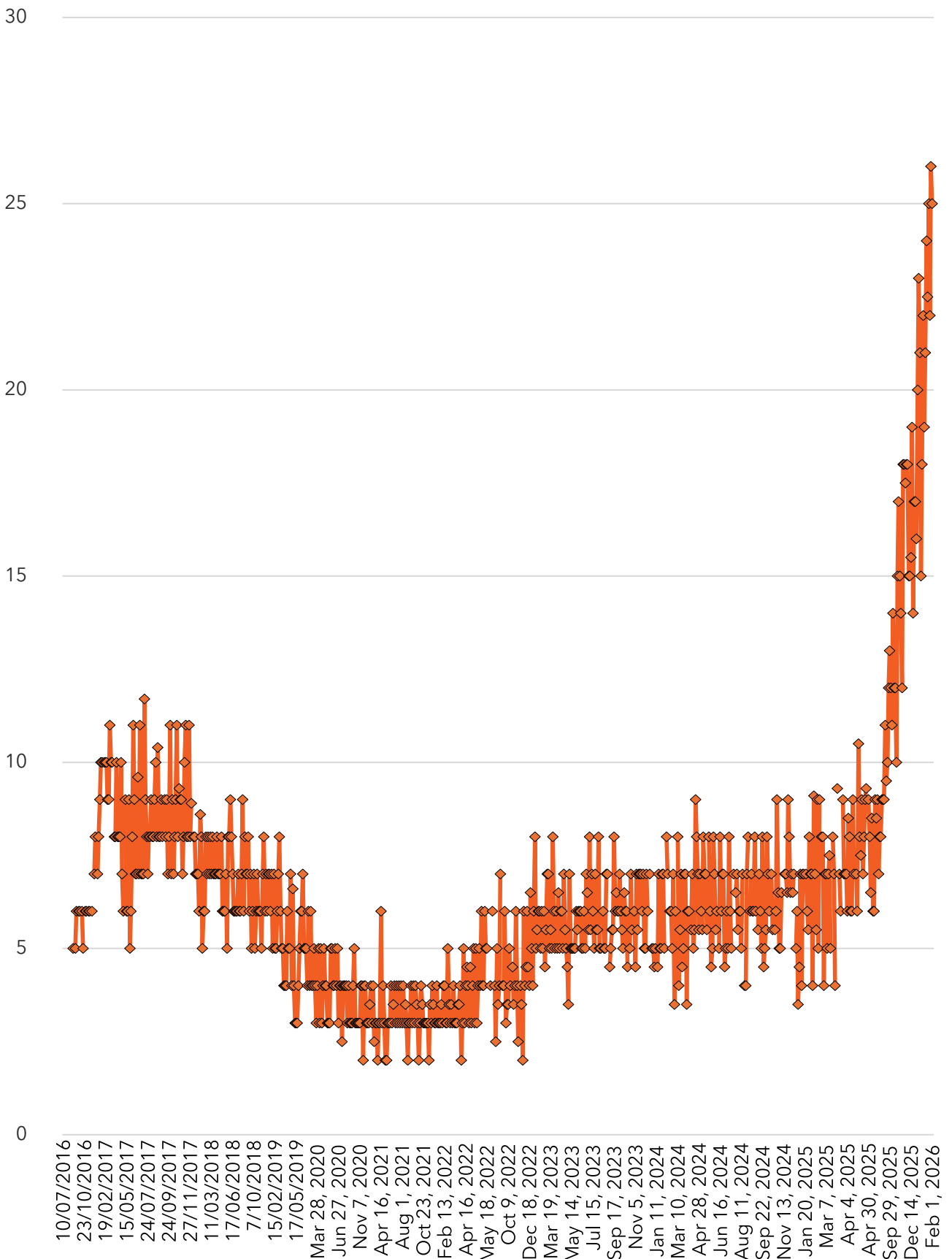
12. Abou-Chadi, "Left Behind by the working class?" p. 8.

13. Shklar, Judith. 1998. Political Thought and Political Thinkers. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, p. 322.

# Pauline Hanson's One Nation: Support in National Opinion Polls (2016-2026)

Figure 4:  
Support for  
One Nation in  
Opinion Polls  
2016-2026

Raw figures from William Bowe "the Poll Bludger"



Over the last twenty years, a third pole has firmly established itself in Australian politics, the far-right. This represents the most consequential shift in Australian electoral dynamics since the establishment of the Democratic Labour Party in 1955.

Political movements rise and fall according to their capacity to convince people to interpret their discontents within the terms of their political language.<sup>14</sup> For the far-right to have risen like this, conditions in Australia must have changed so as to sharpen the resonance of their message for the median voter.

The most important factor to consider here is the sheer magnitude of recent and oncoming social change endured by working Australians over the last half-century.

Recent decades have seen advanced capitalist societies, such as Australia, sustain sequential rounds of major, uninterrupted disruption. These disruptions have not been 'regular' in their speed, scale or scope, and have included:

- A rapid restructuring of economies and labour markets,
- The upending of cultural and religious traditions, and
- Changes to the form and texture of our mass culture(s).

Perhaps above all, recent decades have also upended the habits and characteristics of everyday life, including the:

- Primary mediums of interpersonal communication,
- Devices people use to engage with the news and the public sphere,
- Relations between parents and their children,
- Volume and availability of close friendships and communal networks,
- Quality, content and reliability of work,
- Nutritiousness of leisure activity,
- Durability of romantic attachments, and
- Relations between women and men.

**Far-right politics offers 'coherence at the expense of truth.'**<sup>15</sup> After decades of upheaval, this need for coherence has intensified.<sup>16</sup> In an unstable world, old but familiar stories about hierarchy and tradition can become increasingly magnetic (see: Section 5.2, Identity Disruption and Status Anxiety).

Analysis from the ANU's Australian Election Survey finds that, as of 2025:<sup>17</sup>

**51.8%**  
of Australians believe life was better fifty years ago.

**56%**  
believe life will be worse in fifty years' time.

**50%**  
of Australians mistrust the Federal Parliament.

**61.3%**  
of Australians believe the Government is run by a few big interests.

**41.6%**  
of Australians mistrust the legal system.

**53%**  
of Australians believe immigration is too high.

**These figures suggest a very high growth-potential for far-right politics in Australia.**

14. Stedman Jones, Gareth. *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working-Class History 1832-1982*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

15. Muirhead, Russell and Rosenblum, Nancy. *A Lot of People Are Saying: The New Conspiracism and the Assault on Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019, p. 47.

16. 'Intolerance flourishes where forms of life are dislocated, roots are unsettled, and traditions are undone.' Michael Sandel. 1982. "The Political Theory of the Procedural Republic." *Revue de Metaphysique et de Morale*, Volume 93, No. 1, p. 63, quoted in Christopher Lasch. 1986. "The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Volume 69, No. 1/2, (Symposium: The Habits of the Heart, Spring/Summer 1986), p. 67.

17. Biddle, Nicholas. "Erosion of Hope: Social and financial wellbeing and the relationship with political attitudes. January/February 2025." Australian National University: School of Politics and International Relations, pp. 16-29.

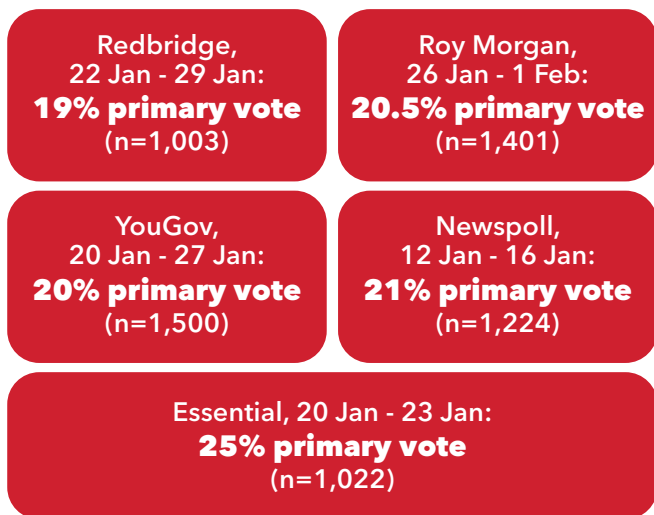
## The Rise of One Nation

The 2025 Federal Election shattered both the confidence and organisational viability of Australia's traditional right-wing parties:

- The Liberal-National Coalition lost 15 seats, on top of the 19 it lost in 2022.
- The Coalition suffered its worst two-party-preferred result since 1943.
- The Coalition was: its leader unseated by an ~8% swing.
- The Coalition was routed in metropolitan Australia: Almost all their remaining seats in the capital cities flipped to Labor.
- The Coalition failed to unseat a single Labor MP or Senator anywhere in the country.

In the aftermath of this watershed, the two parties which make up the Coalition succumbed to infighting: they split, twice, with the second rupture being more acrimonious than the first. They blocked the release of their long-awaited election review, failed to contain ceaseless leadership speculation, and bitterly divided themselves over the question of Net Zero.

By 2026, so deteriorated had the Coalition's standing become that the party began to score some of its worst polling outcomes on record:



The chief beneficiary of this collapse has been, at time of writing, Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party (PHON): a far-right party founded in 1997 that advocates the typical suite of anti-immigration, nationalistic, and economically ambiguous positions.

Elections analyst and political observer Kos Samaras observes that the 'key insight' into the PHON support base is that 88% see the country as headed in the wrong direction, with a third wanting to see the whole system 'burned down.'<sup>18</sup> This will be explored further in Section 5 (Structural Causes).

If One Nation is polling ~22% nationwide, psephologist Antony Green estimates that this would translate to primary votes above 35% in some rural and provincial seats: enough to depose several National Party members.<sup>19</sup>

At the 2025 election, there were 26 seats where One Nation candidates made it to the final three, after preferences. These include seats in every state in the commonwealth.

In 2026, PHON claims to have 150 active branches nationwide and a membership growth rate of almost 600% since the last Federal election.<sup>20</sup>

Although it remains too early to say if polling outcomes will be replicated at the ballot box, a quadrupling in One Nation's vote-and-seat share in 2028 would be consistent with how far-right movements have penetrated established party systems internationally: with a rapid surge, not a steady simmer.

18. Breslin, Conor. 3 February 2026. "They've lost confidence in the major parties': One Nation surge presents deeper risk for Labor, pollster warns." Sky News Australia.

19. Antony Green. 28 January 2026. "Liberal, National and One Nation - Friends, Enemies or Frenemies?" Antony Green's Election Blog. Available at: <https://antonygreen.com.au/liberal-national-and-one-nation-friends-enemies-or-frenemies/>

20. <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1D1z6oUoHE/>

By decade's end, five scenarios are possible for the future of Australian political right:

- **Stabilisation:** The Liberal-National parties retain major party status and uphold their mixed ideology of liberal-conservatism. Internal fissures, tactical missteps or organisational failures see One Nation retreat to the margins.
- **Parity:** The Liberal-National parties retain their existing ideologies and compete with One Nation over the same pool of right-leaning voters.
- **Rupture:** The liberal and conservative elements of the Coalition are unable to maintain their traditional alliance. Populist, agrarian, new-right and nationalist elements defect to One Nation or form their own party.
- **Replacement:** The Liberal-National parties fail to achieve internal coherence or electoral viability and are effectively replaced by One Nation as the primary force on the political right.
- **Enmeshment:** With the exception of a handful of moderates, the bulk of the Liberal-National parties join forces with One Nation either as subordinates or as co-leaders of a new national-conservative political force.

## Victorian Context

### Average Victorian Federal Seat Result

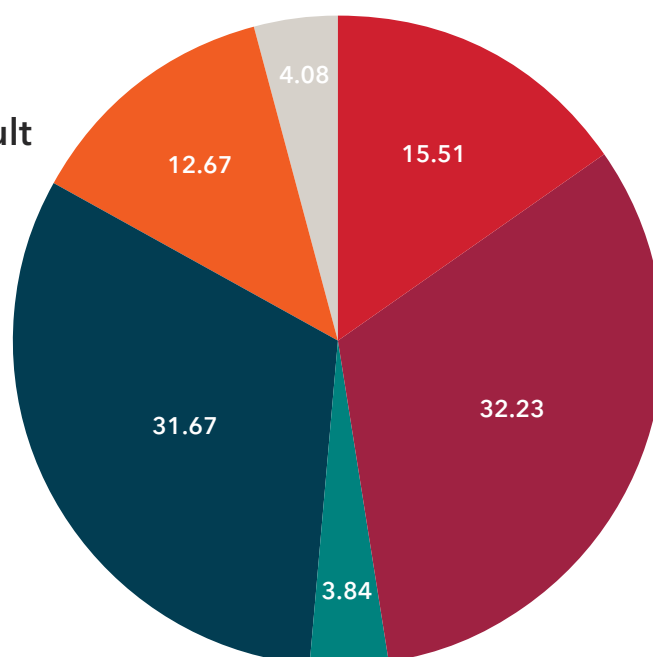
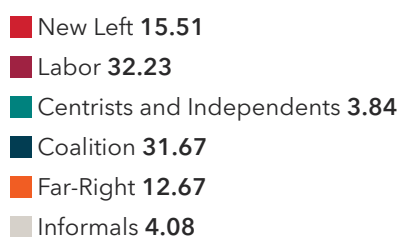


Figure 5: Average Victorian Federal Seat Result, 2025 Federal Election.

Victoria's COVID-19 experience turbocharged both the scale and intensity of far-right political activity in the State.<sup>21</sup>

Across Australia, support for far-right politics increased notably during and after the pandemic – despite broad public support for lockdown measures.<sup>22</sup>

Victoria is a progressive state with a long history of working-class political engagement. It has also, in reaction to this, produced a disproportionate number of right-wing extremist movements.

The first ever right-wing extremist to be charged under Australian counter-terrorism legislation was a Victorian who sought to bomb the Victorian Trades Hall in Carlton.<sup>23</sup>

21. Lydia Khalil and Joshua Roose. 2023. "Anti-Government Extremism in Australia: Understanding the Australian Anti-Lockdown Freedom Movement as Complex Anti-Government Social Movement." *Perspectives on Terrorism*. Special Section: Anti-Government Extremism. Volume 27, No. 1, pp.145-169.

22. Nilan, Pam, Roose, Josh, Turner, Bryan and Peucker, Mario. 2025. "Masculinities, Citizenship, and Right-Wing Populism in Australia." *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, Volume 46, p. 4

23. Harris-Hogan, Shandon. 2023. "Is Far-Right Violence Actually Increasing in Australia?:" *Tracking Far Right Terrorism and Violence in Australia Between 1990-2020.* *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Volume 17, No. 2, pp. 1-29.

Throughout the last century, Victoria has acted as a flashpoint for various far-right organisations, including:

- **The League of National Security**, also known as The White Army: A fascist paramilitary organisation formed in Melbourne in 1931 which fought in street battles against trade unionists and left-wing activists.<sup>24</sup>
- **The Australian League of Rights**, an antisemitic and right-libertarian movement founded in 1946 which undertook branch stacking operations in the Victorian Liberal and National Parties.<sup>25</sup>
- **The National Socialist Party of Australia**, founded in 1968, which ran a training camp in regional Victoria and was rumoured to be responsible for the bombings of several left-wing businesses in Melbourne.<sup>26</sup>
- **The United Patriots Front**, antisemitic ultranationalist group founded in Melbourne in 2015 in response to plans to establish a mosque in Bendigo. It dissolved in 2019, with some leading members taking up roles in explicitly Neo-Nazi organisations.<sup>27</sup>
- **The Rise Up Australia Party**, founded in Melbourne in 2011. Advocated opposition to multiculturalism, Islam, immigration and progressive social policy. Successfully elected a councillor to the City of Casey.<sup>28</sup>
- **The Australian Liberty Alliance**, founded in Melbourne in 2015. Political party with a core policy of opposition to Islam. Advocated the 'great replacement' conspiracy theory. Later renamed Yellow Vest Australia (2019-2020).<sup>29</sup>

An analysis of political extremism in Australia from 1990-2020 identified Metropolitan Melbourne as Australia's 'capital of far-right activism and violence'.<sup>30</sup>

Far-right political and media organisations currently active in Victoria include:

- Pauline Hanson's One Nation.
- The Freedom Party of Victoria.
- The National Socialist Network.
- Family First Victoria.
- The European Australia Movement.
- The National Workers' Alliance.
- The Trumpet of Patriots.
- March for Australia (MFA).
- AustraliaOne.
- Australians vs the Agenda.
- Reignite Democracy Australia.



24. Kristy Champion. 2019. "A Lunatic Fringe? The Persistence of Right Wing Extremism in Australia." *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Volume 13, No. 2, pp. 2-20.

25. Brett Nicholls. 2024. "The Communist Empty Signifier: the Australian League of Rights and the Voice to Parliament Referendum." *Continuum*, Volume 38, Issue 6, pp. 915-933.

26. Champion, "A Lunatic Fringe," p. 6.

27. Champion, "A Lunatic Fringe," p. 12.

28. Craig Butt. 18 November 2014. "Rise Up Australia candidate Rosalie Crestani wants Casey Council to ban same-sex promotions." *The Age*, available at: <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/rise-up-australia-candidate-rosalie-crestani-wants-casey-council-to-ban-samesex-promotions-20141118-11pbhp.html>

29. Champion, "A Lunatic Fringe," p. 13.

30. Harris-Hogan, "Tracking Far-Right Terrorism," p. 20.

Photo by DJ Paine on Unsplash

## Victorian Context: The COVID-19 Lockdowns

Victoria's COVID-19 experience holds particular relevance for understanding its increasingly important role in the Australian far-right.<sup>31</sup> In a study of Australians holding extreme right-wing views, it was found that nearly all respondents had experienced some event which served as a catalyst for their conversion to far-right belief.<sup>32</sup> For some Victorians, the COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020-2021 was one such catalytic experience.

Between May and August 2020, the number of posts on far-right channels on the platform 'Gab' increased by 90%.<sup>33</sup>

Social instability always increases people's propensity for conspiratorial belief.<sup>34</sup> However, the pandemic did indeed produce real material impacts which were not evenly distributed across the community. Existing class, cultural, health, economic, digital and education disparities were widened.<sup>35</sup>

Overwhelmingly, Victorians supported the State Government's strong public health responses to the COVID crisis. The State Labor Government was re-elected in a landslide in 2022.

For some Victorians, however, the pandemic response was experienced as a violation. For the first time, they confronted 'the expansive nature of state power:' the Government's very real ability, if seldom exercised, to restrict basic liberties and control citizens' everyday lives.<sup>36</sup> This had a radicalising effect.

On an organisational level, the pandemic had the crucial effect of bringing disparate far-right groups into greater alignment and coordination with each other - similar to the 'Stop the Mosque' protests in Bendigo during 2014-15, but on a much larger scale.<sup>37</sup>

Opposition to the lockdowns provided a unifying common language for otherwise disparate groups, bringing together vaccine skeptics, neo-Nazis, hardline libertarians, Christian fundamentalists, wellness influencers, conspiracy theorists, sovereign citizens and national conservatives against a common enemy: the State Labor Government, the mainstream media and the public health apparatus.

In September 2021, large violent anti-lockdown protests hit Melbourne targeting labour unions and government buildings. Assassination threats were transmitted to the State Premier's office. Arrests were made over plans to kidnap the Premier, attack critical infrastructure, and bring weapons to protests.<sup>38</sup>

Explosive incidents of far-right activity in Victoria have continued to the present day. The Porepunkah police shootings in 2025 were motivated by a syncretic far-right ideology colloquially known as the sovereign citizen movement. On August 31st, 2025, in the aftermath of the Neo-Nazi lead March for Australia protest through Melbourne, several indigenous women were savagely attacked at Camp Sovereignty - just outside the central business district.



31. Cecile Guerin et. Al. 2021. "A Snapshot of Far-Right Activity on Gab in Australia." Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies, Deakin University.

32. Mario Peucker and Ramon Spaaij. 2024. "Alternative Epistemology in Far-Right Anti-Publics: A Qualitative Study of Australian Activists." International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society, Volume 37, pp. 243-256.

33. Guerin, "A Snapshot of Far-Right Activity," p. 5.

34. Khalil and Roose, "Anti-Lockdown Extremism," p. 148; Allan W Eister. 1972. "An Outline of a Structural Theory of Cults." Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Volume 11, No. 4, p. 325

35. Khalil and Roose, "Anti-Lockdown Extremism," p.147.

36. Khalil and Roose, "Anti-Lockdown Extremism," p.146.

37. Peucker and Spaaij, "Alternative Epistemology," p. 254.

38. Khalil and Roose, "Anti-Lockdown Extremism," p.150.

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Photo (right) by DJ Paine on Unsplash

# Logic: Far-Right Political Thought

## The Persuasive Process

The far-right wins support by changing how voters think about themselves (**identity**) and how they rank the importance of issues (**salience**). Debate and argumentation over policy (**issues**) plays a minimal role.

In a study of 135,000 individuals across 26 countries over 26 years, it was found that anti-immigrant sentiment and exclusionary nationalism are consistently prevalent. Individuals with narrow conceptions of nationality made up more than half of this giant sample size.<sup>39</sup>

Similarly, an Australian study has found that 'strong national pride, anti-Muslim sentiment, opposition to multiculturalism and distrust in government are **not restricted to the margins of society.**' Wide sections of the public hold some or all these views.<sup>40</sup>

However, both here and abroad, far-right vote shares are much lower than these figures would suggest.<sup>41</sup>

This is because vote choice is determined by more factors than how voters feel about individual issues. Broadly speaking, voter choice is influenced by three factors.

### 1. The Issue Dimension:

The distance between the voter's position on an issue and the party / candidate's position. Voters seek to minimise this distance.

### 2. The Salience Dimension:

Voters hold a range of positions, but not all weigh equally on their political choices. Vote choice is driven by what issues are seen to be most important for the dynamics of a particular election.

### 3. The Identity Dimension:

Voters have a range of identities (e.g. woman, worker, white, tall, heterosexual, professional, university educated, parent, rural, etc.). These identities shape political decisions. Voters aim to support candidates and parties who represent the perceived interests of their primary identities.

All three of these dimensions are volatile. Not only can voters move around on the issue dimension (i.e. becoming less or more supportive of a particular policy), but on the salience and identity dimensions too. In their youth, rental rights might be highly salient for a voter, but less so if they acquire home ownership later.



39. May, Antonia and Czymara, Christian. 2024. "Careless Whisper: Political Elite discourses activate national identities for far-right voting preferences." *Nations and Nationalism*, Volume 30, p. 105.

40. Peucker, "Far-Right Anti-Publics," pp. 253-4

41. Czymara, "Careless Whisper," pp. 91-93.

42. Czymara, "Careless Whisper," p. 91.

43. Edelman, Murray. 1971. "Chapter 1: Arousal and Quiescence," in *Politics as Symbolic Action: Mass Arousal and Quiescence*, Chicago: Markham, pp. 1-14.

The aforementioned study found that, although hard-right views on nationality are widespread, their effect on **elections is minimal unless 'activated' by political elites.**<sup>42</sup> Voters are much more likely to choose far-right parties when issues related to national identity are electorally salient. Otherwise, any nationalist sentiments they hold may not drive vote choice.

Parties and candidates can also shape voter placement on all three of these dimensions. Through campaigns, policy promises, and propaganda they can shift views on policies (**issue dimension**), the importance voters attach to certain topics (**salience**) and how they think about themselves (**identity**).

Party policies are not simply responses to demand from voters but can be themselves a source of voter demand: e.g., when a party proposes something highly popular that was not previously on the political agenda.<sup>43</sup>

Parties can also seek to heighten the salience of policy areas where they have an advantage. If a

party is seen as incompetent on nine out of ten issues, it can still win an election by putting that tenth issue at the absolute centre of voters' minds (salience). An example of this is the landslide victory of the Liberal Party of Canada in the 2025 Federal Election – driven, in part, by the towering salience of American aggression and the threat of the Trump Administration.

Parties can also 'activate' particular voter identities for their political gain. The far-right will often seek to activate 'the parent' identity when campaigning against alleged indoctrination in schools, or the nativist identity when campaigning against migrants.

The crucial point to understand here is that **even when attitudes or policy preferences remain unchanged, changes in the relative salience of certain issues or shifts in voter identity can have a decisive impact on political outcomes.**<sup>44</sup>

Understanding the interplay between these three dimensions is essential to grasping the far-right's persuasive strategy.



42. Czymara, "Careless Whisper," p. 91.

43. Edelman, Murray. 1971. "Chapter 1: Arousal and Quiescence," in *Politics as Symbolic Action: Mass Arousal and Quiescence*, Chicago: Markham, pp. 1-14.

44. Rydgren, Jens and Tyrberg, Maria. 2024. "Working-Class Voters Supporting the Radical Right: Do Trade Unions Have a Shielding Effect?" Department of Sociology Working Paper Series, University of Stockholm: No. 47, p. 5.

*Photo by Yosafat Herdian on Unsplash*

# Identity and Choice: How the Far-Right Wins Support

To understand the rise of far-right politics in Australia and abroad, we must ask:

## Why do individuals primarily identify with one kind of group rather than another?

## How does this sense of group identity change, and what are the political effects of this?

The process by which a person is converted to far-right ideology occurs via identity reformulation: the restructuring of how people think about themselves, and in turn, how they rank the importance of particular issues. The far-right succeeds when voters identify more strongly with the racial, cultural or national in-groups that they are a part of, i.e., when voters start seeing themselves as white / Australian-born / heterosexual / Christian above all else.

### Attribute

Individuals possess a range of **attributes**: their age, weight, ethnicity, hair colour, gender, language, height, diet, eye colour, religion, accent, migration status, star sign, education, suburb, generation. For example, skin colour is an attribute:

***"I have white skin."***

***"I work."***

Some attributes may crystallise into a social identity, but not all of them do. The fact that people share a common attribute is no guarantee that they are aware that they have this trait or that they desire to identify with others who have it.

### Social Identity

If an individual feels that they share the attribute with many people around them, or if the attribute boosts their self-esteem, they are more likely to incorporate it into their social identity. People are generally unlikely to identify strongly with attributes that make them feel inferior or isolated.

***"I have white skin [attribute]. I am a white Australian [social identity]."***

***"I work [attribute]. I am a worker [social identity]."***

The far-right encourages people to identify with certain attributes over others - they frame traits such as heterosexuality, whiteness, purity and traditionalism as markers of superiority. In other words, they attach ego-incentives for voters to identify with these traits. The aim is to make them increasingly central to how the voter makes decisions in the ballot box.

### Group Consciousness

The next step is the formation of group consciousness. Social identification is not enough for far-right ideology to take hold. If an individual believes that other members of their social identity have common interests, that they are 'in the same boat,' then we can say that they have a group consciousness:

***"I have white skin [attribute]. I am a white Australian [social identity]. All white Australians are going to suffer under unchecked immigration [group consciousness]."***

***"I work [attribute]. I am a worker [social identity]. All workers are going to suffer if we can't collectively bargain freely [group consciousness]."***

## Ideology

However, even here, the process is incomplete. People can be white, identify as white, believe that white people have common interests, and take a lot of pride out of their identity as a white person – but there is still no guarantee that they will actually take collective action to advance the supposed ‘shared interests’ of white people.

The key, final mechanism that is required is the covariation of the individual’s fate with their possession of the shared attribute. This process of covariation happens through ideology: the fact you are white puts you at risk of white genocide, therefore your whiteness must have unparalleled salience in your political decisions. Your fate is determined by your whiteness.

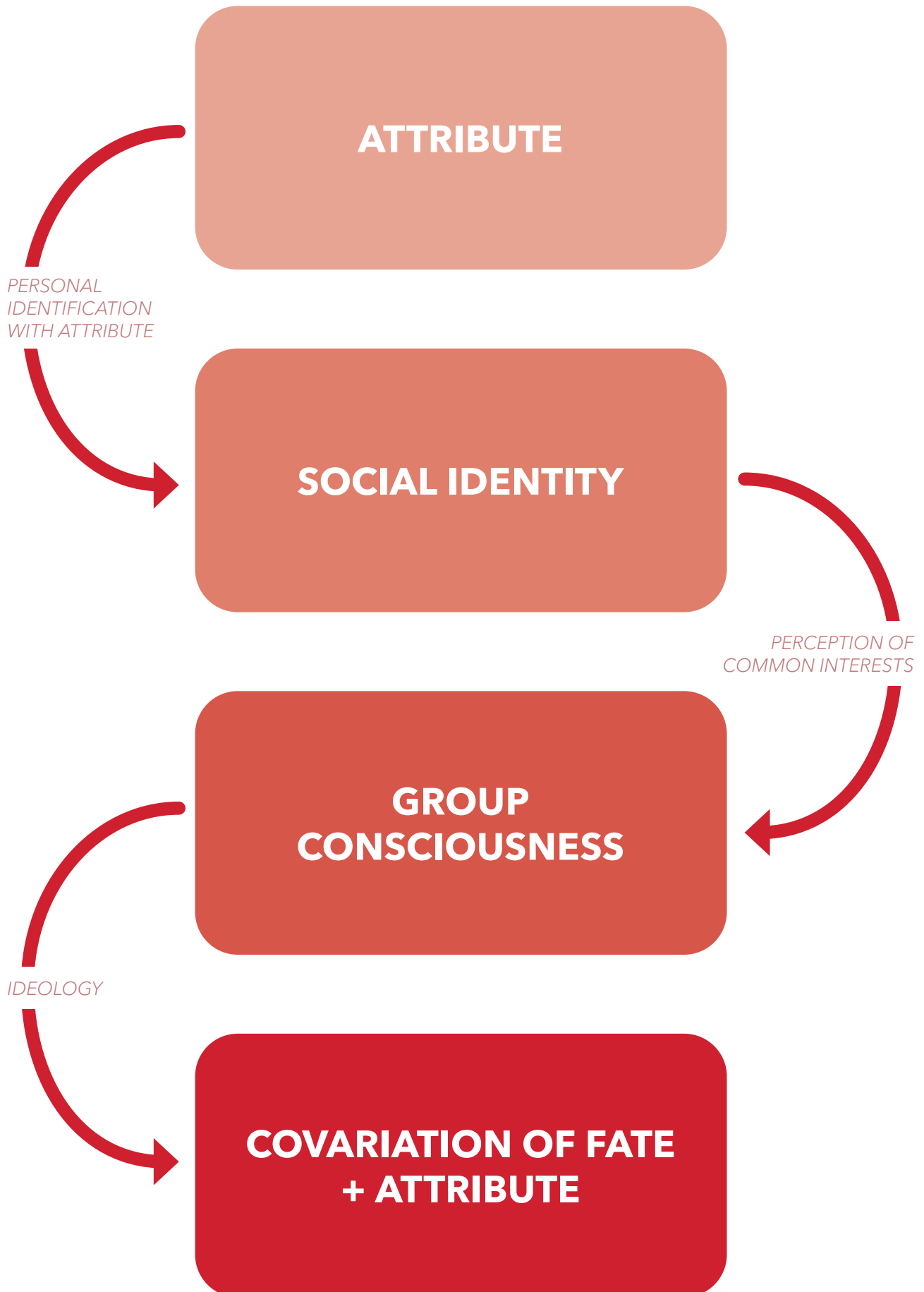
***“I have white skin [attribute]. I am therefore a white Australian [social identity]. White Australians have interests in common, so I will vote for whoever serves those interests [group consciousness]. I am a lot of things, but above all my fate and my interests are determined by the fact that I am white [ideology].”***

***“I work [attribute]. I am a worker [social identity]. Workers have interests in common, so I will vote for whoever serves those interests [group consciousness]. I am a lot of things, but above all, my fate and my interests are determined by the fact that I am a worker [ideology].”***



Photo by Christian Lue on Unsplash

Figure 6: Model of Identity Formation



# Rhetoric: Persuasive Strategies

This re-identification process described above is, in practice, achieved through an arsenal of subtle but highly effective techniques.



## Strategy 1: Culturalisation of Inequality

The far-right admits the reality of exploitation and inequality in our society. However, in their framing, the problem is never that people in general are struggling, but that people who don't deserve it are. The far-right taps into working-class frustrations and redirects them towards an undeserving object (scapegoating). It does this by framing inequality in cultural terms, not economic terms.

Almost 100% of the time, far-right rhetoric **deliberately omits the language of 'worker' and 'boss' or 'poor' and 'rich.'** It will always replace these with some version of 'the people' vs 'the elite,' 'the producers' vs 'the parasites,' 'the patriots' vs 'the traitors,' "the Australians" vs "the migrants." This is a critical manoeuvre. It allows the far-right to mimic critiques of oligarchy, all while defining 'the elite' as some cultural group divorced from any relationship to production.<sup>45</sup>

- I.e.: Elites live in the inner city, enjoy certain kinds of media, study gender at university, or perhaps they are vegetarian, vote for certain parties, or are part of a particular ethnicity.

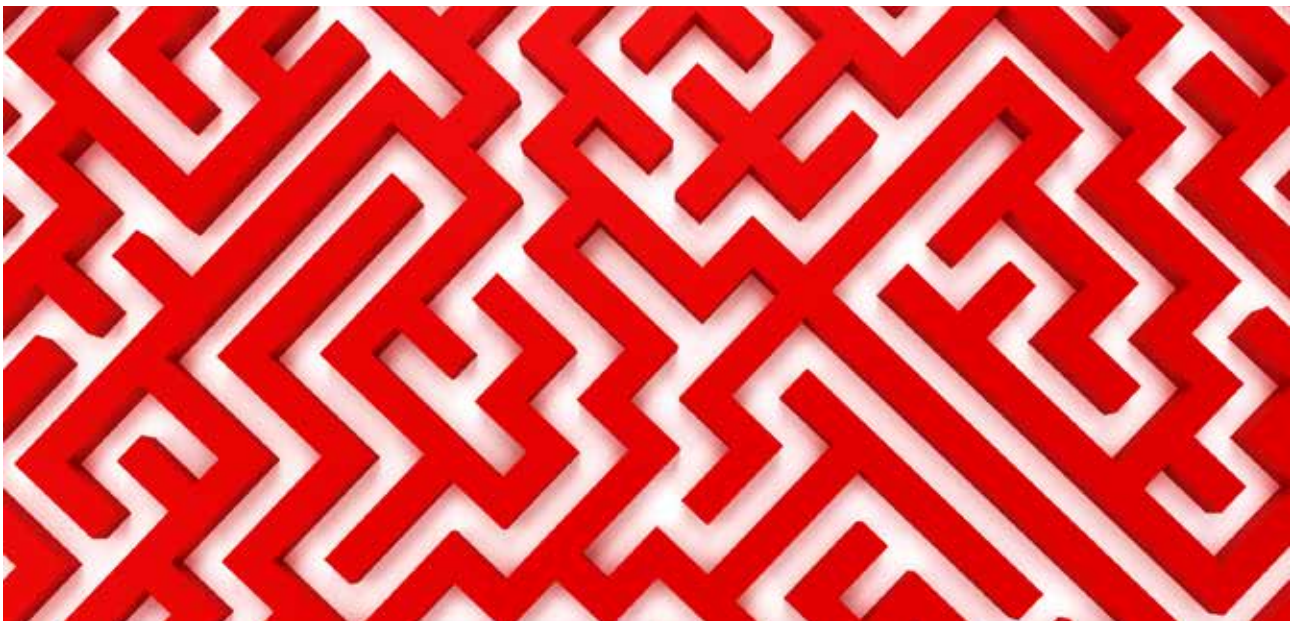
Anti-elitist rhetoric combined with the amplification of real grievances allows the far-right to perform a **hollow simulation of class politics:** to sound like they are fighting the workers fight, while, in fact, providing cover for the real drivers of exploitation.<sup>46</sup>

*"The commentariat ... are the billionaires' little minions - brainwashed ideologues ... My words will be interpreted as some form of class warfare. Yes, they are."*

- Malcolm Roberts,  
One Nation Senator<sup>47</sup>

*"I'm old enough to remember a time when a young man could expect to work a job, marry, buy a house ... What do you think being told 'you're toxic' all the time is doing to young men."*

- Alex Antic,  
Liberal Senator<sup>48</sup>



45. Miranda de Alvaro, "Class and Nation in the Age of Populism: The Forward March of Labour Restarted?" Soundings, Volume 75, (Summer 2020), p. 130.

46. Douglas Holmes, 'Cultural Physician' in Integral Europe: Fast-Capitalism, Multiculturalism, Neofascism, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 64.

47. Malcolm Roberts, "Adjournment, Australian Society," Senate Hansard, 26 March 2024, p. 1310.

48. Alex Antic, "Statements by Senators, Men's Rights," Senate Hansard, 26 March 2025, p. 988.

## Strategy 2: Sentimental Redistribution

If you understand inequality as an economic problem, you will support economic redistribution. If you understand it as a cultural problem, you will support the redistribution of cultural goods: status, dignity, pride, and recognition.

This is what the far-right offers to disadvantaged voters: You have been humiliated, the elite is laughing at you and your way of life. Vote Leave says take back control, Hanson says reclaim Australia and Trump promises to make America proud again.

By offering the redistribution of respect, agency and pride, the far-right forces demand for economic justice into the unconscious. Instead of universal public services and democracy at work, they promise 'release from liberal notions of what [people] 'should' feel - happy for the gay newlywed, sad at the plight of the Syrian refugee, unresentful about paying taxes.<sup>49</sup>

Their supporters are intensely aware that progressives see prejudice as the core of their beliefs. The far-right promises to act as a 'firewall against liberal insults thrown at [them] and [their] ancestors.'<sup>50</sup> This situates the far-right as the workers' defence against libel and humiliation - setting up a relationship of psychological dependence that primes them for further indoctrination.

## Strategy 3: Nostalgia

The far-right is intensely nostalgic. It claims that, in the past, the worker had the respect they deserved because society was unified into a single, coherent national community. **No such point of homogeneity exists in Australian history:** in 1891, the share of Australians born overseas was roughly 30% - the same as today.<sup>54</sup>

Nostalgia for a lost unity also erases Australia's long history of bitterly fought class conflict - which saw the establishment of minimum wages, the eight-hour day, work safety laws, social welfare, and industrial rights. The far-right erases this history of diversity and struggle - framing the past as a unitary golden age where everyone had the same values and everyone belonged.<sup>55</sup>

*"All we hear from our cultural elites is how we should feel ashamed."*

- Alex Antic,  
Liberal Senator<sup>51</sup>

*"Contempt ... comes from a deep-seated sense of superiority amongst inner-city elites and their champagne socialist ideology."*

- Malcolm Roberts,  
One Nation Senator<sup>52</sup>

*"The hyphenated name brigade ... claim to speak for the worker yet yell at supermarket cashiers when they don't scan their vegan sausages."*

- Alex Antic,  
Liberal Senator<sup>53</sup>

*"Fifty years ago, Australia was a cohesive predominantly Anglo-Celtic nation ... Everyone from the cleaners to the captains of industry had a shared vision of who we were as a people."*

- Fraser Anning, Former  
Katter Australia Party Senator<sup>56</sup>

*"Many Australians feel like they are experiencing a cultural invasion ... [they] tell me they no longer recognise the towns they grew up in."*

- Pauline Hanson,  
One Nation Leader<sup>57</sup>

49. Hochschild, Arlie Russell. Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right. The New Press: New York City, 2017, p. 22.  
50. Ibid., p. 23.

51. Alex Antic, "Statements by Senators, Racism," Senate Hansard, 26 June 2024, p. 2105.

52. Malcolm Roberts, "Adjournment, Australian Society," Senate Hansard, 26 March 2024, p. 1310.

53. Alex Antic, "Statements by Senators, Racism," Senate Hansard, 26 June 2024, p. 2105.

54. Samaras, Kos. Australian Financial Review. "The 3 demographic shifts sealing the Coalition's fate." 12 September 2025.

55. Nilan and Turner, "Masculinities, Citizenship and Right-Wing Populism," p. 3.

56. Fraser Anning, "Full text: Senator Fraser Anning's Maiden Speech," SBS News, 15 August 2018. Available at: <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/full-text-senator-fraser-annings-maiden-speech/8shbk54k6>.

57. Pauline Hanson, "Matters of Public Importance, Australian Society," Senate Hansard, 27 November 2018, p. 8730.

## Strategy 4: Democratic Devaluation

The far-right argues that democracy has been corrupted and this is why Australia isn't what it used to be. Democracy is framed as a farce and an illusion: the parties are fake, the outcomes are predetermined, the media is biased, and no one adheres to the rules of the game.

Devaluing the democratic system works to encourage voters to abandon the principles, norms and assumptions which govern it. It also **allows the far-right to argue that they are not opposed to democracy: they are simply trying to fight for their beliefs in a system where 'real democracy' is long gone.**

***"The so-called battle between Labor and Liberal is an illusion... Both parties bow to unelected globalist organisations."***

- Ralph Babet,  
Trumpet of Patriots Senator<sup>58</sup>

***"Australia's preferential voting system is UNDEMOCRATIC [sic]. It's intentionally confusing to enable the same career-politicians to keep getting re-elected."***

- Reignite Democracy Australia, Telegram Post<sup>59</sup>

***"Labor didn't win the election. They rewrote the voter base. While you were working, paying taxes, and trying to buy a home... Anthony Albanese and the Labor Party were changing who counts as Australian. 1.15 million migrants brought in under Labor ... This is election engineering."***

- George Christensen,  
Former Liberal Senator<sup>60</sup>

## Strategy 5: Vanguardism

Consequently, if democracy is illusory, and 'the elite' uses illegitimate methods to keep power, the far-right implicitly argues that political power is only truly exercised by secretive networks, master puppeteers and clandestine organisations: a 'vanguard.'

The power of elites is framed as deriving from something completely outside of the recognised democratic process. Therefore, it follows that defeating the elites must also require going beyond conventional democratic methods too. Far-right parties emulate their imagined opponents.

***"Who is the master puppet pulling the strings? ... I've often thought about engaging a lobbyist myself to get something done around here, because as an elected representative, I'm not getting much done."***

- Gerard Rennick,  
Former Liberal Senator<sup>61</sup>



58. Ralph Babet, "Statements by Senators," Senate Hansard, 12 February 2025, p. 590.

59. Reignite Democracy Australia, Telegram Post, 26 May 2025: <https://t.me/reignitedemocracyaustralia/7576>

60. George Christensen, 23 May 2025, Facebook Post, Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1VsFbJeFm9/>

61. Gerard Rennick, "Matters of Public Importance, Assistant Treasurer," Senate Hansard, 28 November 2022, p. 2367.

Photo by DJ Paine on Unsplash

## Strategy 6: Reflex of Suspicion

***“Reliance on expert views is attractive to those who don’t think the people can be trusted to make their own decisions.”***

- Alex Antic,  
Liberal Senator<sup>64</sup>

The sensation of persecution is ‘central’ to far-right rhetoric and systematised by grandiose theories of conspiracy.<sup>62</sup> The far-right disseminates doubt about the credibility of all socially recognised sources of knowledge: universities, the press, public health agencies, international organisations, historical research, the scientific method, the ‘establishment.’<sup>63</sup>

The far-right’s aim here is to overwhelm the worker and install a reflex of suspicion to all knowledge claims except those produced by the far-right movement. As the Nazi’s chief architect Albert Speer noted, to be on the extreme right is to be **‘relieved of having to think.’**<sup>65</sup> When all trust is lost for systems of knowledge-production, the party/movement does your thinking for you.

## Strategy 7: Reflex of Paranoia

Strategies 1-6 crush workers sense of political and epistemic competence. They are made to feel as though they do not have any reliable way of knowing anything, nor sharing their political circumstances. A massive conspiracy is being waged against ‘the people,’ truth is indiscernible, and democracy is a lie.

This paranoia is intensified through the invocation of white male victimhood. The far-right deploys a form of grievance-based identity politics that frames white men as the ultimate social outsiders: whose historical achievements, lifestyles, entitlements and futures are all under attack – with the full support of Governments, media and civil society.<sup>66</sup>

At this point, a critical turn is made. Suspicion about mainstream narratives explodes into an expansive, systematised and increasingly complex persecutory delusion.

***“Our government departments are walking in lockstep with the globalist agenda.... It’s death by a thousand cuts.”***

- Alex Antic,  
Liberal Senator<sup>67</sup>

***“The Liberal-Labor-Greens ... have decades of serving masters outside the party - globalist, elitist, parasitic billionaires, foreign corporations, non-government organisations, the United Nations and the World Economic Forum alliance.”***

- Malcolm Roberts,  
One Nation Senator<sup>68</sup>



62. Hofstadter, Richard. 1964. “The Paranoid Style in American Politics.” *Harpers’ Magazine*, November 1964 Issue, p. 4.

63. Sprinzak, Ehud. 1991. “The process of delegitimation: Towards a linkage theory of political terrorism.” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Volume 3, Issue 1, pp. 50-68.

64. Alex Antic, “Adjournment, Australian Society,” *Senate Hansard*, 10 September 2024, p. 3717.

65. Speer, A. 1969. “Profession and Vocation” in *Inside the Third Reich*. New York: Macmillan, p. 20.

66. Nilan and Turner, “Masculinities, Citizenship and Right-Wing Populism,” p. 3.

67. Alex Antic, “Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee, Reference,” *Senate Hansard*, 27 March 2023, p. 1315.

68. Malcolm Roberts, “Future Made in Australia (Production Tax Credits and Other Measures) Bill 2025, Second Reading,” *Senate Hansard*, 5 February 2025, p. 131.

Photo by Mark Fletcher-Brown on Unsplash

## Strategy 8: Apocalypse Fantasy

Next, this sensation of paranoia is escalated to apocalyptic proportions. Instead of merely claiming that the past was better (nostalgia), they argue that present society is on a course to moral degeneration, total collapse, or dictatorship.<sup>69</sup>

The far-right often speaks in terms of a 'final battle' approaching, of time running out, an oncoming storm. The destruction of Australians' treasured way of life is imminent, and they will be invaded, dominated, overrun. The key is to stimulate a sense of urgency.

The language is of **'demonic forces of almost transcendent power,'** a rhetoric which 'runs dangerously near to hopeless pessimism but usually stops short.'<sup>70</sup>

**"Many Australians are waking. Those who aren't waking are running out of time."**

- Alex Antic,  
Liberal Senator<sup>72</sup>

**"The predatory billionaires ... need an energy shortage to control the people and prevent protests. There will be control. There will be a wealth transfer from the people to elitist parasites."**

- Malcolm Roberts,  
One Nation Senator<sup>71</sup>

## Strategy 9: Essentialism

Given these apocalyptic stakes, it follows that far-right ideology drives acolytes to view their political opponents as essentially dangerous by nature: as social contaminants, cronies, vectors of disease or subhumans. Far-right radicals will talk about society as though it is an organism (**'social biologism'**). They deploy ancient fears about 'racial hygiene,' 'degeneracy,'

contamination and admixture.<sup>73</sup> Antisemitism also often plays a central role too.

At its most extreme, **opponents are spoken about as if they are a different species** - a different type of human being that needs to be defeated to keep the national community intact.

**"These [cultural elites] aren't brave. They are not kind. They are some of the worst people in the country - maybe the world."**

- Alex Antic,  
Liberal Senator<sup>74</sup>

## Strategy 10: Crusade Politics

Finally, the far-right ties the above strategies together to reframe the meaning and function of political conflict itself. At the most advanced stages of indoctrination, single issues such as vaccination, climate change, surveillance, multiculturalism, immigration, Islam, gender-sex diversity, transnational institutions, and liberal politics are tied together as interchangeable

pieces in an all-encompassing meta narrative ("transformational delegitimation.")<sup>75</sup>

No longer is politics understood as a contest of ideas or a negotiation of interests, but as an existential, Manichean struggle between good and evil. Politics is a crusade: and the only solutions left are extremist in nature, and violent in practice.

**"The Greens are a cancer to Australia and must be eliminated."**<sup>76</sup>

**"Destroy Paedo freaks."**<sup>77</sup>

**"Jews hate Freedom."**<sup>78</sup>

69. Michael Barkun. 1990. "Racist Apocalypse: Millenarianism on the Far Right." *American Studies*, Volume 31, No. 2, pp. 121-140.

70. Hofstadter, "the Paranoid Style," pp. 29-30.

71. Malcolm Roberts, "Matters of Urgency, Nuclear Energy," Senate Hansard, 13 September 2023, p. 4435.

72. Malcolm Roberts, "Adjournment, Australian Society," Senate Hansard, 26 March 2024, p. 1310.

73. See: Wade, P. 2002, *Race, Nature and Culture: An Anthropological Perspective*, Pluto Press, London.

74. Alex Antic, "Statements by Senators, Racism," Senate Hansard, 26 June 2024, p. 2105.

75. Khalil and Roose, "Anti-Lockdown Extremism," p. 148.

76. Morgan C Jonas, Freedom Party of Victoria. Facebook post, 14 March 2025. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/morgancjonas/posts/pfbid0CTrbZiPf2tMqscqBwP9Vdnw5k7ZzjuvRyJh1wywM5GmreU3T2eiAS6ecnESfuCH3I>

77. NSN banner unfurled at Victorian Parliament.

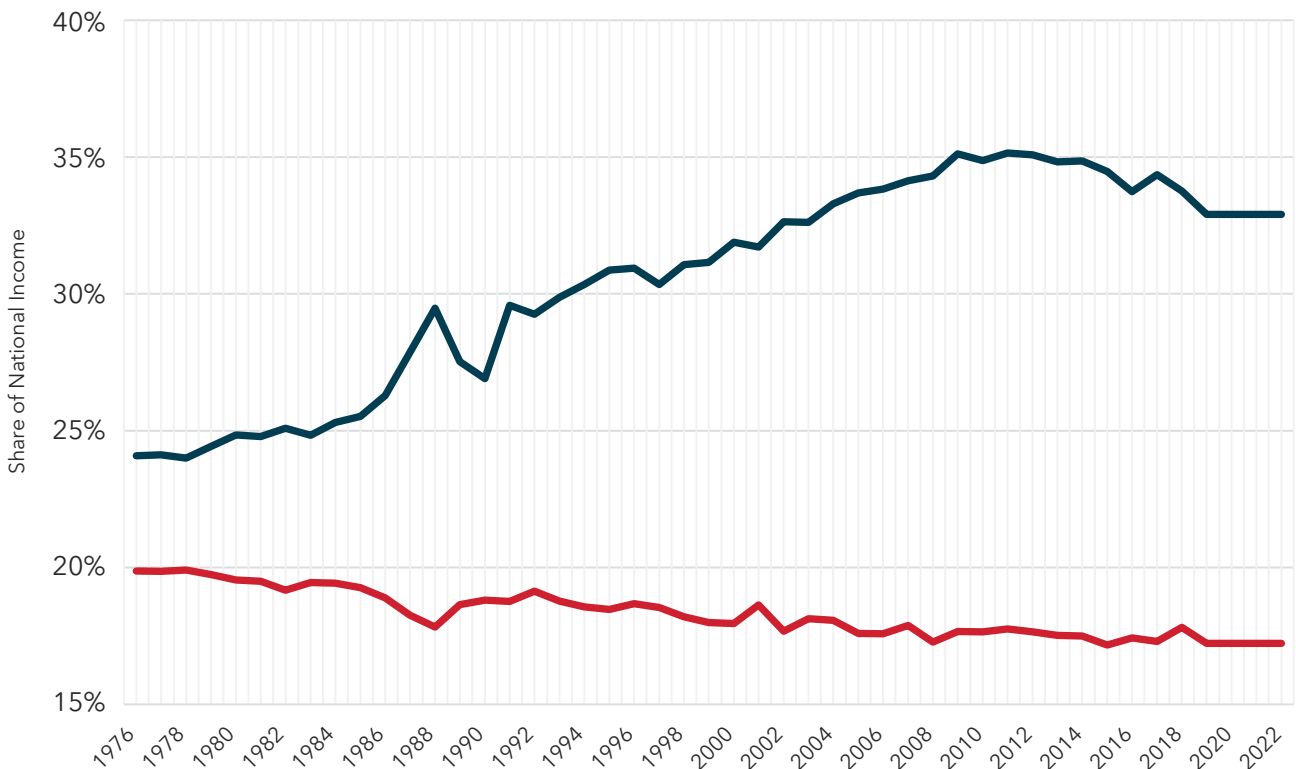
78. NSN banner unfurled at Victorian Parliament.

# Structural Causes

Figure 7:

## Share of National Income held by Income Groups

— Top 10%  
— Bottom 50%



## Australia's Inequality Crisis

The far-right has used the above strategies more or less unchangingly since the beginning of the 20th century. The reason these strategies have such cut-through today is, at least in part, because of soaring economic inequality: and the kind of society that this level of inequality has produced.<sup>79</sup>

In Australia, employment, job security and asset ownership are being distributed increasingly

unequally. This is visible across a litany of metrics (see below).

Traditional employment, with its attached social and legal protections, has become more limited, while large sections of the public do not enjoy such entitlements as paid leave, liveable wages, or secure employment.<sup>80</sup>

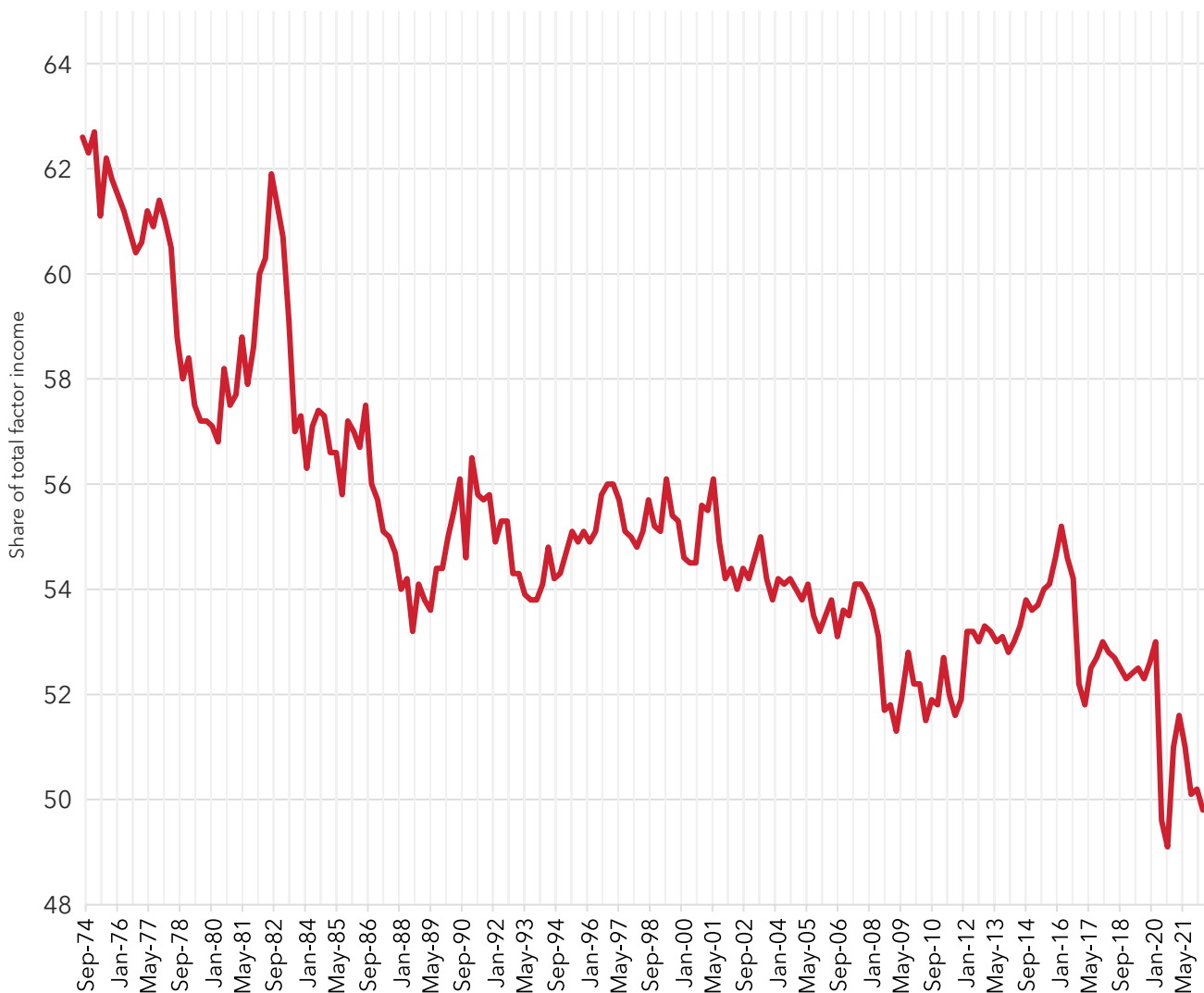


79. O'Connor, Nat. 2017. "Three Connections between Rising Economic Inequality and the Rise of Populism. Irish Studies in International Affairs, Volume 29, p. 29.

Photo by Andreas Brücker on Unsplash

Figure 8:

## Wages as a % of a total factor income in Australia: The percentage of the Australian economy's total income that is paid to workers through wages, salaries benefits.



Wage pressure, insecure work, persistent indebtedness, and general precarity have also spread into higher skill levels: reaching the middle classes, professional occupations, the highly educated and other traditional labour market insiders.<sup>81</sup>

A climate of economic pessimism is increasingly common among working Australians, as demonstrated by a range of public opinion surveys.<sup>82</sup>

A 2018 survey found that a staggering 44% of Australians said they had not **'gained anything' from the preceding 26 years of uninterrupted economic growth.**<sup>83</sup>

Australians feel increasingly bleak about future economic conditions, both for themselves and for the country at large. This is a 'driving force behind the collapse in support for the political mainstream.'<sup>84</sup>

80. Hausermann et. Al. 2020. "How Labor Market Inequality Transforms Mass Politics." *Political Science Research and Methods*, Vol. 8, p. 345.

81. Polacko, Matthew. 2022. "The Rightward Shift and Electoral Decline of Social Democratic Parties under increasing inequality." *West European Politics*, Volume 45, No. 4, p. 670

82. Viet Nguyen, Ferdi Botha and Kyle Peyton. "Economic pessimism is behind the drift of voters to minor parties and independents." *The Conversation*, 15 May 2025. Available at: <https://findanexpert.unimelb.edu.au/news/104076-economic-pessimism-is-behind-the-drift-of-voters-to-minor-parties-and-independents>

83. Committee for Economic Developments of Australia, "Community Pulse 2018: The Economic Disconnect," <https://www.ceda.com.au/ResearchAndPolicies/Research/Corporate-social-responsibility-I-Social-Compact/Community-pulse-2018-the-economic-disconnect>.

84. *Ibid.*

Young Australians today face a particularly bleak set of conditions: the oncoming destruction of entry level jobs through AI-driven automation, an endemic housing crisis, increased debts, above average rates of unemployment, widespread psychological distress, work intensification, and the prospect of cataclysmic ecological disruption.

Figure 9:

### Distribution of National Wealth between Social Classes 2024

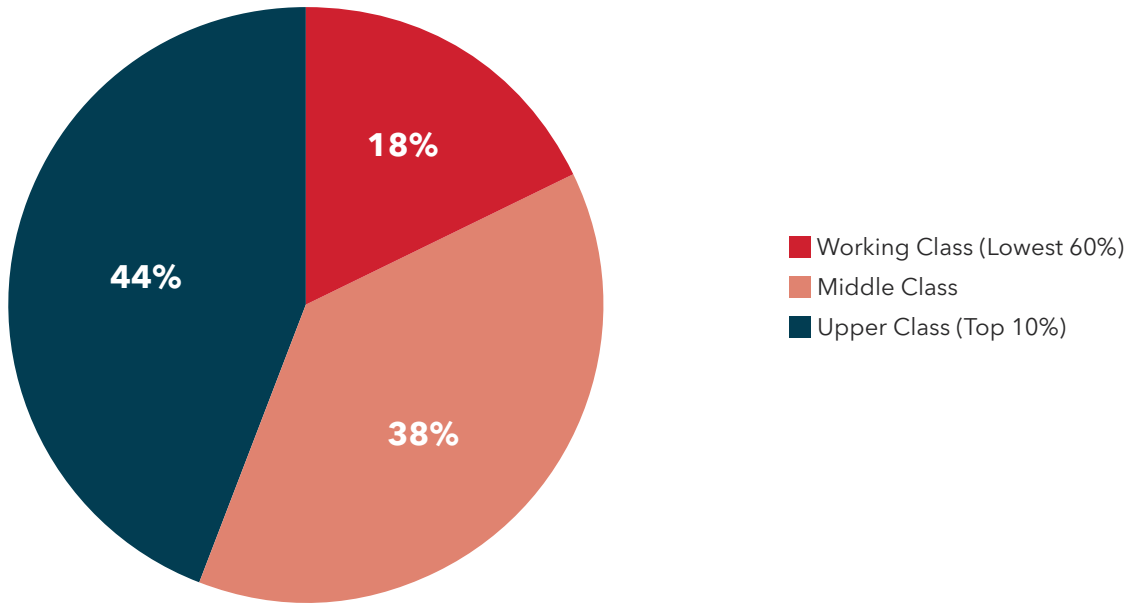


Figure 10:

### Share of National Pre-Tax Income held by the Top 1%

— Top 1%

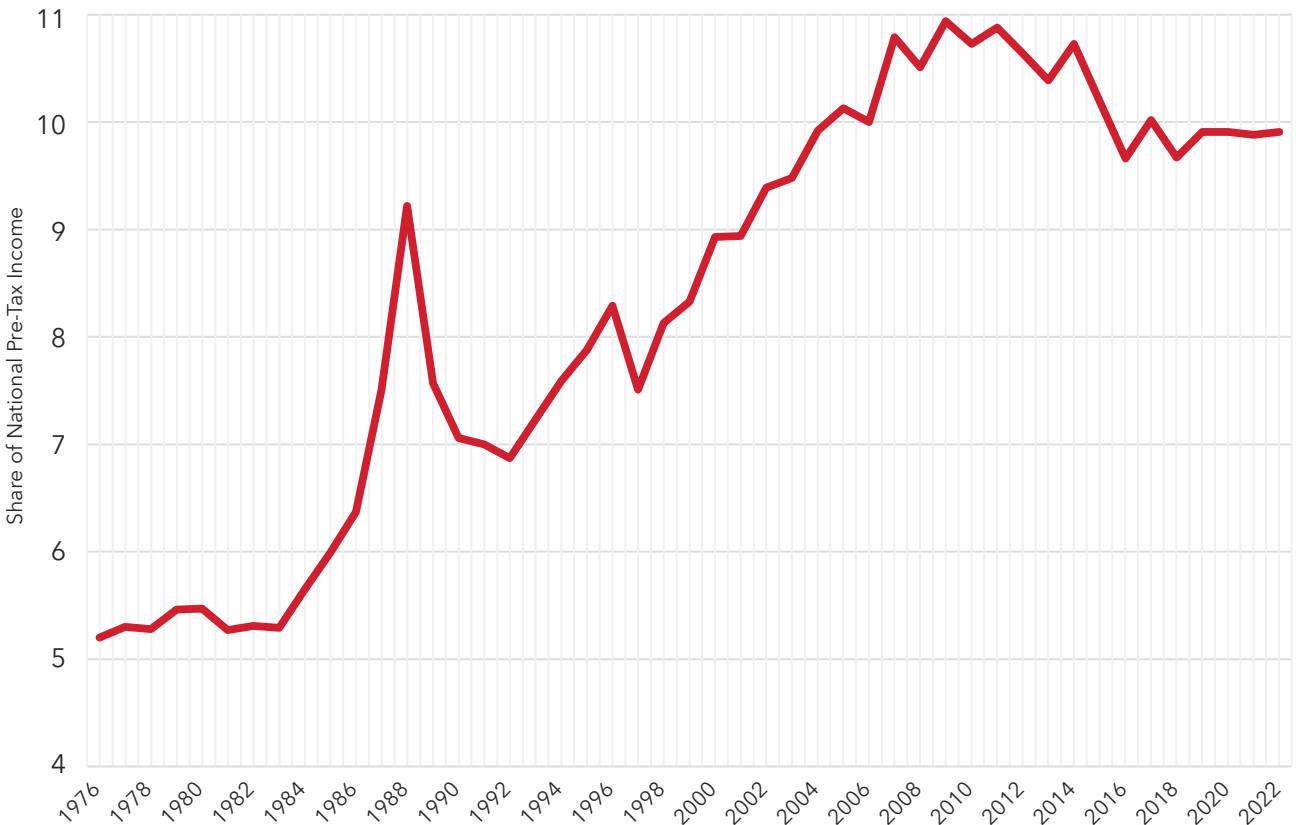
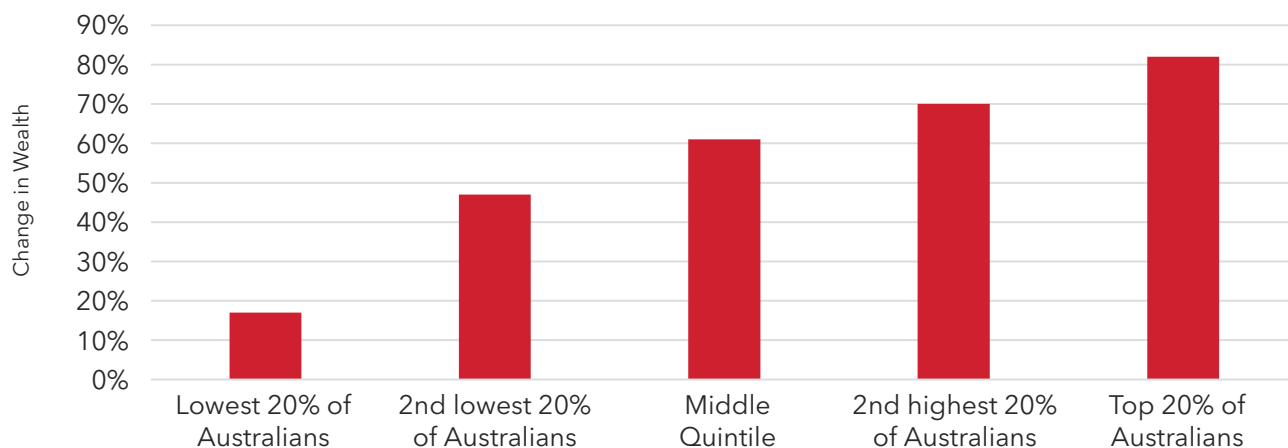


Figure 11:

## Change in Wealth Since 2003



As of January 2025, large sections of the Australian workforce report serious anxiety about the future of their livelihoods.

- 33.8% are concerned that their industry of work is shrinking.
- 27.4% are concerned that their employer will find someone who is willing to do their job for less money.
- 25.2% are concerned they will be replaced by someone overseas.
- 24.8% are concerned that they will be replaced by a machine.<sup>85</sup>
- 36.1% of Australians aged 18-44 find it difficult or very difficult to get by on their current income.<sup>86</sup>

The far-right does not respond to these anxieties by promising to abolish poverty, exploitation, or joblessness. They make no commitment to redistribute wealth, tax the rich, or secure better rights in the workplace.<sup>87</sup> Rather, as aforementioned, they promise that those who do not 'deserve' it will be spared the fate of destitution.

As for those who are already disadvantaged, the far-right calls them 'freeloaders who live off tax payments,' 'irresponsible and unproductive citizens.'<sup>88</sup> [Instead of structural transformation, they offer selective protection of 'their people.']

Declining social trust makes this argument resonant.<sup>89</sup> When people lose faith in the capacity of governments to meaningfully improve the general condition of society, they pursue protection for their particular in-group.

### On a sinking ship, most people's priority becomes finding a lifeboat.

- Vote shares for far-right parties increase by 30% after a financial crisis.<sup>90</sup>

All over the world, the far-right capitalises on the inequality crisis and its related ills:

- In Germany, far-right voters report 'problematic working conditions' and job dissatisfaction 'significantly more frequently' than the average worker.<sup>91</sup>
- In regional Queensland, many voters on lower incomes experienced declining living standards in the lead up to the 2016 Federal election. Booth-level analysis showed that these areas turned strongly towards One Nation.<sup>92</sup>

As previously described, the far-right builds support through manipulating voter identity. Rising inequality lubricates this process of identity reconstruction.

85. Biddle, "The Erosion of Hope," pp. 26-29.

86. Nicholas Biddle. "Hope, Hardship and Democratic Confidence: Social Wellbeing and Political Sentiment in Election-Year Australia. March/April 2025." Australian National University, School of Politics and International Relations. 17 April 2025, p. 11.

87. Although, in some cases, they may promote 'welfare chauvinism' which maintains social assistance programs for favoured sections of the working class while cutting back protections more broadly.

88. Daniel Hosang and Joseph Lowndes 'Parasites of Government,' p. 19; Reece Peck, Fox Populism: Branding Conservatism as Working Class, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 176.

89. Enggist, Matthias and Pingerra, Michael. 2022. "Radical Right Parties and their Welfare State Stances - Not So Blurry After All?" West European Politics, Volume 45, No. 1, p. 109.

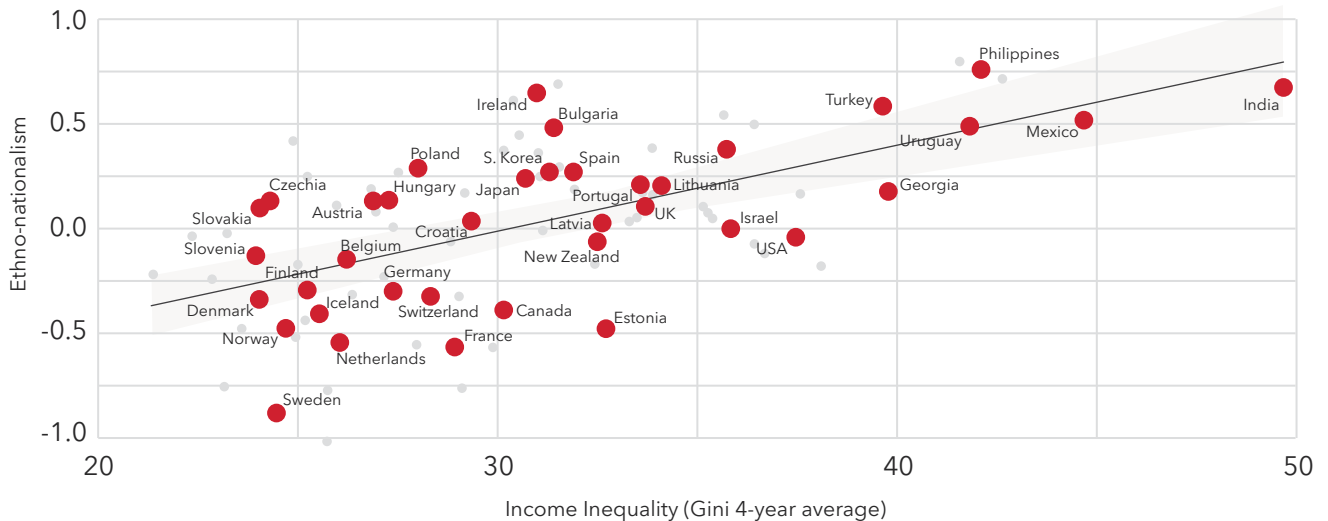
90. O'Connor, Nat. 2017. "Three Connections between Rising Economic Inequality and the Rise of Populism. Irish Studies in International Affairs, Volume 29, p. 33.

91. <https://www.boeckler.de/de/pressemitteilungen-2675-studie-leuchtet-anstieg-der-afd-wahlbereitschaft-aus-54087.htm>

92. Bourne, "One Nation Voters," p. 92.

Figure 12:

## Identity Disruption and Status Anxiety



Source: Lukk, Martin. 2024. "Politics of Boundary Consolidation: Income Inequality, Ethnonationalism and Radical-Right Voting." *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*. Volume 10, pp. 4-5. Data from 1995-2013 International Social Survey Programme National Identity Cross-Sections.

### As inequality increases, people become more aware of status differences and more concerned about their position in social hierarchies.

Inequality sharpens anxieties about one's self-worth relative to others.

Rising inequality is a status threat, and status threats motivate people to identify more strongly with ethnic, national or cultural in-groups so as to secure self-esteem and safety.<sup>93</sup>

In other words, inequality motivates changes on the identity dimension. It creates powerful incentives for people to identify with any privileged cultural in-groups that they are a part of.<sup>94</sup>

This is why a very unequal society is much more likely to report high degrees of ethnonationalism (see above).

This pressure is felt most acutely by the disadvantaged. Those on the losing side of rising inequality may feel a particular pull towards identifying with in-groups as compensation for the threat of increasing precarity.<sup>95</sup>

There is an active debate about whether the growth of far-right politics is driven by socioeconomic crisis or identity crisis. Over time, it appears that the most likely answer is **that the socioeconomic crisis is an identity crisis**. A clear example of this is provided in the 'crisis of masculinity,' so effectively exploited by far-right movements globally.

In a 2023 study of how blue-collar young men in Australia understand masculinity, **40.6% considered having a stable job as one of its most important attributes**.<sup>96</sup>

Breadwinner status is an economic role before it is a cultural one. Rising labour market inequalities puts that role out of reach for most young workers.

Today, even those who complete full technical and vocational training can experience periods of prolonged job insecurity and underemployment.<sup>97</sup> Precarious work conditions and the ever-increasing upskilling and re-credentialing requirements of the workforce have 'intensively fractured' the conventional transition to adulthood for young Australians.<sup>98</sup> Gone, for most, is the era of one job, one employer and one profession for life.

93. Lukk, Martin. 2024. "Politics of Boundary Consolidation: Income Inequality, Ethnonationalism and Radical-Right Voting." *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*. Volume 10, pp. 4-5.

94. Gugushvili, Alexi, Halikiopoulou, Daphne and Vlandas, Tim. "Downward Class Mobility and Far-Right Party Support in Western Europe." *Political Behaviour*, 2025, pp. 407.

95. Lukk, "Inequality and Ethnonationalism," p. 6.

96. Nilan, Pam et. Al. 2023. "Young Masculinities and Right-Wing Populism." *Youth*, Volume 3, p. 289.

97. *Ibid*, p. 291.

98. *Ibid*, p. 286.

Although women are graduating university at higher rates than men and no longer reliant, by and large, on male incomes in order to sustain themselves - it is insufficient to blame advances in gender equality for the crisis of masculinity. A much larger fragmentation of identity is at play, and it has a powerful economic component.

Gender equality does not, in and of itself, pose a status threat to men. If that was the case, Iceland would produce the highest rates of gender-based violence in the world.

The men who are most likely to report feeling as though masculinity is in crisis are those who are most disadvantageously positioned in the current labour market due to:

- Reduced demand for physical labour.
- Decline in heavy industry.
- Development of the service economy.
- Widespread upskilling requirements.<sup>99</sup>

Decisiveness, rationality and level-headedness are the foundation of classical Australian masculinity. It is not possible to be decisive, level-headed and rational in conditions of constant livelihood uncertainty.

In this sense, while the inequality crisis is **enacted** through the economy, it is often experienced through personal identity: specifically, a sense of being unable to live up to the demands of social roles and historical cultural expectations.



99. Standing, G. *The Precariat*; Bloomsbury: London, UK, 2011; Roberts, S. *Young Working-Class Men in Transition*. Routledge: London, UK, 2018.

## Unresponsive Government

The period between 1980 and 2020 has been characterised by a 'hollowing out' of representative democracy.<sup>100</sup>

In 1978, a one-unit shift in the public's left-right position was associated with mainstream parties moving in the same direction by roughly 0.6 points (in a sample including parties from across the democratic world). We can call this the 'public opinion responsiveness coefficient.'<sup>101</sup>

From the 1990s, the coefficient score began to fall. By 2010, **the public opinion responsiveness coefficient reached 'essentially zero.'**<sup>102</sup>

This means that, across the democratic world, mainstream political parties have stopped reacting to changes in public opinion - at least at the level of ideology.

The far-right asserts that democracy has been fatally hollowed out. This is an overstatement, but not a hallucination.

## Causes of Non-Responsiveness

The causes of declining democratic responsiveness are interconnected and complex.

### The concentration of media ownership

This has granted agenda-setting power to an ever shrinking group of individuals and outlets.<sup>103</sup> The public sphere has grown less diverse with the systematic crowding-out of community media. In 2020 alone, 114 local news outlets were closed across Australia.<sup>104</sup>

### Significant increases in income inequality

Significant increases in income inequality have also heightened the non-responsiveness of governments, granting business leaders and multinationals greater power to influence party programs regardless of public opinion.

### Globalisation and financialisation

Globalisation and financialisation has allowed capital owners much greater freedom to withdraw from (and thus destabilise) domestic markets in response to disfavoured policies.<sup>105</sup> The deregulation of financial services has increased the mobility of capital, driving a race to the bottom on the effective rate of capital taxation since the mid-1980s.

### The decline of social organisations

The decline of social organisations which previously served to counterbalance the influence of business and finance: unions, volunteer groups, civil society organisations, charities, service clubs and faith-based congregations.

### The cartelisation, standardisation and professionalisation

The cartelisation, standardisation and professionalisation of major political parties, in which mass participation has been steadily replaced by technocratic and centralised management. Today, internal positions are more dominated by professionals without working-class lived history. This issue is exacerbated by the relative ease with which corporate actors can access politicians and party-operatives.

100. O Nuallian and Byers, "Building a Trade Union Response," p. 17.

101. Ferland, et. Al. 2025. "Party Responsiveness over time: From left-right to issue specific dimensions." Party Politics, Volume 31, Issue 4, pp. 755-759.

102. Ibid, p. 4.

103. Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, 'Media Diversity in Australia,' Submission to the Inquiry on Media Diversity, 11 December 2020, p. 4.

104. Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, "Inquiry into Australia's Regional Newspapers," Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communication and the Arts, 28 Jan 2022.

105. Planck, Max. 1999. "The Viability of Advanced Welfare States in the International Economy: Vulnerabilities and Options," Institute for the Study of Societies, Cologne. Working Paper, No. 99/9.

Together, these forces have resulted in democratic governments becoming more removed from the sentiments of the public and especially the working class.

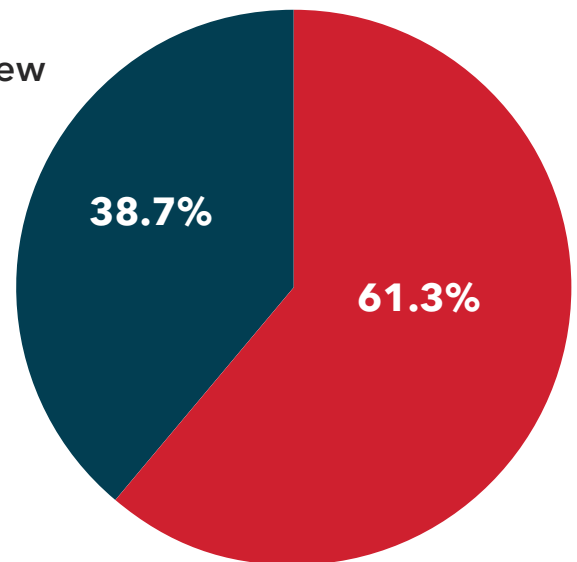
Workers have reciprocated this decline in responsiveness from their governments. **With politics paying less attention to workers, workers are paying less attention to politics.** Today, almost 7 in 10 Australian deliberately avoid engaging with the news.<sup>106</sup>

Notably, the loss of trust and engagement, has also occurred consistently across political groups - with left-wing, right-wing and centrist Australians all indicating the same level of mistrust in mainstream media within a few percentage points.<sup>107</sup>

Figure 13:

**“The Government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves.”**

■ Yes  
■ No

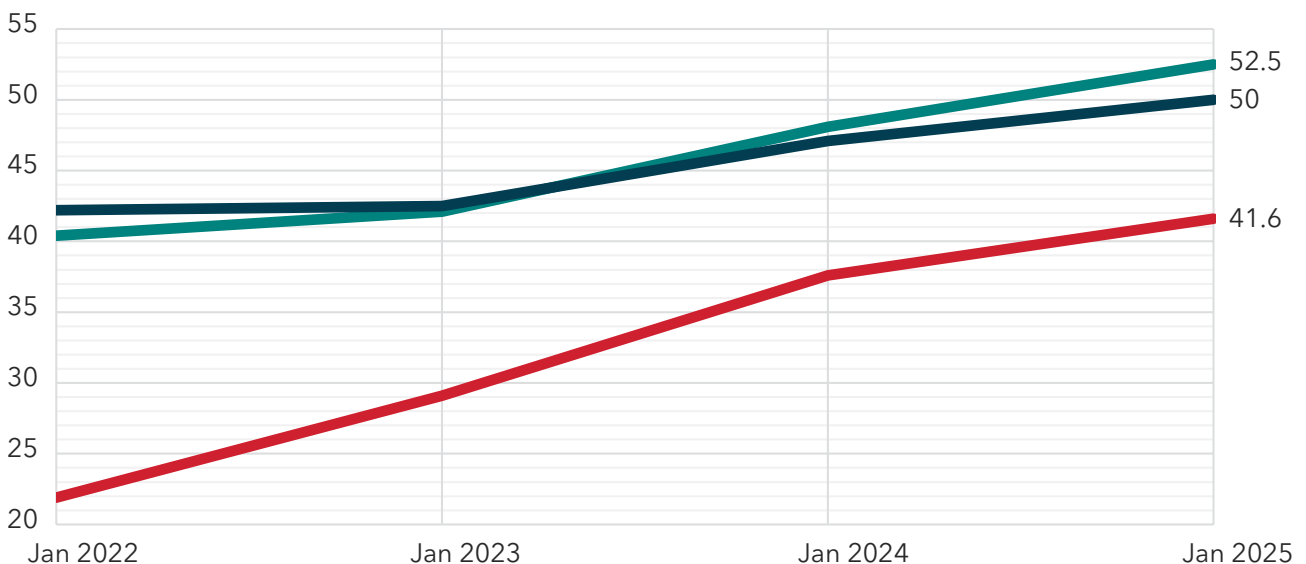


Source: Biddle, Nicholas. “Erosion of Hope: Social and financial wellbeing and the relationship with political attitudes. January/February 2025.” *Australian National University: School of Politics and International Relations.*

Figure 14:

**Reported Level of Mistrust**

— The Judiciary    — The Federal Government  
— The Parliament



Source: Biddle, Nicholas. “Erosion of Hope: Social and financial wellbeing and the relationship with political attitudes. January/February 2025.” *Australian National University: School of Politics and International Relations.*

106. Park, S., McGuinness, K., Fisher, C., Lee, J., McCallum, K., Cai, X., Chatskin, M., Mardjianto, L. & Yao, P. (2023). *Digital News Report: Australia 2023*. Canberra: News and Media Research Centre, University of Canberra, p. 12.

107. *Ibid*, p. 111

J.W. Muller is a foundational expert on the study of populism. He notes that populist movements often arise as a confused corrective force responding to technocratic rule:

***“The drunken guest at a dinner party that blurts out occasionally important truths... An illiberal democratic response to undemocratic liberalism.”***<sup>108</sup>

Unresponsive government gives far-right politics and other forms of populism real political currency.<sup>109</sup> The far-right feeds on the decay of participatory institutions. It is not an external threat to the status quo, but a direct output of a system that does not live up to its stated principles.

**The far-right is not an outside threat to our increasingly unequal democratic system: it is its inevitable outcome.**

Voters perceive and recognise the increasing distance between the positions of political leaders and their own views. This is especially true regarding economic policy and income inequality issues. As one unemployed 23-year-old said in a survey of blue-collar Australian men:

***“[the] rift between Government and the people whom they are voted to represent has grown wider.”***<sup>110</sup>

***“The working everyday man is just disposable.”***<sup>111</sup>



108. Muller, Jan-Werner. 2016. What is Populism? University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, p. 11.

109. Guttman, W., 1981. The German Social Democratic Party 1875-1933. 1st ed. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, p. 329, p. 322.

110. Nilan, “Young Masculinities,” p. 293.

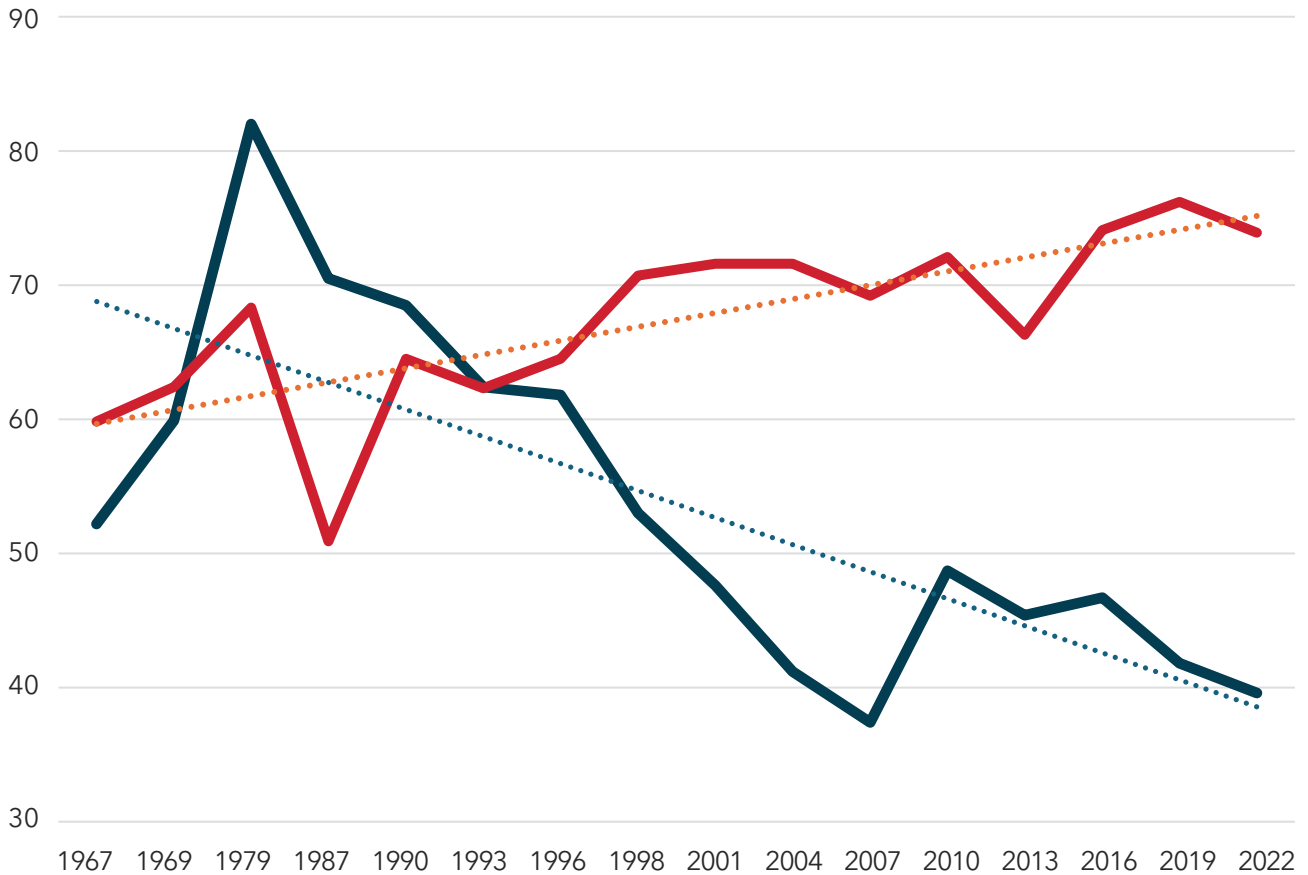
111. Ibid, (Cert III/IV Trade Qualification, Age 29, unemployed).

## Political Supply Deficits<sup>112</sup>

Figure 15:

### Share of Australians who believe Unions vs Big Business have too much power

— Unions have too much power  
— Big business has too much power



Workers broadly want to see governments take strong action against rising inequality and unchecked corporate power. Public appetite for economic redistribution has grown steadily over the preceding decades, but the 'supply' of politicians willing to implement it has fallen. We can call this a political supply deficit.<sup>113</sup>

Voters accurately estimate the degree of convergence (commonality) or divergence

(difference) between parties from election to election.<sup>114</sup> If a party moves to the right on economic policy, working class voters notice this.

In the period between 1980-2010, centre-left parties around the world undertook 'a pronounced shift towards the right' on economics.<sup>115</sup> Meanwhile, since 1980, ~10% of national income shares have moved from labour to capital in advanced economies.

112. Australian Election Study, ANU, School of Politics and International Relations.

113. See: Figure 11.

114. Evans and Tilley, "the Depoliticization of Inequality," p. 970.

115. Polacko, "The Rightward Shift," p. 665.

As noted by the British Trade Union Congress, mainstream parties around the world converged in support of 'a market-driven economic model,' which included:<sup>116</sup>

- Support for labour market flexibilisation (where non-standard or casualised work arrangements are facilitated and normalised).
  - Cuts to welfare payments and social assistance.
  - The prohibition of pro-worker and pro-union industrial practices such as bargaining fees, closed shops, maintenance of membership agreements, sector-wide bargaining, solidarity strikes, and preferential hiring clauses.
  - The privatisation of public utilities and services including transport, water, electricity, aviation, rail, banking, telecommunications and social services.
  - Reduced taxation on capital, wealth, inheritances and profits in favour of taxes on consumption or incomes that disproportionately impact workers and consumers.
- In many advanced capitalist economies today, **high-net worth individuals 'effectively pay less tax than middle-class workers.'**<sup>117</sup>
- The introduction and/or intensification of means-testing regimes for welfare payments.
  - Moves toward self-regulation, voluntary guidelines, assumed compliance and non-enforcement in the fields of corporate, technology, financial and workplace health and safety regulation.

Rising inequality should heighten worker's receptiveness to progressive politics. The greater the level of inequality, the more the median voter has to gain from income and wealth redistribution.<sup>118</sup> However:

### **Progressive parties cannot benefit from rising inequality when their policy programs are not seen as pro-worker.<sup>119</sup>**

In these cases, rising inequality may instead benefit the far-right.

Voters can accurately assess changes on party positioning regarding economic issues, especially on welfare spending and social assistance.<sup>120</sup> Working-class voters notice when left-wing parties stop emphasising their interests.

When progressives do not signal a willingness to stand up to monopolists, magnates and multinationals, they risk being viewed as complicit in falling living standards.<sup>121</sup>

### **For this reason, a centre-left party moving rightwards on economic policy by two standard deviations is associated with, on average, a 2% decline in its vote share.<sup>122</sup>**

Furthermore, the number of workers votes lost when progressive parties make this rightward shift is greater than the sum of any pro-market voters they gain.<sup>123</sup> When social democratic parties de-emphasise workers' interests, their 'base' becomes less likely to vote for them at each subsequent election.<sup>124</sup>

For many centre-left parties, the price of rightward drift has been existential.

There has been a global collapse in average vote-shares for social democratic parties from 40% in the 1990s to roughly 20% today.

116. O'Nuallian and Byers, "Building a Trade Union Response," p. 13.

117. Finer, Lauri and Pankka, Niko. 2025. "Tackling Tax Avoidance: Reforming Capital Income Taxation in the EU," European Foundation for Progressive Studies and Kalevi Sorsa Foundation, p. 15.

118. Polacko, "The Rightward Shift," p. 669.

119. Ibid, p. 678.

120. Evans and Tilley, "the Depoliticization of Inequality," p. 970.

121. O'Nuallian and Byers, "Building a Trade Union Response," p. 17.

122. Polacko, "The Rightward Shift," p. 679.

123. Polk, Jonothan and Karreth, Johannes. 2024. "Voter Responses to Social Democratic Ideological Moderation after the Third Way," in Beyond Social Democracy: The Transformation of the Left in emerging Knowledge Societies. Eds. Hausermann, S and Kitschelt, H. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 306.

124. Polk and Karreth, "Voter Responses," pp. 279-313.

## Social democratic vote share and Gini Index 1965-2019

Figure 16: Social democratic vote share in advanced democracies

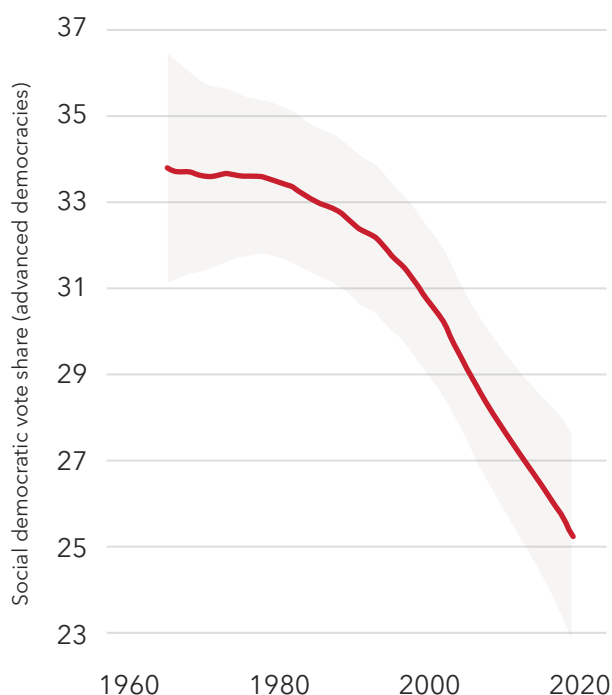
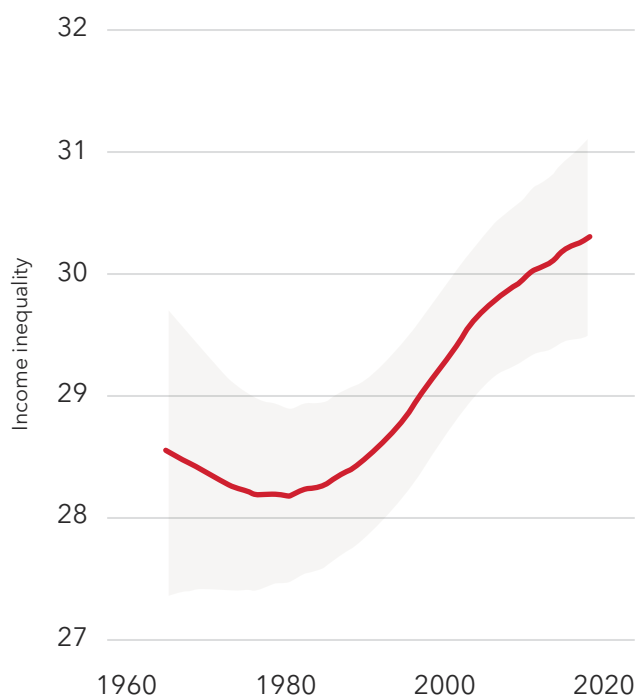


Figure 17: Income inequality



Source: Polacko, Matthew. 2022. "The Rightward Shift and Electoral Decline of Social Democratic Parties under increasing inequality." *West European Politics*, Volume 45, No. 4, p. 676.

The move away from explicitly pro-worker economics in the period 1980-2020 made working class communities much more open to alternative political options. The Global Financial Crisis of 2008 (GFC) and the COVID-19 pandemic represented, in many countries, a missed opportunity to correct this trend.<sup>127</sup>

The GFC was widely understood, correctly, as the result of an increasingly hazardous deregulation drive in financial markets. Analysis of party manifestos shows that, all over the world, centre-left parties responded to it either by **'clinging' to the pro-market consensus** or by deviating from it only temporarily.<sup>128</sup>

Since 2008, the bleeding of workers' votes to the far-right has only accelerated.<sup>129</sup>

Furthermore, the pro-market consensus also had transformative flow-on effects on salience and identity: the depoliticisation of the economy has made cultural issues the primary point of differentiation in elections - presenting an enormous opportunity for the far-right to activate what had hitherto been latent concerns about national identity, borders and migration.

Australia has been insulated from some of the worst of these trends. The Australian centre-left's continued connection with the union movement has seen it maintain anti-inequality policies and hold more working-class voters than other comparable parties.

127. Bandau, "The Crisis of Social Democracy," p. 189.

128. Bjorn, Bremer. 2017. "The Missing Left? Economic Crisis and the Programmatic Response of Social Democratic Parties in Europe." *Party Politics*, Volume 24, No. 1, p. 20.

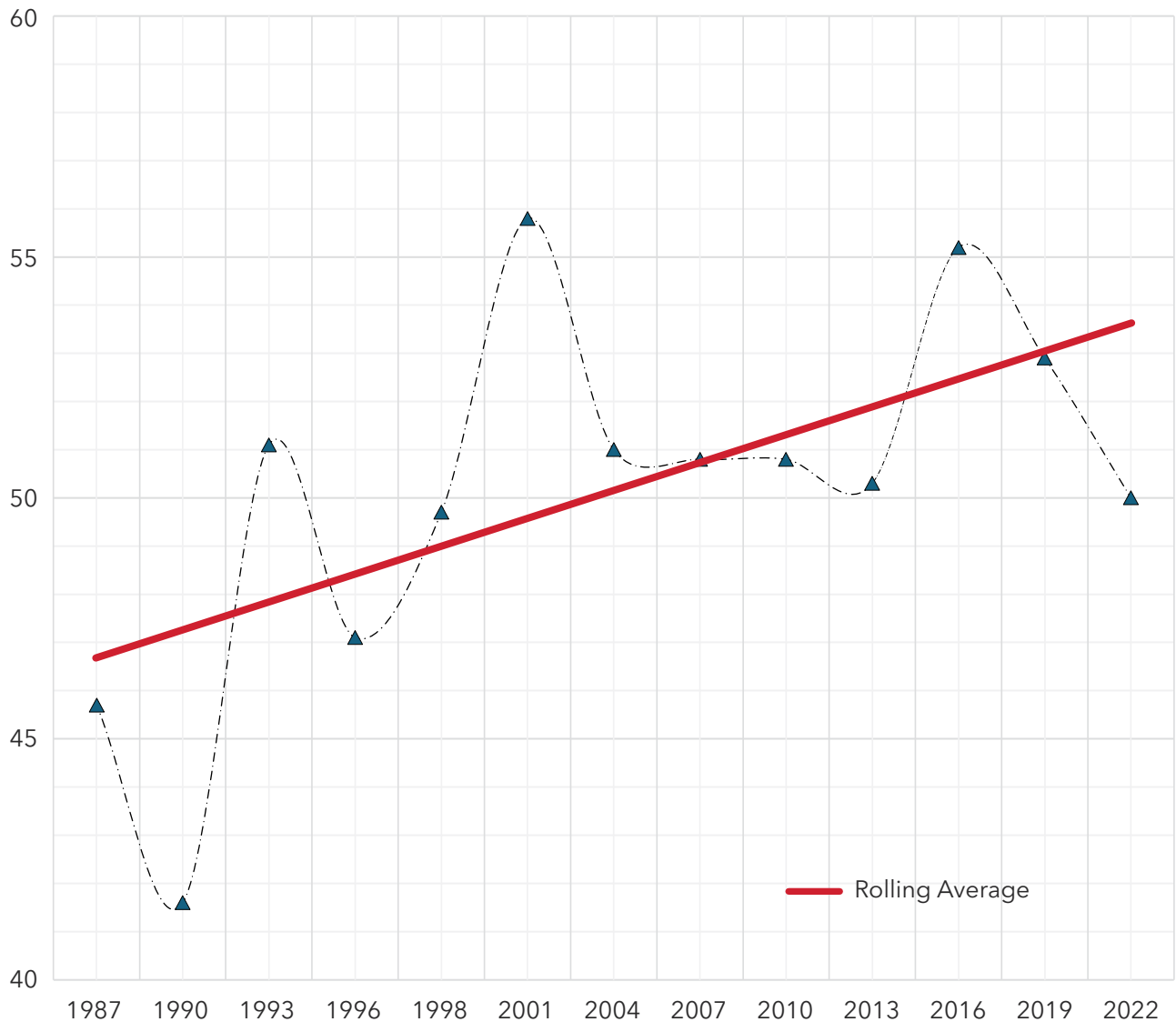
129. Polk and Karreth, "Voter Responses," p. 283.

However, Australia is not immune to the general tendencies described above. The share of voters who support redistributing incomes and wealth has grown to historic levels – and amongst left-leaning voters, demand for strong action on inequality continues to reach new heights:<sup>130</sup>

<b>9%</b> of Labor voters trust large corporations to act in the public interest	<b>11%</b> of Labor voters trust the mainstream media to report accurately (a share lower than Coalition and Greens voters).	<b>16%</b> of Labor voters believe 'our political system is working well.'
<b>74%</b> of Labor voters support an increase in taxes paid by large corporations.	<b>64%</b> of Labor voters support cracking down on tax evasion by wealthy families.	<b>80%+</b> of Australians blame supermarkets and energy companies for the cost-of-living crisis. <sup>131</sup>
		<b>93%</b> of Australians support higher wage growth. <sup>132</sup>

### % of Australians who believe income and wealth should be redistributed (Total) Figure 18

Source: The Australian Election Study, School of Politics and International Relations, Australian National University Centre for Social Research and Methods. Available at: [australianelectionstudy.org/](http://australianelectionstudy.org/)



130. Essential Report, March 18, 2025.

131. Heap, Lisa. 2025. "Doing it Tough: How Australians are experiencing the cost of living crisis." Centre for Future Work, The Australia Institute.

132. Ibid

## Tripolar Political Contests

*"The left and the radical right compete for votes from the working class. Depending on whether economic or cultural issues are more salient ... workers either choose the left or the radical right."<sup>133</sup>*

The increased salience of cultural and social issues in Western mass politics is 'a key factor' driving this process.<sup>134</sup>

As of the 2025 Federal Election, Australia has a 'bi-polar' political culture - meaning that, although many candidates/parties seek representation, the contest for government is ultimately fought between a centre-left and a centre-right bloc.

When the far-right gains enough support, it reshapes the basic structure of the political system: from a bipolar (left v right) contest to a tripolar (left v centre-right v far-right contest).

Bipolar contests have long been standard in many democracies around the world. In recent decades, however, they have broken down and been replaced by a tripolar configuration.

A political system can be said to be tripolar if this third pole achieves approximately 15% of the national vote. An example of the move to tripolar competition is provided below: depicting the French National Assembly in 2007 compared to 2024:

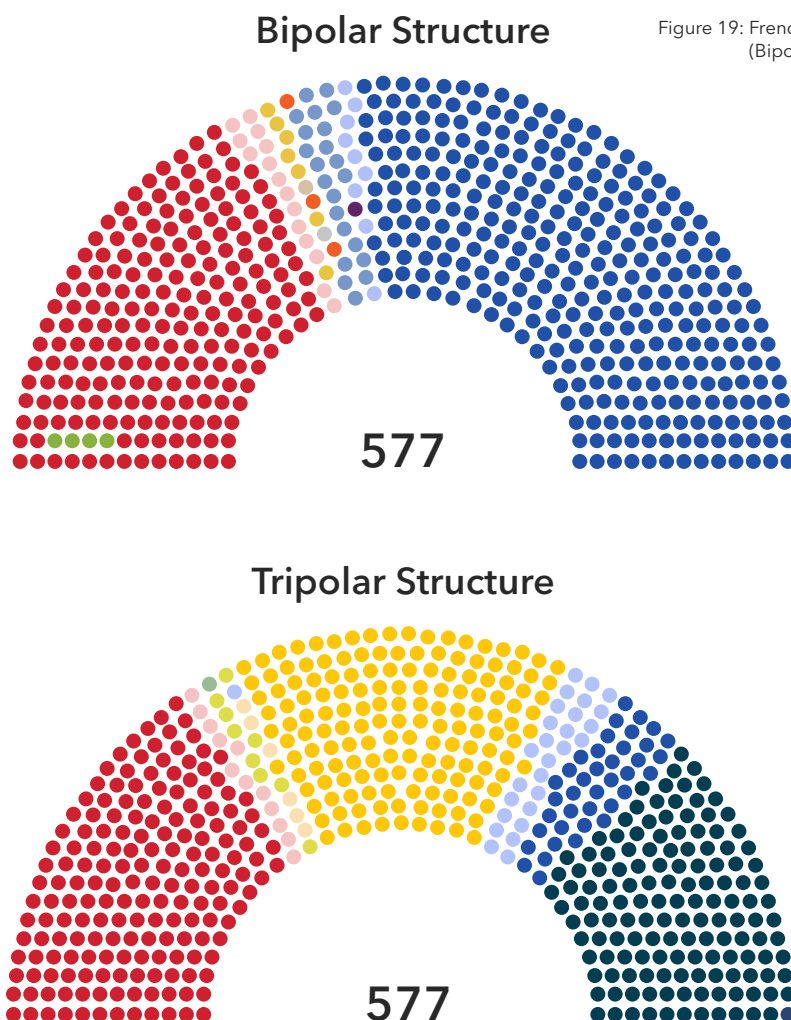


Figure 19: French National Assembly in 2007 (Bipolar) and 2024 (Tripolar)

The cause for the rise of tripolarity is found in shifts between how different types of workers are voting and a decline in 'class voting' more generally.

133. Oesch and Rennwald, "New Tripolar Space," p. 804.

134. Hausermann et. Al. 2020. "How Labor Market Inequality Transforms Mass Politics." Political Science Research and Methods, Volume 8, p. 348.

## Class Voting and The Bipolar System

**Class Voting: The extent to which an individual's economic class determines how they will vote.**

For most of the 20th century, class voting in Australia was very strong. The relative economic position of a community could reliably predict how it voted. Class voting was stronger in Australia relative to other comparable democracies and underpinned the country's two-bloc system for over a century.<sup>135</sup>

### The Origins of Class Voting

In many advanced economies, class voting and political bipolarity began with the industrial revolution, which massively increased the urban working class population and shattered previous identity/status distinctions between workers.

As workers moved into the cities, they experienced common conditions of exploitation and, from this, developed consciousness of their shared interests. Workers' parties formed in the late 19th century to represent these interests.

Lower income workers, private sector workers, renters, minority groups, insecure workers and public sector workers formed the political base of the left. While managers, landowners, established professionals, large employers and business leaders formed the political base of the centre-right.

The middle class, women and small entrepreneurs, meanwhile, were competed over by both political blocs.

This class-based bipolar system structured Australian politics for over a century (and many other advanced democracies too).

As party bases were determined by economic status, so too were party policies.

Elections were fought primarily over economic issues: over how the productive gains of society should be distributed - what we can call **'distributive questions'**- capitalism vs socialism, state-intervention vs free markets, regulation vs de-regulation, workers' rights vs managerial freedom. Cultural conservatives and cultural liberals, meanwhile, were present in both blocs.<sup>136</sup>

**Political competition, in this era, essentially operated as 'the democratic instantiation of class struggle.'**<sup>137</sup>

When class was the organising variable for political life and elections were fought primarily over distributive questions, there was simply no room in the political landscape for the far-right: whose views on economic policy are largely incoherent.<sup>138</sup>

Only with the rising salience of cultural issues and the decline of class voting has it become possible for the far-right to gain prominence.

No worker who sees themselves as a worker first would support a party that opposes workers' rights. First, they need to be made to identify primarily as 'white,' 'traditional,' 'Australian-born.'



135. Bourne, Glenda. 2021. Understanding the relationship between income and voting: Are One Nation voters influenced by economic factors? Master of Philosophy, The University of Notre Dame Australia, p. 55.

136. There are exceptions to this. Even at the height of class voting (1880-1940) there were still some elections which were defined by cultural issues and not distributive ones, for example conscription played an enormous role in Australia's 1917 Federal Election.

137. Lipset, Seymour Martin. 1960. Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, p. 221.

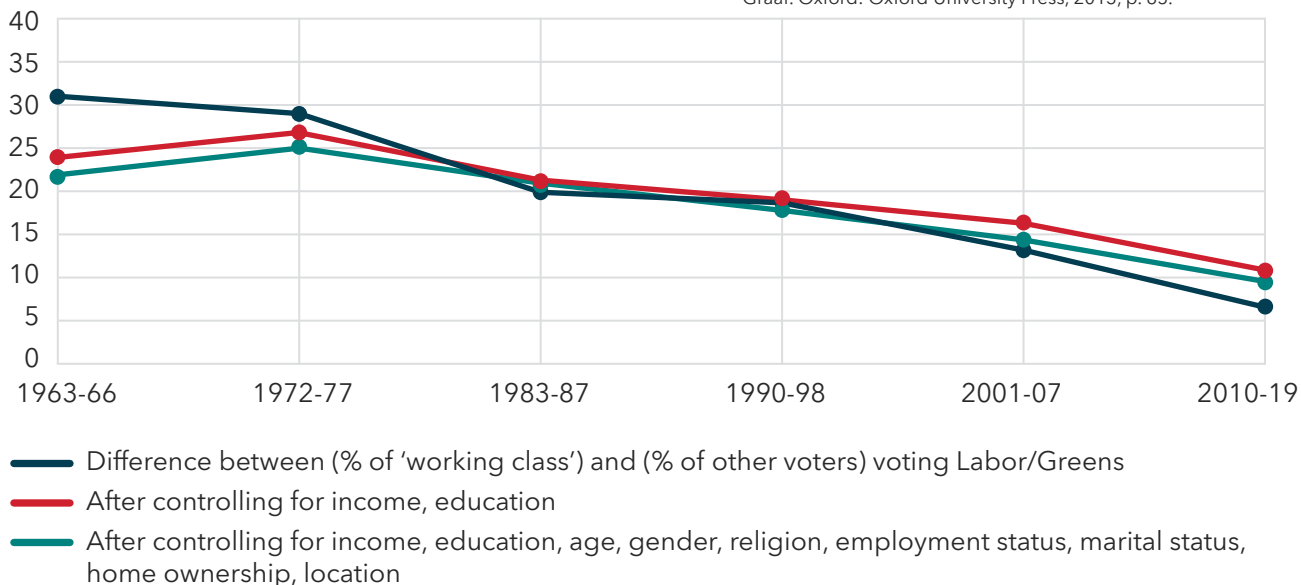
138. Rovny, Jan. 2013. "Where do radical right parties stand? Position blurring in multidimensional competition." Central European Political Science Review, Volume 5, No. 1, pp. 15-20.

## The Rise of Tripolarity

Figure 20:

### Decline in Australian Class Voting

Source: Marks, Gary N. 2013. "Accounting for the Declining Impact of Class on the Vote in Australia" in *Political Choice Matters: Explaining the Strength of Class and Religious Cleavages in Cross-National Perspectives*, ed. Geoffrey Evans & Nan Dirk Graaf. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 85.



As demonstrated in Part 1, voters will polarise based on whatever issues are salient in a given election.

When economic inequality is focal, workers will support parties which seek to address it. Even if some are, for example, very concerned about border security, this will not necessarily determine their ultimate voting decision.

As class interest, inequality and workers' rights have lost salience, voters have polarised over new issues where the far-right has an advantage.

***"The radical right gains the support of the working class not thanks to its free-market programme, but despite it."***<sup>139</sup>

Today, voters are increasingly mobilised via identity rather than distributive issues.<sup>140</sup> This is because class voting and class consciousness are not inevitable. They are 'like a tropical exotic plant' that can only arise under certain conditions. When the left fails to enable those conditions through unions, class identity dissipates.<sup>141</sup>

**The weakening of class voting is a necessary condition for the rise of the far-right.**



139. Oesch and Rennwald, "New Tripolar Space," pp. 805-7.

140. Polacko, "the Rightward Shift," p. 667.

141. Hechter, "From Class to Culture," p. 406.

The decline of class voting has a litany of causes. For our purposes, we can identify three key factors, and a range of secondary causes that are also worth noting:

## Primary Factors

1. Efforts by the centre-right to initiate culture wars which reduce the salience of class and distributive questions.
2. Efforts by the left to grow support amongst professionals and labour-market insiders by de-emphasising worker-centred, redistributive economics.<sup>142</sup>
3. Declining trade union membership.

## Secondary Factors

1. Weakening of working-class identity due to reduced class segregation of neighbourhoods and higher rates of interclass marriage and interclass contact.<sup>143</sup>
2. Structural decline in industries with a history of working-class militancy and trade union organisation.
3. A general decline in mass mobilisation/participation for all class groups.
4. Increased social mobility, affluence and educational opportunities for workers in the mid-to-late 20th century.
5. The expansion of the welfare state which reduced the uncertainty and hardship which unions formed in response to.
6. The rise of individualist values and the transformation of workers into entrepreneurs through self-employment and independent contracting.
7. The emergence of new postmaterialist values that cross-cut class.
8. The increased salience of social and cultural issues in Western politics generally over those related to class.

To this day, a person's class position still determines how much they disapprove of inequality.<sup>144</sup> This is true even when controlling for education, religion, party affiliation, age, gender, and marital status.<sup>145</sup>

- This is confirmed by a longitudinal study of public opinion data in Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, Czechia, France, Germany, Japan, Norway, Philippines, Portugal, Slovenia, Russia, Spain, UK and the United States.

However, this doesn't have the same effect on elections as it used to because distributive questions are no longer chiefly salient. This is why workers who support union rights and worker protections might choose to vote for the far-right: because, for them, the salience of immigration might eclipse that of industrial relations.

A far-right party with policies opposed to workers' economic interests can suddenly win large shares of their votes, because workers are no longer voting as workers, but according to regional, racial, cultural, sexual, religious or familial identity.<sup>146</sup>

In 21st century advanced democracies, centre-right parties perform very well with large employers, managers and liberal professionals. Left parties, meanwhile, draw strong support from public sector workers, cultural minorities, and professionals in the media, culture, arts, and education industries.<sup>147</sup>

It is among **production workers, service workers and small business owners** where political loyalties have become most fluid. These communities are more exposed to economic shocks and consequently exhibit outsized discontent with the status quo.

**Wherever the far-right has achieved tripolarity, it has done so by successfully winning over significant portions of these occupational groups.**

142. See: Przeworski, Adam and Sprague, John. 1986. Paper Stones: A History of Electoral Socialism, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 53-55.

143. Hechter, "From Class to Culture," p. 408.

144. Haddon, "How Class Shapes Critical Resentment Toward Inequality: The Competing Forces of Stratification and Politics." International Journal of Sociology, Volume 49, (2019): p. 258.

145. Ibid, p. 251.

146. We can describe this as a shift from class consciousness to spontaneous consciousness, Oesch, "Explaining Workers' Support," p. 353.

147. Oesch and Rennwald, "New Tripolar Space," pp. 805-7

Once a political structure adopts a tripolar form, it becomes very hard to reverse. This is because tripolarity perverts the occupational make-up of the other political blocs - especially the left. See below:

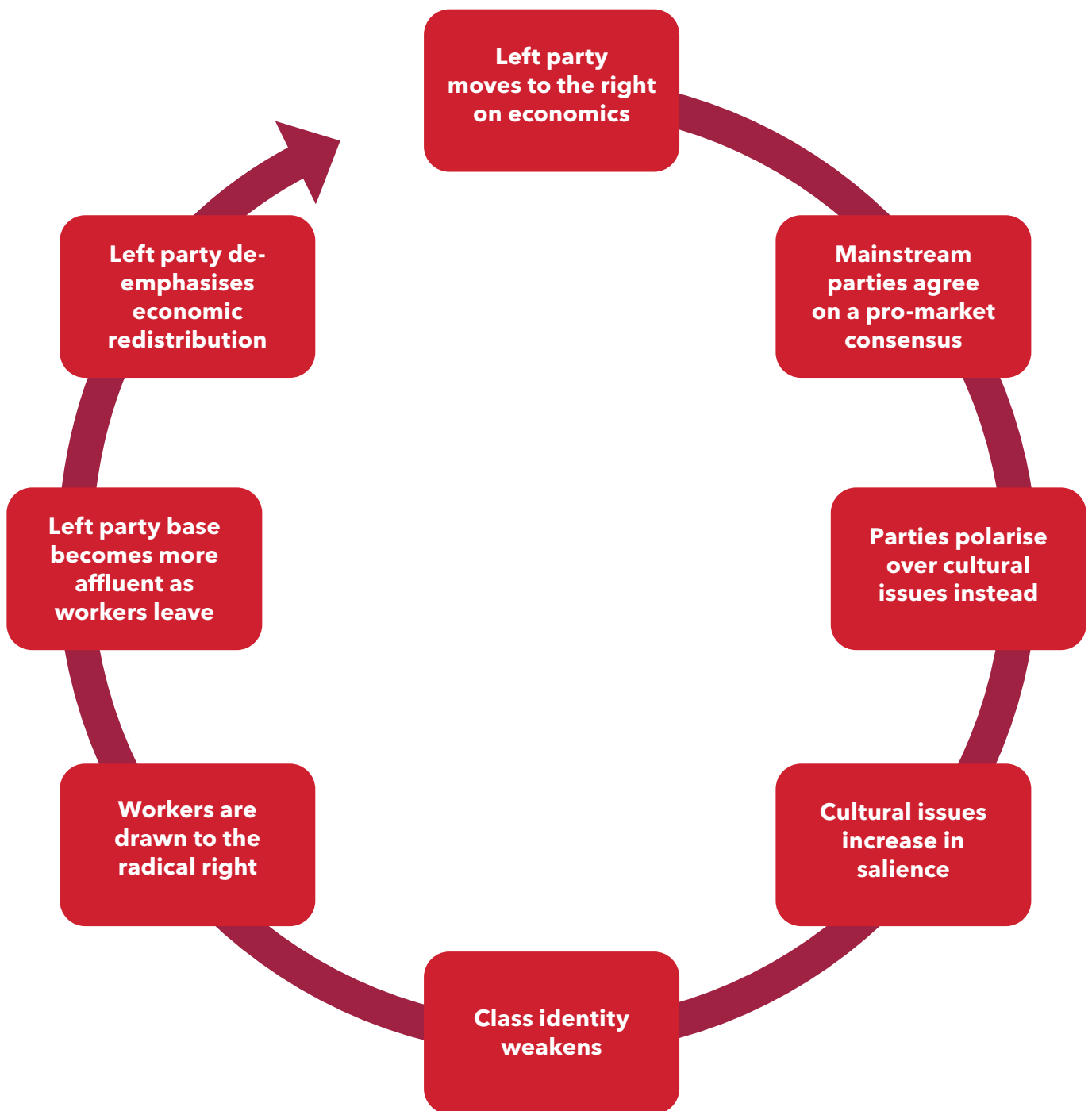


Figure 21: The Emergence of Tripolarity and the Decline of Class Voting

This process is not merely theoretical and can be observed in electoral data. Once the far-right achieved tripolar status in Denmark, Norway and Switzerland, the centre-right and the left both lost vote shares.<sup>148</sup> However, although the centre-right suffered more losses, it suffered these homogeneously across its base. For the left, **losses were concentrated strongly amongst production workers.**

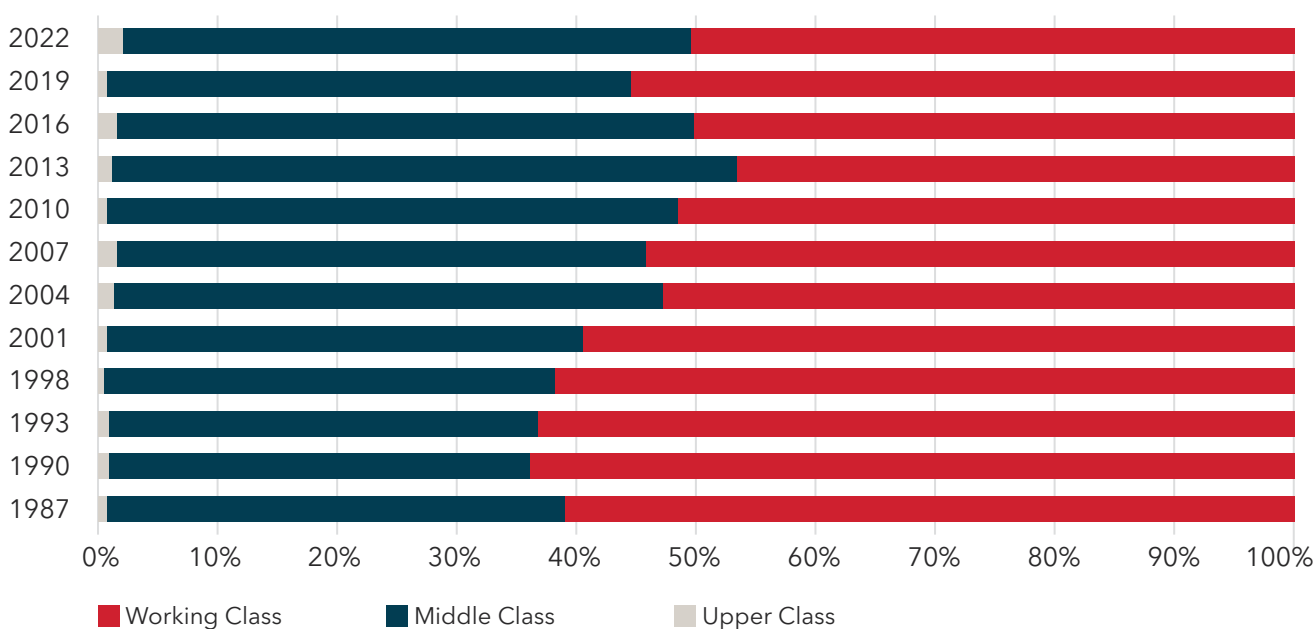
The remaining base of left-wing voters, therefore, were more likely to be affluent. This gradually shifts the priorities and organisational make-up of left parties towards affluent voters, further alienating workers and increasing the appeal of the far-right.

In many democracies, tripolarity represents a self-perpetuating cycle: as party bases determined by class, party policies cease to reflect differences in class interest, causing cultural issues to gain salience and class voting to dilute even further.

Without policies which emphasise differences in class interest, class position may eventually stop being relevant to voter choice altogether: and far-right billionaires can rake in millions of workers' votes.<sup>149</sup> To a much lesser degree than elsewhere, we can see the dilution of class voting in the Australian Labor Party's support base from 1987-2022 (see next page).

Figure 22: Class Composition of ALP voters. Australian Election Study. Class based on self-report.<sup>150</sup>

## Class Composition of ALP Voters 1987-2022



Source: The Australian Election Study. *School of Politics and International Relations*. Australian National University Centre for Social Research and Methods. Available at: <https://australianelectionstudy.org/>

In many ways, John Howard paved the way for the decline in class voting in Australia, using culture wars to detach working class communities from the left and reduce the salience of distributive questions.<sup>151</sup> Despite his 1996 Workplace Relations Act, which devastated workers' ability to organise and strike, his cultural politics drew increasing support from working class communities disenchanted with Labor's support for globalisation and neoliberal reform.<sup>152</sup>

In the years since Howard, class voting in Australia has weakened further. Working class Australians no longer vote for left-wing parties in the same overwhelming numbers as they used to, while higher-income professionals have an increased presence on the progressive centre-left. In seats with many blue-collar workers, the far-right has enjoyed disproportionate support over the last two Federal elections (see below).

148. Oesch and Rennwald, "New Tripolar Space," p. 802.

149. Enggist, Matthias and Pingerra, Michael. 2022. "Radical Right Parties and their Welfare State Stances - Not So Blurry After All?" *West European Politics*, Volume 45, No. 1, pp. 104-109.

■ Left  
■ Radical Right  
■ Centre Right

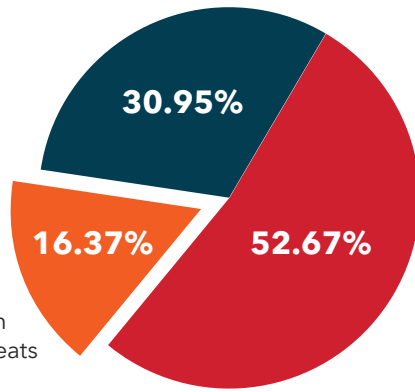


Figure 23: Tripolar vote share in heavily blue-collar seats (Federal 2025)

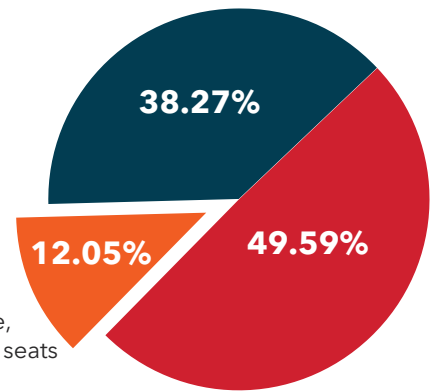


Figure 24: Tripolar vote share, average across all seats (Federal 2025)

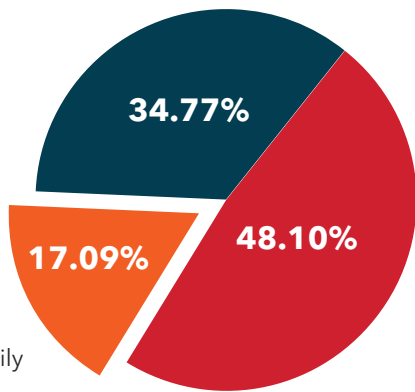


Figure 25: Tripolar vote share average across heavily blue-collar seats (Federal 2022)

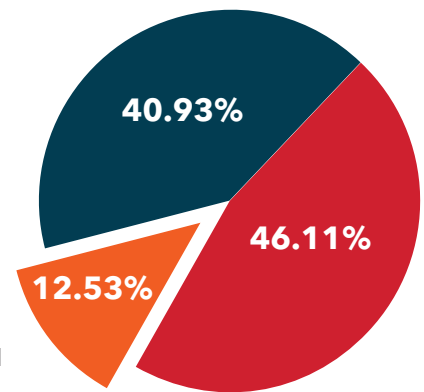


Figure 26: Tripolar vote share in all seats (Federal 2022)

## Social Justice Politics and New Left Progressives

The success of the far-right can be interpreted as 'the mirror image of, and counterreaction to' the ascent of new green-left-progressive parties that emphasise cultural politics and tend to be directed by sociocultural professionals rather than organised workers.<sup>153</sup>

It has been argued that workers have withdrawn from the left due to the rise of these movements and their support for social justice, gender equality, queer rights, anti-racism and multiculturalism.

This is misleading. **It is not that workers oppose social justice politics, but that social justice gained salience at the very same time that distributive questions were de-emphasised.**

The working class today is made up of millions of women, migrants, queer people, religious and cultural minorities, and other diverse groups. In many advanced economies, migrants form up to a quarter of the workforce. Service workers are majority women.<sup>154</sup>

The detachment of working-class communities from the political left cannot be dismissed as a reaction to cultural tolerance. Much greater significance should instead be assigned to the rightward drift of left parties, and the decades of attacks on working class institutions: above all, the decimation of the union movement.

151. Bourne, "One Nation Voters," p. 56.

152. A key factor in the defeat of the Keating Government in 1996 was backlash from manual working-class voters. See: Lavelle, Ashley. 2010. "The Ties that Unwind? Social Democratic Parties and Unions in Australia and Britain." *Labour History*, No. 98 (May 2010), p. 60.

153. Abou-Chadi, "Left Behind by the Working Class," p. 9.

154. Abou-Chadi, "Left Behind by the Working Class," p. 12.

Figure 27

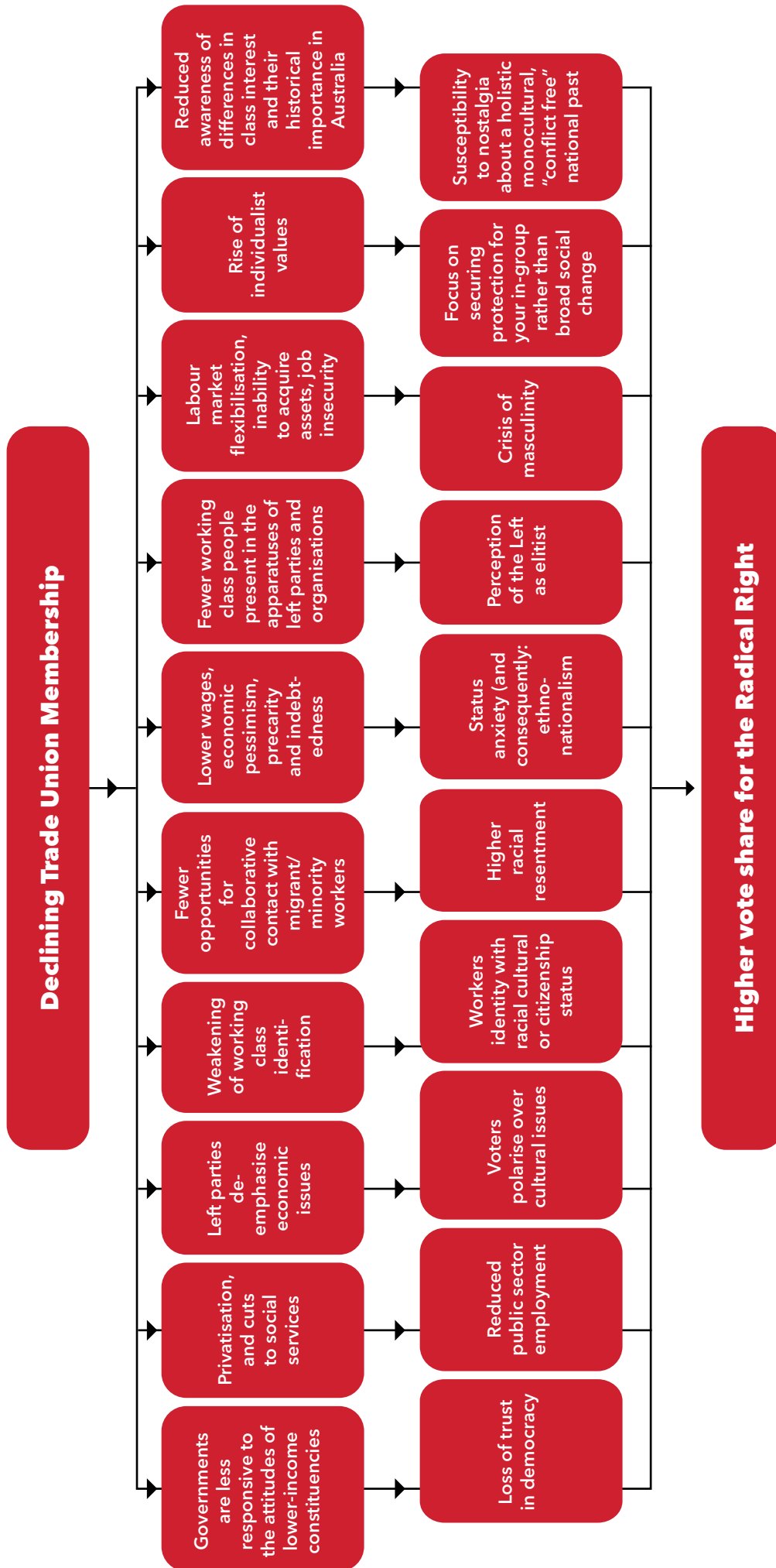


Figure 28

### Anti-System Vote Share and % Employed in Blue Collar Industries (Victoria 2022). Anti- System = far-right + informal votes.

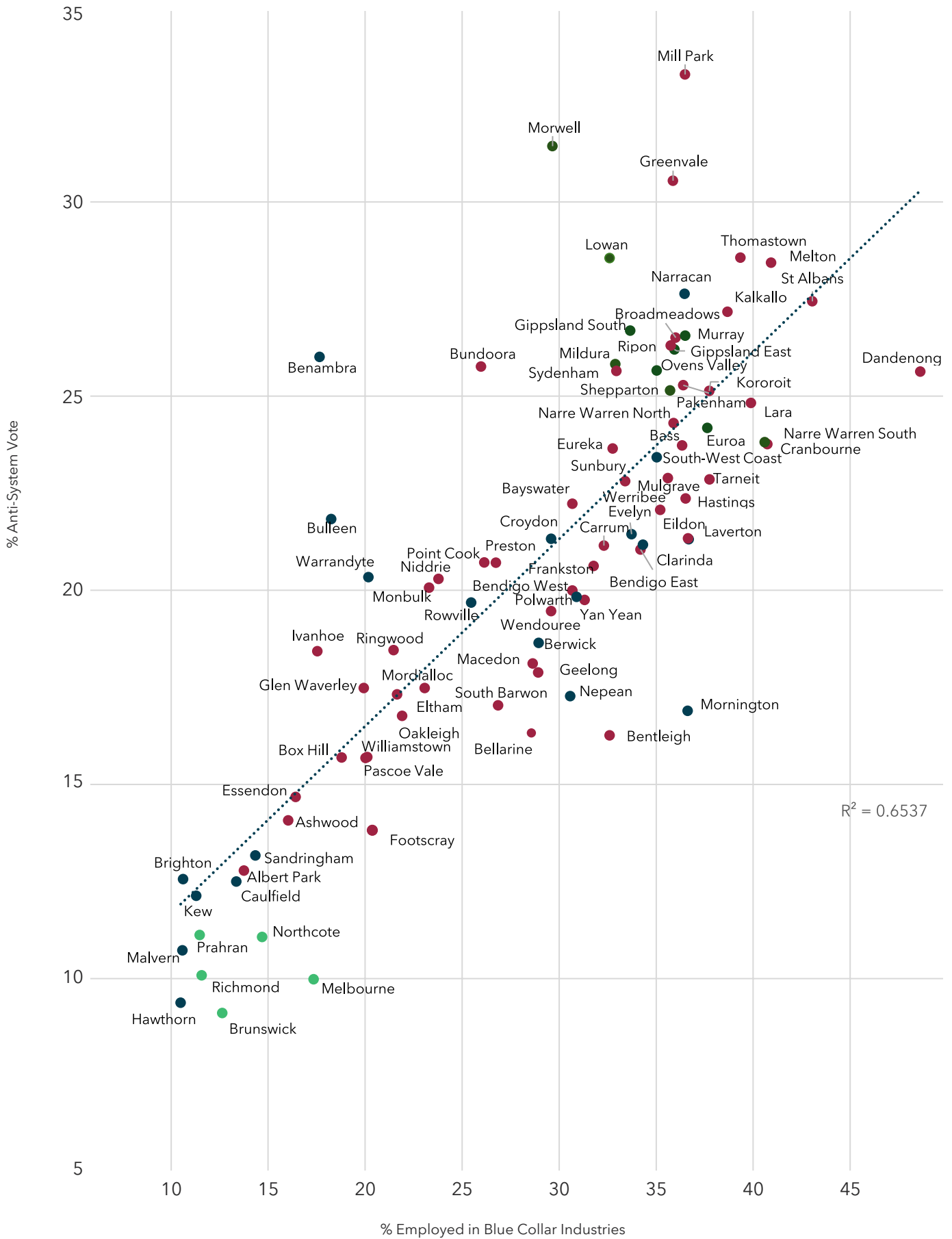


Figure 29

# % Employed as Professionals vs Far-Right Vote Share. 2025 Federal Election.

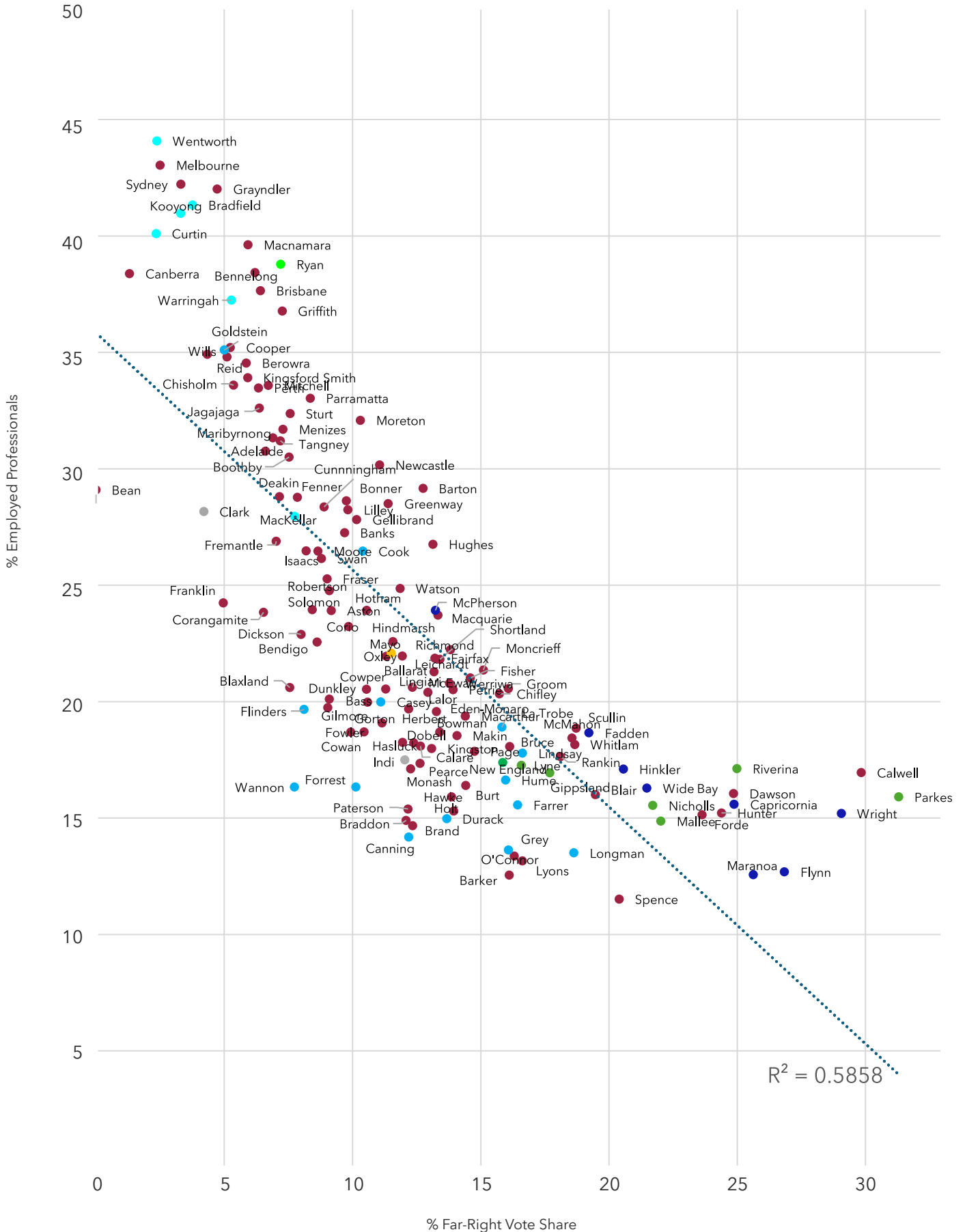


Figure 30

# Anti-System Vote and % Employed as Labourers (Federal Election 2022)

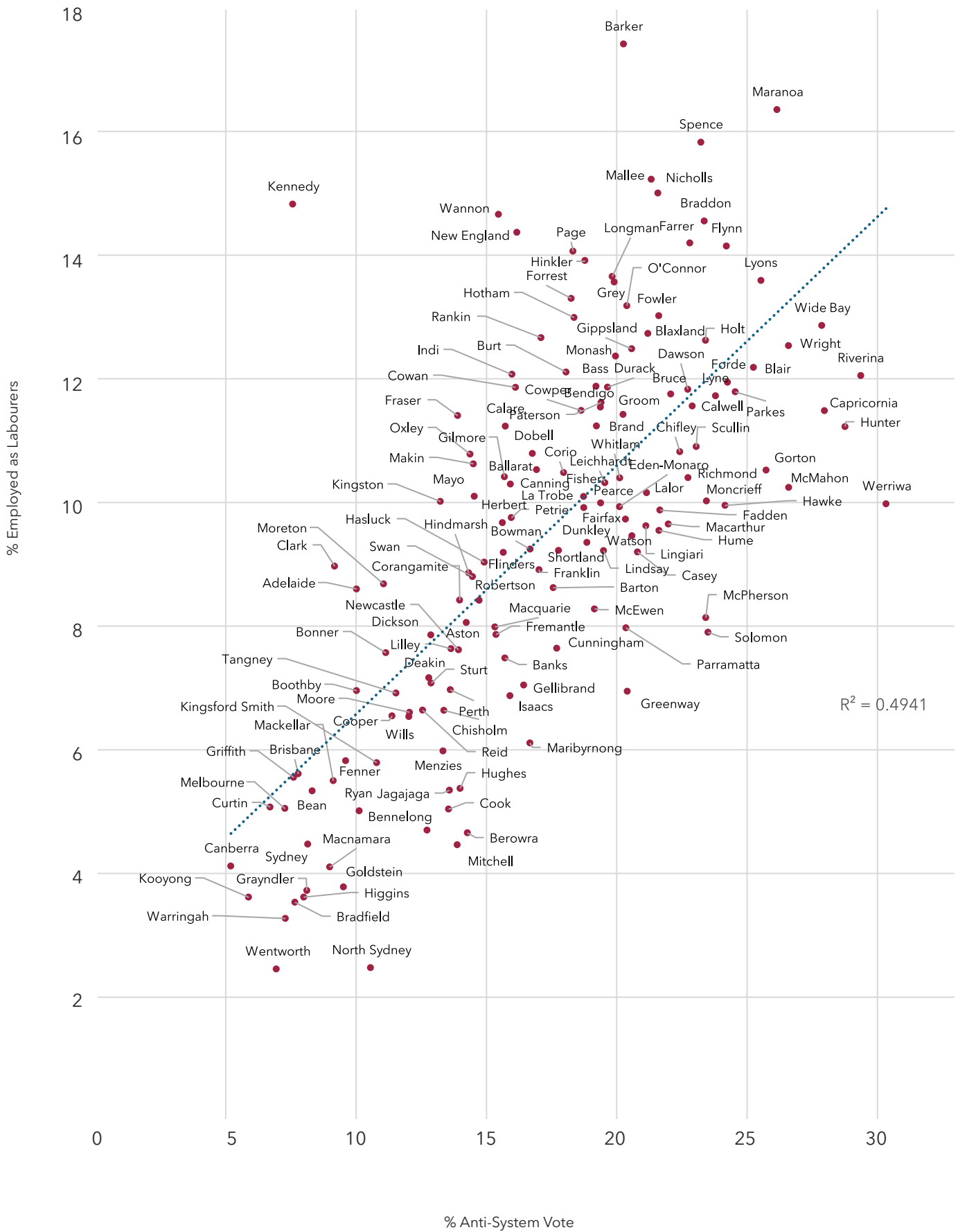


Figure 31

# % Employed in Mining, Manufacturing, Electricity, Construction, Transport, Retail and Anti-System Vote (Federal, 2022)

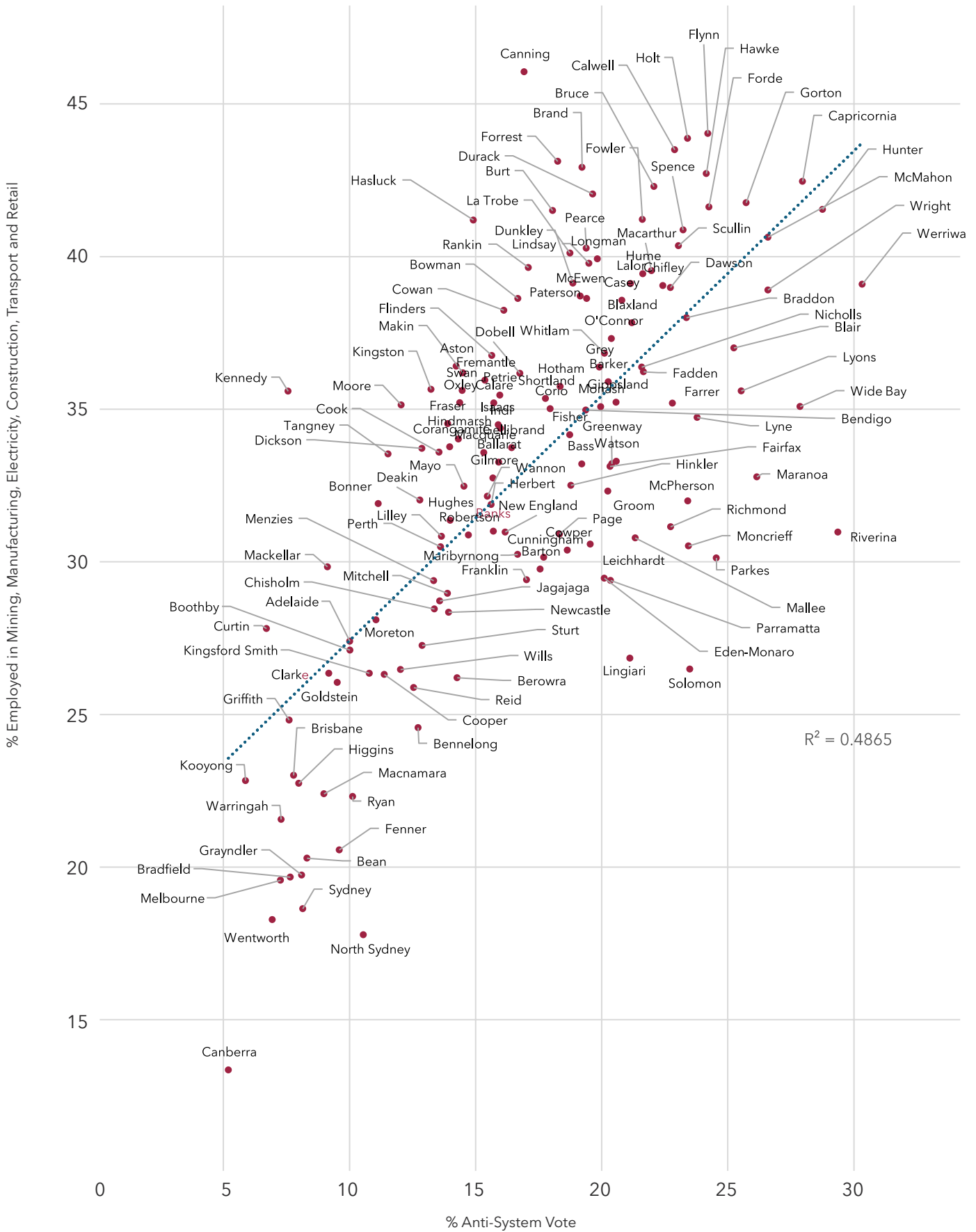


Figure 32

## % Employed as Labourers and Anti-System Vote (Victoria, 2022)



Figure 33

## Seat by Seat Comparison of Vote Share

Shifts between the Three Blocs. Federal Election 2025. Bolded seats represent seats that changed hands, and seats highlighted yellow are seats with the highest shares of blue-collar workers.

	Left		Centre-Right		Far-Right
Adelaide		8.97		-9.100	0.132859505
Aston		7.98		-5.826	-2.155712668
Ballarat		-2.72		2.236	0.477783787
<b>Banks</b>		6.03		-4.960	-0.018385736
Barker		3.39		-5.209	1.814377478
Barton		0.01		-1.869	1.855894402
<b>Bass</b>		4.72		-7.878	3.15534574
Bean		-6.18		11.781	-5.600951278
Bendigo		-7.08		14.788	-7.708435796
Bennelong		9.34		-8.190	-1.150708145
Berowra		1.35		1.394	-2.828666179
Blair		3.10		-1.507	-1.592907039
Blaxland		11.82		-7.710	-4.108332267
<b>Bonner</b>		8.03		-8.923	0.891273557
Boothby		10.93		-12.628	1.690588215
Bowman		4.22		-3.441	-0.781709355
<b>Braddon</b>		16.26		-20.199	3.937613027
<b>Bradfield</b>		-0.11		0.541	-0.436414376
Brand		6.31		-2.258	-4.055825881
<b>Brisbane</b>		2.40		-2.982	0.588806956
Bruce		9.11		-6.704	-2.407320004
Burt		2.75		-1.579	-1.168507314
<b>Calare</b>		-2.24		1.820	0.421437494
Calwell		-4.62		-7.513	12.1270979
Canberra		-0.34		2.519	-2.177707196
Canning		3.81		-2.531	-1.281912724
Capricornia		4.39		-6.008	1.62395852
Casey		-2.72		7.129	-3.19264178
Chifley		6.12		-6.987	0.865704891
Chisholm		-2.87		4.955	-2.753443829
Clark		-0.34		1.283	-0.941944394
Cook		6.28		-7.117	0.83200102
Cooper		5.24		-3.038	-2.20676628
Corangamite		-0.78		4.749	-2.557583399
Corio		-0.62		4.223	-3.596910124
Cowan		6.69		-6.065	-0.624156295
Cowper		1.26		2.616	-3.874259144
Cunningham		5.17		-1.711	-4.346449143
Curtin		-0.36		3.216	-2.550348397
Dawson		1.39		-1.252	5.470638694
<b>Deakin</b>		-1.78		3.577	-0.72221374
<b>Dickson</b>		0.00		1.371	-1.362216269
Dobell		8.18		-7.843	-0.338881796
Dunkley		2.87		2.862	-5.737311896
Durack		0.86		2.303	-3.164930344
Eden-Monaro		1.10		-1.859	-1.258516748
Fadden		3.25		-4.337	1.084600675

Fairfax	-2.76	5.223	-2.461860353
Farrer	-8.34	8.371	-0.031858371
Fenner	5.17	-5.929	0.764684014
Fisher	-7.78	9.284	-1.499211853
Flinders	-4.31	7.107	-2.694869613
Flynn	-3.92	-1.731	5.644588246
<b>Forde</b>	5.22	-10.109	4.884722593
Forrest	-5.29	11.159	-5.867470143
Fowler	3.39	-0.922	-2.470920601
Franklin	-12.26	18.797	-6.802090668
Fraser	8.73	-7.814	-0.907785559
Fremantle	-12.21	17.642	-5.434309771
Gellibrand	2.78	-0.797	-1.992468392
Gilmore	2.79	-0.044	-2.753746085
Gippsland	2.07	-1.608	-0.465288221
<b>Goldstein</b>	2.02	-0.713	-0.706255756
Gorton	6.69	-0.341	-8.880678969
Grayndler	4.08	-5.046	0.966789554
Greenway	5.80	-3.905	-1.892229282
Grey	0.24	-2.370	2.132470734
<b>Griffith</b>	2.63	-4.168	1.538195943
Groom	-2.37	2.587	-0.217542392
Hasluck	15.17	-11.227	-0.569426047
Hawke	9.23	-5.672	-3.561030039
Herbert	1.12	-2.513	1.733284669
Hindmarsh	5.56	-8.000	2.448381976
Hinkler	9.70	-14.246	4.540074354
Holt	11.63	-7.531	-4.09658323
Hotham	4.28	0.525	-4.805228201
<b>Hughes</b>	21.58	-24.612	3.037834959
Hume	10.84	-11.205	0.359701827
Hunter	7.74	-9.252	1.509421732
Indi	1.08	-2.002	1.976632708
Isaacs	10.66	-3.544	-4.80974391
Jagajaga	0.61	3.188	-3.79915952
Kingsford Smith	3.20	-2.504	-0.690052384
Kingston	6.65	-9.933	3.286305882
Kooyong	5.94	-6.167	0.397408245
La Trobe	5.40	-6.451	1.055637517
Lalor	2.72	0.362	-3.080343527
Leichardt	8.46	-8.703	-0.471671554
Lilley	3.55	-2.128	-1.424154822
Lindsay	3.90	-6.991	3.08596353
Lingiari	10.20	-6.660	-3.542018533
Longman	-0.90	-2.120	3.01388217
Lyne	2.35	-0.532	-1.824444449
Lyons	0.85	-7.809	6.955653348
Macarthur	8.90	-7.391	-1.505422268

MacKellar		3.86		-6.043		2.180714271
Macnamara		-1.70		1.527		0.164684705
Macquarie		0.45		-2.973		2.518714109
Makin		5.70		-8.949		3.255438902
Mallee		6.16		-11.563		5.398194159
Maranoa		1.04		-3.078		2.037686673
Maribyrnong		2.08		3.334		-5.417402234
Mayo		3.49		-4.911		1.515762946
McEwan		4.20		-0.696		-3.502525534
McMahon		0.85		-1.530		0.672743835
McPherson		-1.58		7.365		-5.790374885
<b>Melbourne</b>		-6.50		8.392		-1.893734483
<b>Menzies</b>		-1.74		4.909		-3.169141439
Mitchell		9.62		-6.276		-3.344306543
Monash		-6.79		10.556		-3.763135323
Moncrieff		0.06		3.585		-3.649886921
<b>Moore</b>		-3.37		5.906		-2.534720109
Moreton		5.76		-7.534		1.774711016
New England		1.91		-7.197		5.285701412
Newcastle		3.33		-5.378		2.046118728
Nicholls		17.32		-24.157		6.84496441
O'Connor		-0.82		2.482		-1.666691929
Oxley		7.42		-7.584		0.162161763
Page		9.67		-12.225		2.551034067
Parkes		-1.22		-11.817		13.03127259
Parramatta		7.42		-3.228		-4.192394123
Paterson		2.66		0.269		-2.928159013
Pearce		5.10		-1.377		-3.720565882
Perth		4.67		-0.648		-4.021114426
<b>Petrie</b>		4.61		-5.651		1.041460197
Rankin		4.90		-9.265		4.363830215
Reid		6.07		-4.696		-1.378314011
Richmond		6.61		-3.442		-3.16975077
Riverina		-2.22		1.012		1.199675673
Robertson		8.34		-8.275		-0.064243867
Ryan		3.98		-3.894		-0.086976119
Scullin		0.88		-1.191		0.312577624
Shortland		3.50		-4.438		0.937319874
Solomon		-11.21		23.485		-12.27741481
Spence		5.71		-6.874		1.167129736
<b>Sturt</b>		9.27		-9.019		-0.252839071
Swan		8.15		-5.154		-0.945393236
Sydney		4.52		-2.795		-1.719341036
Tangney		8.51		-5.728		-2.782490455
Wannon		-8.95		12.002		-3.050095314
Warringah		5.97		-6.771		0.802402275
Watson		11.51		-11.355		-0.16089336
Wentworth		4.37		-3.410		-2.181950561
Werriwa		8.81		2.674		-8.962585992
Whitlam		-4.75		0.059		2.67239877
Wide Bay		8.69		-11.541		-1.440975724
Wills		7.44		-4.430		-3.005264642
Wright		4.08		-9.131		5.057402207

# Antidote: Trade Unionism

Writing in the Nazi Party's monthly journal, the fascist strategist Fritz Oerter explained why it was so important for the Nazis to break the German trade union movement:

***"[the socialist] worker can tell what is genuine and what is artificial. When he sees a speaker has taken on a 'popular' style of speaking ... he becomes reserved and critical. They have learned to evaluate everything from a materialistic and rational perspective."***<sup>155</sup>

- Fritz Oerter, Nazi Party Strategist, 1932

Trade unionism obstructs the growth of far-right politics through two channels:

- **Individual-level effects:**  
Unionism reshapes workers' priorities, preferences and identities in ways hostile to the far-right.
- **Social policy effects:**  
A strong trade union movement impacts policymaking in ways that undermine the structural drivers of far-right ideology.

## Individual-Level Effects

Nadja Mosimann's comprehensive study of how union membership impacts Western European voting patterns produced the following key findings:<sup>156</sup>

- Workers in unions are 13% more likely to vote for labour / centre-left parties.
- Workers in unions are significantly less likely to abstain from voting.
- Where links between unions and left parties are strong, the impact of union membership against voting for the far-right is stronger.

Research by Dr. Andrew Leigh covering the Australian federal elections from 1966 and 2004 found that:

- Union members are 23% more likely to vote Labor.<sup>157</sup>
- Union membership for Australian workers has twice the effect on their voter choice as it does for American workers.<sup>158</sup>
- Union members who are most likely to vote Labor are male, middle aged, lower income and less educated (precisely the demographics which the left are now struggling to hold).<sup>159</sup>

**If union membership had remained at 1970s levels for the following decades, Labor would have likely won the 1998, 2001 and 2004 elections.**<sup>160</sup>

The ability of unions to 'vaccinate' workers against right-wing politics has been recognised since the genesis of fascism over a century ago.<sup>161</sup> The Nazis considered class politics to be an 'antithesis' of fascism, which was itself 'created for the express purpose of defeating this enemy.'<sup>162</sup>

In fact, many early extreme right movements emerged from 'yellow unions' set up by employers to undermine organising and engineer intraclass divisions.<sup>163</sup>

The very existence of trade unions in the workplace undermines the operating conditions of far-right politics. The departing premise of trade unionism is solidarity: the belief that working people share meaningful and significant common interests.<sup>164</sup>

155. Oerter, Fritz. 1932. "Our Speakers in the Anti-Marxist Struggle. The Balance Sheet of an Election Year," *Our Will and Way*, Volume 2, pp. 351-2.

156. Mosimann, p.13-29

157. Leigh, Andrew. 2006. "How do Unionists Vote? Estimating the Causal Impact of Union Membership on Voting Behaviour from 1966 to 2004." *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Volume 41, No. 4, p. 541.

158. Leigh, "How do Unionists Vote?" p. 548.

159. Leigh, "How do Unionists Vote?" p. 542.

160. Leigh, "How do Unionists Vote?" p. 549.

161. Mosimann, Nadja, et. Al. 2018. "The Radical Right, The Labour Movement and the Competition for the Workers' Vote." *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, Volume 40, Issue 1, p. 7.

162. Alred Six, Franz. 1936. "The Propaganda of the Street and the Masses" in *The Political Propaganda of the National Socialist German Workers' Party in the Struggle for Power*. Heidelberg: Winger Printing Works, p. 32.

163. Mosimann, "The Competition for the Workers' Vote," pp. 7-9.

164. Bithymitris, Giorgos, and Manos Spyridakis. "Union Radicalism versus the Nationalist Upsurge: The Case of Greek Shipbuilding Workers." *Dialectical Anthropology* 44, no. 2 (2020): pp. 121-35. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45294660>, p. 124.

Unionism departs from the assertion of meaningful common interests between all working people (footnote 164). This principle cannot co-exist with far-right ideology, which is defined by:

- Hierarchies of identity, status and personhood,
- A fixation on cultural difference,
- A moralistic imagination of politics, and
- A rhetoric of contamination, penetration and persecution.

The principle of solidarity dissolves each of these central tenants.

### Unions decentre identity differences

Unions nominate the category 'worker' as the basic unit of political identity, **at the expense of every other**. In the union movement, collective action is taken by workers, with other workers, in furtherance of their common interest as workers. In a bargaining negotiation, whiteness, heterosexuality and citizenship status have to be sidelined so as to build a sufficiently powerful coalition in every workplace. Unions have to centre what all workers have in common to be effective. Union leaders have 'ideological and strategic incentives to mitigate racial resentment among the rank and file' so as to grow membership and maintain solidarity.<sup>165</sup>

### Unions compete with employers, not 'elites'

Unions concentrate specifically on the employment relationship - not on a vaguely defined 'elite' that can be stretched to include any disfavoured population. By constantly drawing attention back to the workplace, and the actual differences in power that manifest there, unionism pulls focus away from the vague and remote networks of 'elites,' 'globalists,' 'cabalists,' and 'freemasons' promoted by the far-right.

### Unions ground politics in lived experience

Unions de-mythologise political conflict. While the far-right insists on politics as an epic crusade between good people and demonic elites, unions insist on the real world, the shop floor and the payslip as the fundamental sites of competition.

Unions do not frame the employer as a demonic entity, a subhuman or a conspiratorial overlord. Instead, they are understood to be simply looking out for themselves in a profit-driven system. They will always do this, and workers will always need a force to counteract that, and that force is the union. Unions install a basically sober political attitude that undermines the overcharged intensity of far-right politics. Collective bargaining is defined by negotiation, strategy and measurable outcomes. The far-right, meanwhile, requires people to see politics as a Manichean crusade.<sup>166</sup>

### Unionism affirms agency, not grievance

Participation in union activity undermines the feelings of persecution, invasion and grievance so central to far-right thinking. The far-right describes politics in a way that makes people feel helpless and besieged. They install this sense of helplessness to:

- (a) frame themselves as the workers' saviour and
- (b) justify the intensive use of force to 'protect' traditional values from peril.

Unionism, on the other hand, emphasises workers' own collective agency as an engine for social change, new ideas and new values. Unionism depends on giving workers the courage to exercise their labour power: it aims to affirm their agency, not their powerlessness. At its best, unionism insists on workers' capability to transform not only their immediate conditions but also, in aggregate, the basic arrangements that govern all society.

165. Frymer, Paul and Grumbach, Jacob. 2021. "Labor Unions and White Racial Politics," *American Journal of Political Science*, January 2021, Volume 65, No. 1, p. 225.

166. Moragues, Stefan Benito. "Unmasking the Far-Right's Anti-Worker Agenda," *European Economic and Social Committee, Workers' Group*. June 2024, p. 8.

## Effects at the Day-to-Day Level

Unions transmit the principle of solidarity through a variety of contexts including:

- Direct-to-member communications;
- Internal activities, events and campaigning;
- Industrial organising drives;
- Mobilisation during disputes and bargaining negotiations.

Consequently, union members are more political knowledgeable and more likely to engage in democratic discourse.<sup>167</sup> Non-membership is associated with higher rates of voter abstention.<sup>168</sup> In the United States, union members are 12% more likely to vote than the unorganised.<sup>169</sup>

Additionally, unions do not just promote the idea that workers have common interests, but actively provoke the onset of situations which makes those interests viscerally clear.

In an industrial dispute, there are two sides. **There is no separate enterprise agreement for straight workers, and one for queer workers**, for example. There is only (a) the union, which pushes for improvements in all workers' conditions and pay, and there is (b) management, which pushes back against these demands.

**The industrial dispute forces the shared interests of workers into focus, no matter their background, race or personal identity.**

Unions represent working people in uniformity. To be successful, they must bring to the forefront those concerns which are shared by all workers at the relevant worksite. By mobilising workers to not only recognise but actively take collective action in pursuit of common aims:

**Unions necessarily lower the salience of identity differences which fuel the far-right.**

Unions are also one of the very few civic organisations where non-citizens / migrant workers can become members and meaningfully collaborate, as equals, with domestic workers for shared goals. Unions reduce racial resentment at the individual-level.<sup>170</sup>

The effect of unionism on racial resentment is causal, not coincidental. At least in the United States, studies have demonstrated that union membership reduces measures of racial animosity reported by white workers.<sup>171</sup>

- White union members are less racially resentful than non-union members by between 4.7-6.3%.<sup>172</sup>
- White former union members are less racially resentful by 2.0-2.5%.<sup>173</sup>
- The effect of union membership on racial resentment is almost as large as the effect of education.<sup>174</sup>
- White union members are more likely to support racially targeted policies designed to address systemic racism.<sup>175</sup>

167. Iversen, T and Soskice, D. 2015. "Information, Inequality and mass polarisation: ideology in advanced democracies." *Comparative Political Studies*, Volume 48, No. 13, pp. 1781-1813.

168. Kolander, Michael. *Socioeconomic Deprivation and the Support for Populism: A Study on Individual and Contextual Determinants*. Open Press TIU, 2022. <https://jstor.org/stable/community.34023129>, p. 149

169. Economic Policy Institute, p. 3

170. Economic Policy Institute. "Unions Promote Racial equity," 2023, Josh Bivens et. Al.

171. Economic Policy Institute. "Unions Promote Racial Equity," 2023, p. 3

172. Frymer, "Labor Unions and White Racial Politics," p. 233.

173. *Ibid*, pp. 233-234.

174. *Ibid*.

175. *Ibid*, p. 235.

## What unionism and the far-right have in common

What trade unionism and far-right politics have in common is that they go beyond mere position-taking and policy offerings and instead constitute an extended metasystem of identity and self-belief.

They offer individuals a flexible but enduring model for thinking about themselves and the forces which structure political society: *a series of analytical reflexes which can be used to explain and process political events in real time.*

Once a worker has been imbued with the principle of solidarity, they can use it to orient themselves regardless of whether the issue of the day is penalty rates, refugees, health funding, the right to strike, the minimum wage, public education etc.

Similarly, the fascist principles of blood and soil can be applied regardless of whether the issue is UN, climate change, immigration, LGBTQ rights, or the illuminati.

Both of these ideologies have persisted for so long because they can act as a reflexive stencil for navigating political life.

The advantage of unionism over the far-right, however, is that unionism is rooted in **lived facts that only have to be revealed**: the working-class is a 'pre-existing social group, characterised by its substantial content.' To be a worker is a fact of one's life, while 'white pride' must be implanted through propaganda.<sup>176</sup>

Inequality, job stress, exploitation and financial pressure is a fact of life experienced by millions of working-class people. Class is enacted in front of them, in their real life, at their work, in their interactions with welfare agencies, in their planning of family budgets, on their commute, at their schools, in their neighbourhoods.<sup>177</sup>

**Meanwhile, the hierarchies of human value promoted by right-wing radicals have to be constantly reinforced through propaganda: this is because they describe something that is not real. All humans are born equal.**

## Society-Level Effects

***"In the Australian context, the simplest explanation for the decline in the class-vote relationship is the decline in trade union membership."*<sup>178</sup>**

The far-right is stronger today than it has been in nearly all our lifetimes. It's accumulation of power is undeniable. Two points here, should be noted:

- 1. It is no coincidence that the far-right's ascension has occurred parallel to the union movement's decline, and**
- 2. The far-right's power, while menacing, rests on a profoundly unstable foundation.**

At the centre of the far-right coalition is an untenable contradiction - a support base with directly opposed material interests: major employers, production workers, billionaires, service workers and small business owners. The power of the far-right survives only as long as this contradiction goes unnoticed - and not a second longer.

The far-right's fixation on cultural purity, sexual order, and ethnic hierarchy is a fundamentally defensive move - a series of contortions all aimed at preventing the fatal lie at its political heart from gaining salience:

**They may speak for workers, but they always act against them.**

The far-right will say and do whatever it takes to direct attention away from its internal contradictions. They will target any group, demonise any minority and promote any narrative to this end.

All over the world, a tendency of these parties is to obscure their economic and distributive views as much as practicable.<sup>179</sup> They turn economic issues into cultural ones and introduce a constant stream of new identity categories intended to pull attention from the employment relationship.

176. Žižek, Slavoj. 2006. "Against the Populist Temptation." *Critical Inquiry*, Volume 32, No. 3, p. 564.

177. Žižek, Slavoj. 2004. "Over the Rainbow: Slavoj Žižek on Populist Conservatism." *London Review of Books*, Volume 26, no. 21, p. 5.

178. Marks, Gary. "Accounting for the Declining Impact of Class on the Vote in Australia," in eds. Evans, Geoffrey and Graaf, Naan Dirk. 2013. *Political Choice Matters: Explaining the Strength of Class and Religious Cleavages in Cross-National Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 145.

179. Rovny, Jan. 2013. "Where do radical right parties stand? Position blurring in multidimensional competition." *Central European Political Science Review*, Volume 5, No. 1, p. 20.

The union movement insists on that relationship. It makes class location the centre of political identity, allowing for broad cross-cultural solidarity. Unions are the most important organisation for promoting the salience of class in industrial society.<sup>180</sup> Unionism hones workers' attention on what political forces will achieve for them in real material terms. The far-right has nothing to offer here. They have no plan.

The return of the union movement to the day-to-day life of Australians and their political culture would be a crisis for far-right identity politics. The presence of strong unions generates spillover effects that impact the political outcomes of society as a whole.<sup>181</sup>

- Unions make governments **more responsive** to the needs and policy preferences of the disadvantaged: restoring faith in the democratic project. In areas where many workers are unionised, local representatives are more responsive to lower-income constituents and their concerns.<sup>182</sup>
- Unions enhance the participatory democracy by providing workers with **'democratic upskilling.'** Unions are one of the very few organisations where working people can accrue experience in the routine skills needed for serious political engagement: how to record minutes at a meeting, organise a public assembly, participate in negotiation, debate with someone who you share a common goal with, de-escalate conflict, vote on issues and courses of action, and mobilise communities.<sup>183</sup> **Internal union procedures**

**'provide members with skills and efficacy translatable to the public sphere.'**<sup>184</sup>

- Unions bring democracy to working life. Limited industrial democracy at the workplace (consultation, negotiation and engagement between workers and management) correlates strongly with support for the far-right.<sup>185</sup>
- A strong union movement improves the legitimacy of liberalism by acting as a counterbalance to the power of big business and vested interests.
- Strong unions support the expansion of public services and social goods. High rates of public sector employment are associated with a reduced far-right vote share.<sup>186</sup>
- Unions **reduce inequality.** A strong union movement improves wage outcomes well beyond its negotiated agreements ("union coverage effects," in part because employers may independently raise wages to deter further unionisation ("the union threat effect").<sup>187</sup>
- By improving workplace conditions and advocating for legislative change, unions address the crises that have drained faith in liberalism. The more frustrated workers are, the more opportunities the far-right has to hijack their discontents. By raising the society-wide power of workers to shape their working lives, frustrations are neutralised before they can be exploited.

180. Hechter, "From Class to Culture," p.406.

181. Agnolin, P, Anelli, M, Colantone, I and Stanig, P. 2025. "Robots Replacing Trade Unions: Noval Data and Evidence from Western Europe." IZA - Institute of Labour Economics, Discussion Paper 17864, p. 5; Wang, Tova. 2020. Union Impact on Voter Participation - And How to Expand It. Harvard Kennedy Law School, Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, p. 9.

182. Becher, M and Stegmüller, D. 2020. "Reducing unequal representation: the impact of labor unions on legislative responsiveness in the US Congress." Perspectives on Politics, Volume 19, No. 1, pp. 92-109.

183. Wang, "Union Impact on Voter Participation," p. 10.

184. Ibid., p. 12.

185. <https://www.boeckler.de/de/pressemitteilungen-2675-studie-leuchtet-anstieg-der-afd-wahlbereitschaft-aus-54087.htm>

186. Mosimann et al, "the Competition for the Workers' Vote," p. 20.

187. Faber, HS, Herbst, D, Kuziemko, I and Naidu, S. 2021. "Unions and inequality over the twentieth century: new evidence from survey data." The Quarterly Journal of Economics, Volume 136, No. 3, pp. 1325-1385.

188. Turner, Ian. Industrial Labour and Politics: The Dynamics of the Labour Movement in Eastern Australia 1900-1921 (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1979, [1965]), xvii.

# One Nation Voting Record on Workers' Rights and Distributive Issues

<b>2026</b>	<b>Voted AGAINST</b> making price gouging against Australian consumers from big supermarkets illegal. <sup>189</sup>
<b>2025</b>	<b>Voted AGAINST</b> Fee-Free TAFE. <sup>190</sup> <b>Voted AGAINST</b> keeping the NBN Publicly owned. <sup>191</sup> <b>Voted AGAINST</b> providing families 3 Days Guaranteed Free Childcare. <sup>192</sup>
<b>2024</b>	<b>Voted AGAINST</b> the Closing Loopholes Bill. <sup>193</sup> <b>Voted AGAINST</b> supporting home ownership for first time buyers. <sup>194</sup> <b>Voted AGAINST</b> making wage theft a crime. <b>Voted AGAINST</b> the Right to Disconnect. <sup>195</sup> <b>Voted AGAINST</b> protecting workers from deadly silica dust. <b>Voted AGAINST</b> improving access to bargaining for low paid workers. <b>Voted AGAINST</b> making industrial manslaughter an offence.
<b>2022</b>	<b>Voted AGAINST</b> banning pay secrecy clauses. <sup>196</sup> <b>Voted AGAINST</b> Secure Jobs Better Pay legislation. <sup>197</sup> <b>Voted AGAINST</b> workers having an ability to request flexible work. <sup>198</sup>
<b>2021</b>	<b>Voted AGAINST</b> increasing support for the unemployed. <b>Voted AGAINST</b> increasing access to welfare for Australian workers. <b>Voted AGAINST</b> requiring employers to eliminate sex discrimination and sexual harassment at work. <sup>199</sup> <b>Voted FOR</b> increasing government surveillance (2016, 2018, 2021, 2025). <sup>200</sup> <b>Voted FOR</b> slashing workers' protections against unfair dismissal. <sup>201</sup>
<b>2020</b>	<b>Voted AGAINST</b> increasing childcare support for studying parents. <b>Voted AGAINST</b> a Royal Commission into Robodebt. <sup>202</sup> <b>Voted FOR</b> increasing the cost of university degrees. <sup>203</sup>
<b>2019</b>	<b>Voted FOR</b> cutting taxes on the rich. <sup>204</sup>
<b>2017</b>	<b>Voted FOR</b> stripping workers of their penalty rates. <sup>205</sup>

189. [https://theyvoteforyou.org.au/people/senate/wa/tyron\\_whitten/policies/334](https://theyvoteforyou.org.au/people/senate/wa/tyron_whitten/policies/334)

190. [https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;db=CHAMBER;id=chamber%2Fhansards%2F28776%2F0297;page=0;query=Tafe%20SearchCategory\\_Phrase%3A%22senate%22%20Dataset\\_Phrase%3A%22hansards%22;rec=11;resCount=Default](https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;db=CHAMBER;id=chamber%2Fhansards%2F28776%2F0297;page=0;query=Tafe%20SearchCategory_Phrase%3A%22senate%22%20Dataset_Phrase%3A%22hansards%22;rec=11;resCount=Default)

191. [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Chamber\\_documents/Senate\\_chamber\\_documents/Divisions/Details?id=4030](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Chamber_documents/Senate_chamber_documents/Divisions/Details?id=4030)

192. [https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;db=CHAMBER;id=chamber%2Fhansards%2F28695%2F0213;page=0;query=Early%20Childhood%20Education%20and%20Care%20\(Three%20Day%20Guarantee\)%20Bill%202025%20SearchCategory\\_Phrase%3A%22senate%22%20Dataset\\_Phrase%3A%22hansards%22;rec=4;resCount=Default](https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;db=CHAMBER;id=chamber%2Fhansards%2F28695%2F0213;page=0;query=Early%20Childhood%20Education%20and%20Care%20(Three%20Day%20Guarantee)%20Bill%202025%20SearchCategory_Phrase%3A%22senate%22%20Dataset_Phrase%3A%22hansards%22;rec=4;resCount=Default)

193. [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Chamber\\_documents/Senate\\_chamber\\_documents/Divisions/Details?id=3108](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Chamber_documents/Senate_chamber_documents/Divisions/Details?id=3108)

194. [https://theyvoteforyou.org.au/people/senate/queensland/pauline\\_hanson/policies/117](https://theyvoteforyou.org.au/people/senate/queensland/pauline_hanson/policies/117)

195. <https://theyvoteforyou.org.au/divisions/senate/2024-02-08/5>

196. [https://theyvoteforyou.org.au/people/senate/queensland/pauline\\_hanson/policies/291](https://theyvoteforyou.org.au/people/senate/queensland/pauline_hanson/policies/291)

197. [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Chamber\\_documents/Senate\\_chamber\\_documents/Divisions/Details?id=2282](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Chamber_documents/Senate_chamber_documents/Divisions/Details?id=2282)

198. <https://theyvoteforyou.org.au/divisions/senate/2022-11-30/7>

199. [https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;orderBy=customrank;page=0;query=%22employers%22%20SearchCategory\\_Phrase%3A%22senate%22%20Dataset\\_Phrase%3A%22hansards%22%20Speaker\\_Phrase%3A%22hanson,%20sen%20pauline%22;rec=4;resCount=Default](https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;orderBy=customrank;page=0;query=%22employers%22%20SearchCategory_Phrase%3A%22senate%22%20Dataset_Phrase%3A%22hansards%22%20Speaker_Phrase%3A%22hanson,%20sen%20pauline%22;rec=4;resCount=Default)

200. [https://theyvoteforyou.org.au/people/senate/queensland/pauline\\_hanson/policies/44](https://theyvoteforyou.org.au/people/senate/queensland/pauline_hanson/policies/44)

201. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/feb/18/one-nations-malcolm-roberts-calls-for-law-making-it-easier-to-sack-workers>

202. [https://theyvoteforyou.org.au/people/senate/queensland/pauline\\_hanson/policies/243](https://theyvoteforyou.org.au/people/senate/queensland/pauline_hanson/policies/243)

203. [https://theyvoteforyou.org.au/people/senate/queensland/pauline\\_hanson/policies/246](https://theyvoteforyou.org.au/people/senate/queensland/pauline_hanson/policies/246)

204. [https://theyvoteforyou.org.au/people/senate/queensland/pauline\\_hanson/policies/130](https://theyvoteforyou.org.au/people/senate/queensland/pauline_hanson/policies/130)

205. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-03-05/pauline-hanson-advises-george-christensen-stay-where-you-are/8325880>

# Conclusion

As a mode of identity, the far-right's defences are strong. Their propaganda exploits the deepest longings of the contemporary mind. They deploy prejudices with millennia-old roots. They fill important psychic needs in an age of disruption and vertigo.

Trade unionism can fill these needs too, but in a constructive way: The need to resist indignation, to belong, to feel like a participant rather than a spectator-victim of society.

Unionism is not an ideology of resentment. It transforms workers from 'passive to active elements in society, from weights to be pushed around to social levers in their own right.'<sup>188</sup>

Through its ideas and activities, the labour movement induces hope. It drives exploited people to trace on the horizon the faint outlines of a transformed world - urging them to lunge ahead and pull it closer.

**Our democracies are in poor health. For decades, they have endured runaway inequality, unresponsive governments and widespread political disengagement. This represents a serious crisis of legitimacy.**

**The far-right feeds upon this crisis: growing alongside it, inflaming it, using it to penetrate the veins of the body politic.**

**Unionism is not palliative.**

**Unionism is the antidote.**

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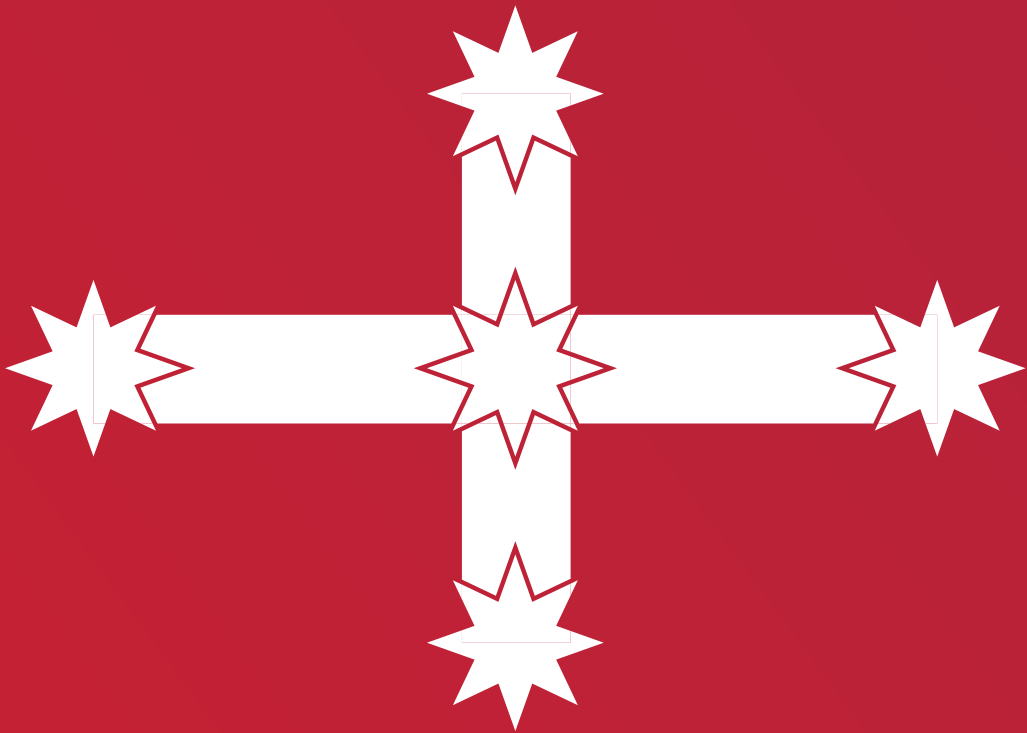
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