

'A Greenslide or Winning in Increments? The Greens in the 2022 federal election'

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The Greens' performance at the 2022 Australian federal election outcome was hailed by the party and the commentariat as a Greenslide. In this article, we examine whether this characterisation of the outcome is entirely accurate. We argue that both the Greens' campaign strategy and representational gains were strong, even if their overall electoral performance, as reflected in vote share, was not especially spectacular. We conclude that Greens gains are the culmination of an incremental but steady consolidation of the party's primary vote in mostly inner metropolitan seats. To this extent, the 2022 election outcome was less a Greens surge as it was a victory for the party's ability to forge ongoing inroads within the electorate. The outcome suggests that the Greens are still growing.

KEY WORDS: Australian Greens, federal election, political parties, environment.

On election night, Greens party leader, Adam Bandt, declared the outcome a 'greenslide' (Cassidy and Hinchcliffe 2022). Bandt's description of the party's performance is understandable even if somewhat overwrought. This was, indeed, the party's strongest federal election outcome in terms of representational gains. In the House, the party retained the lower house seat of Melbourne, and claimed the seats of Griffith, Ryan, and Brisbane. In the Senate, the Greens secured six vacancies, increasing their presence in the upper house to 12 senators in the 76-member chamber. Nonetheless, the increase in the party's first-preference nationwide vote compared to 2019 was modest: from 10.4 per cent to 12.25 per cent in the House and from 10.19 per cent to 12.66 per cent in the Senate.

This article examines the Greens' electoral performance at the 2022 election. Section one surveys the party's campaign. We contend that the party's policy and messaging appeals on climate especially managed to strike an effective balance between principle and electoral pragmatism. Section two analyses the electoral data. We show that the Greens' representational gains were achieved on the strength of modest growth in their overall share of their primary vote. In section three, we consider what this outcome portends for the Greens. Fundamentally, we argue that the Greens' performance is the culmination of a gradual but steady consolidation of the party's primary vote in largely inner metropolitan seats rather than heralding a dramatic electoral breakthrough for the party.

The Greens campaign

Some within the commentariat (see, for example Harris 2021) suggested that the Greens might struggle for electoral relevance in 2022 because of the presence

of the teal independents (teals). 'The teals' is the label applied to a group of well-resourced and loosely aligned grassroots independents that formed prior to the 2022 election based on an agenda of climate action, political integrity and gender equality (Millar 2022), issues that are sympathetic with the Greens' policy and political priorities. The Greens, however, rejected claims that the teals constituted a direct electoral threat, arguing instead that the party's electoral prospects would be enhanced by the elevation of the 'climate issue at the election' (Bandt quoted in Secombe 2022).

The Greens' assessment of the 'teal effect' was not mere puffery but an observation informed by certain empirical realities. The Greens had candidates contesting every lower seat compared to the teals' approximately 22 community-backed candidates (Hawley and Smiley 2022), most of whom were contesting House seats. Secondly, the more prominent teal candidates were confined to safe Liberal, inner-metropolitan seats, electorates that have, with few exceptions, exhibited a comparatively modest appetite for Greens candidates. Third, much of the electoral momentum surrounding the teals was concentrated in the House and not the Senate contest, where the state-wide constituency basis of the upper house is often less hospitable to independents. The Senate, if nothing else, remained competitive for the Greens.

The teals' presence did, however, signify the increased salience of the issue of climate, a policy domain over which the Greens lay claim to issue ownership. While climate is not a new policy concern (Cameron and McAllister 2020: 242-3), and voters have long ranked it as a policy domain of importance, the issue lacked *immediacy* among voters until recently. Several climate change induced emergencies, in addition to the more

insistent consensus among the scientific community about the state of the climate, may have elevated the salience of climate change. Renewed voter emphasis on climate was reflected in several surveys, most notably the Lowy Institute's Climate Poll 2021, which showed increased voter support for parliament taking more dramatic action on this issue (see also, ACF 2022). The Lowy survey reported that six in 10 electors regarded global warming to be a 'serious and pressing problem', up from five in 10 in 2015. Moreover, eight in 10 respondents reported supporting a net-zero emissions target for 2050. Heightened voter anxiety about the climate was recalled in the experiences of one Greens campaigner who observed that 'this time around I encountered more people than ever bringing [climate change] up at the door as the main issue on their minds...' (Horton 2022).

While the defining issue of the campaign — climate — was a Greens-owned policy issue, the party was much more strategic in positioning itself to optimise its natural advantage. In 2019, the highly charged nature of climate policy was argued by some to partially account for the Coalition's 'unexpected' election victory (Horn 2019). In fundamental respects, the Greens' 2022 climate policy message was very much business as usual. The party called for the rapid phase-out of coal and gas, a 75 per cent emissions reduction target by the end of the decade and net-zero emissions by 2035. At the same time, the party's policy rhetoric on climate was less abrasive, taking greater pains to acknowledge the financial impost of jettisoning old technologies, and granting the important historical role of the mining sector in elevating the living conditions of many Australians.

Bandt's concession that 'we owe coal workers a debt of thanks for powering our country' and that 'we don't need to choose between taking urgent climate action and supporting coal communities' reflected the party's more circumspect rhetorical turn (see Australian Greens 2022: 22). Bandt also delivered these messages personally in those areas of Australia that have been more heavily dependent on coal mining and other fossil fuel technologies, such as the NSW Hunter Region and Queensland. This gentler rhetoric was accompanied by substantive policy commitments, such as a '\$19bn plan to diversify fossil fuel-reliant towns and subsidise the wages of coal workers who transition into new jobs, saying employees can stay in mining but should seek employment in critical minerals or green metals' (Butler 2022a). In 2022, the Greens appeared to take more care to present climate action, employment, and the economy as complementary and interdependent and not a zero-sum trade-off.

The more nuanced messaging on climate policy was an extension of the party's disciplined campaign in general, certainly compared to 2019 when internecine conflict in

the Victorian and NSW divisions marred the campaign in the more populous states (Jackson 2020). A less fractious party, led by the second most popular federal party leader at this election (Cameron et al. 2022:13), was able to pre-empt issues that had been electoral quicksand for the party in previous elections. One such example was the Greens' management of the perennial question about their relationship to Labor. In an editorial appearing in the *Australian*, Bandt addressed the matter early (February) and explicitly, declaring that:

The Greens want to change the government but not to be in a Liberal-National style coalition with Labor. Being forced to vote with Labor for more coal and gas mines or to give tax cuts to billionaires doesn't interest us in the least. We'll maintain our independence as we push the next government to act on the climate and inequality crises (Bandt 2022: 11).

It was, however, the party's ground campaign that exemplified its disciplined approach. This was particularly apparent in Queensland, where the party's self-described 'social work' style of campaign was deployed 12 months prior to the start of the official election (Ludlow 2022). The strategy did not explicitly ask electors for their vote but rather made the party's presence known in the electorate by offering more tangible forms of support to voters. The party's theory of its campaign approach was that to reconnect with a disillusioned body politic the Greens must 'reach them [voters] in their homes' (Gillespie 2022) in what one commentator described as a 'blend of politics and activism' (Manning 2022). This entailed embedding party workers within the community well in advance of the official campaign and having volunteers distribute 'care packages to vulnerable residents... building community gardens, organising forums and sending out newsletters as if the Greens were the incumbent' (Smee 2022). As one party campaigner observed, the campaign was not structured around 'mailouts, robo-calls, or text messages', but rather:

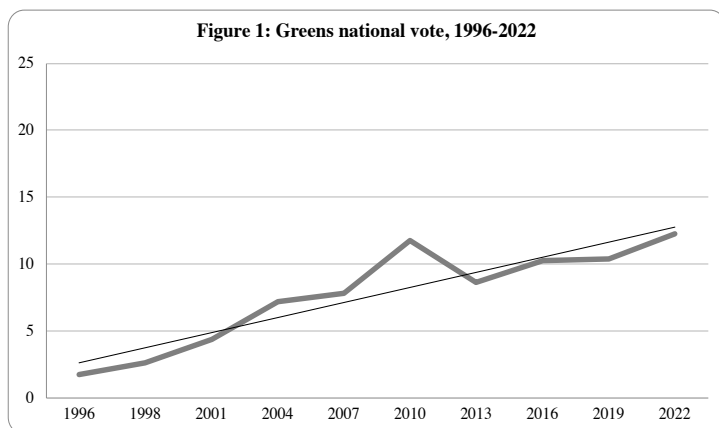
...tens of thousands of individual conversations... We never assumed the role of experts there to convince voters of our policies. Rather, we took the position that we had a lot to learn from the people we spoke to. In this way, the ground campaigning effort was valuable in not only bringing voters over to the Greens, but also in better aligning the party's policies and messaging with what voters cared about (Horton 2022).

The Green vote

House of Representatives outcomes

In 2022, the Greens' share of the primary nationwide vote share reached 12.25 per cent, up 1.85 percentage

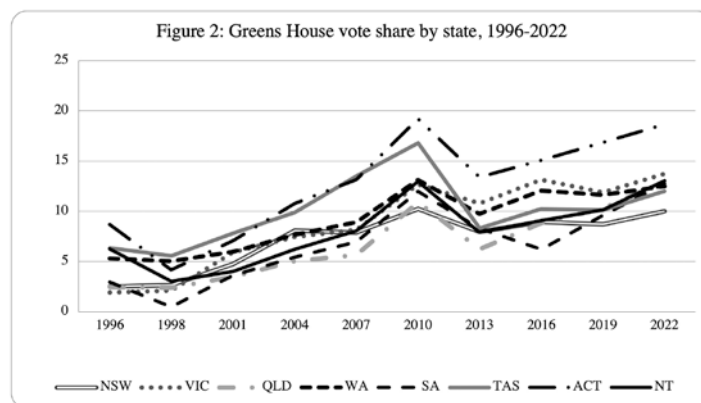
points from 2019. This is the highest nationwide vote achieved by the Australian Greens on record, although it is not the largest swing that the party has enjoyed at a federal election. The strongest swing recorded by the party at a federal election occurred in 2010 where they registered a 3.95 per cent swing. As Figure 1 shows, the Greens' share of the nationwide vote has been on an upward trajectory since 1996, despite several plateaus (2007 and 2019) and one trough (2013).



Source: AEC

The party's primary vote in the states and territories is consistent with the national pattern, marked by incremental growth, as shown in Figure 2. There is, however, some variation by jurisdiction, even if the trendline is broadly similar. Here we can see that the ACT, Victoria, and Western Australia have long been reasonably reliable jurisdictions, particularly the ACT (18.67 per cent) and Victoria (13.74 per cent). Other states, such as Tasmania, polled strongly for the Greens in the early 2000s but have consistently fallen short of the 16.83 per cent vote that it achieved in 2010. Since this time, Greens House support in Tasmania has been middling compared to other states, polling 12 per cent in 2022. A second collection of states and territories — Queensland, South Australia, and the NT — have been historically slower to warm to the Greens. However, the Greens' performance in all three caught up with the party's stronger performing state divisions in 2022. Only in NSW did the Greens' primary vote remain comparatively low. While the party's state-wide vote in NSW registered an increase, at 10.2 per cent it was the lowest state-wide vote achieved by the party for the second time at two consecutive elections. The party's comparatively poor long-term performance in the nation's most populous state points to an underlying weakness for the Greens.

There is, however, greater variation in Greens support at the divisional level. Table 1 presents the party's vote in the three most recent federal elections by vote range. The first category consists of seats where Greens candidates won more than 20 per cent of the primary,



those divisions which, under the right conditions, place the party's candidate in vote-winning contention. The second category of seats are those where the Greens' candidate polled between 10 per cent and 19 per cent of the vote. These are what we term 'tipping point' seats — divisions in which the Greens are building momentum but are not yet winnable prospects. The third category of seats are those which we have labelled 'low performing' seats, defined for our purposes as any electorate where the party achieves less than 10 per cent of the vote.

Table 1: Greens vote by range, 2016-2022

	2022		2019		2016	
	n	%	N	%	n	%
Competitive seats 20+	17	11	14	9	8	5
Tipping point seats 19 - 10	67	44	60	40	54	36
Low performing seats <10	67	44	77	51	88	59
	151		151		150	

Source: AEC 2022

Table 1 shows that the proportion of lower house seats where the Greens' primary vote exceeds 20 per cent has increased from 5 per cent in 2016 to 11 per cent in 2022. This points to a modest but growing number of seats emerging as viable electoral prospects for the party. Growth in the number of competitive seats is paired by a decline in the number of divisions where the Greens vote is less than 10 per cent. In 2016, 59 per cent of all seats that the Greens contested attracted less than 10 per cent of the vote but this fell to 44 per cent in 2022. Growth has been less robust, however, in the 'tipping point' seats, with the proportion rising from 36 to 44 per cent over the three most recent elections. The picture overall suggests that the Greens are making steady and incremental inroads within the electorate.

We can gain additional insights into the bases of Greens support by comparing key traits of seats against the party's electoral performance. Table 2 groups our three seat categories by demographic rating (i.e., inner-metro,

outer-metro, provincial and rural) and pre-election party incumbency status (Labor or non-Labor), characteristics which are generally positively correlated with the Greens' vote. It reveals that the Greens' strongest electoral performances in 2022 (20+) were, indeed, clustered in inner-metropolitan seats held by Labor. In contrast, the Greens' weakest electoral performances were concentrated in provincial and rural seats, occupied by non-Labor candidates. This is consistent with prevailing evidence that the Greens' competitive prospects are strongest in Labor-held, inner-metropolitan electorates.

Table 2: Greens vote range by seat and party type 2022

	Seat type %				Party type %	
	Inner Metro	Outer Metro	Provincial	Rural	Labor	Non-Labor
20+	76	6	12	6	76	24
10-19	30	39	21	10	51	49
<10	18	24	34	24	37	63

Source: AEC 2022

House victories

The highpoint of this election for the Greens was the capture of three lower house seats — Brisbane, Griffith and Ryan. The retention of the inner metropolitan seat of Melbourne, held by party leader Adam Bandt, was expected. Since winning Melbourne in 2010, the Greens have increased and consolidated their primary vote from 36.17 per cent to 49.62 per cent in 2022. This seat is designated by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) as one of the safest federal electorates.

The Greens' victories in the divisions of Griffith, Ryan and Brisbane are particularly noteworthy, especially given that they are concentrated in Queensland, a state with a substantial resources sector that has delivered strong electoral results for the Coalition (Williams 2021) and comparatively poor representational outcomes for the Greens at recent elections. The Greens' path to victory was assisted by the swing recorded against the Liberal National Party (LNP).

Beginning with Griffith, this seat possesses traits which otherwise made it competitive for the Greens. Griffith is an inner-metropolitan seat that spans the inner-southern suburbs of Brisbane. While it has oscillated between Labor and the Coalition since its creation in 1934, it has been held by Labor since 1998 when future Prime Minister Kevin Rudd won the seat. Following Rudd's resignation from the House in 2013, he was succeeded by Terri Butler, who would later be appointed Labor's shadow environment minister. Over the last three recent elections particularly, the Greens' primary vote has been increasing at Labor's expense. In 2022, the Greens secured the highest primary vote, winning 34.59 per cent of the primary vote, ahead of the LNP (30.74 per cent) and Labor (28.94 per cent). As

the main beneficiaries of the 10.23 per cent swing against the LNP, the Greens stayed ahead of Labor throughout the count, assisted by favourable preference flows from excluded United Australia Party (UAP) and One Nation (ON) candidates. The Greens eventually claimed the seat following the exclusion of Labor at the fourth count.

The electorate of Brisbane shares similar characteristics to Griffith. Brisbane is an inner-metropolitan electorate that has historically leaned left, interspersed by short Liberal/LNP incumbencies. In 2010, redistricting added the affluent 'blue-ribbon' Brisbane suburbs of Ascot, Hamilton, and Hendra, helping the LNP to win the seat. Nevertheless, the prospect of a Greens victory had been increasing, with the party consistently finishing in third position and, crucially, closing the vote gap with Labor since 2010. Although the Greens finished in third position in 2022 (27.24 per cent), only 0.1 per cent separated their vote from Labor (27.25 per cent). The wafer-thin margin separating Labor and the Greens (0.1 per cent) meant that by the exclusion of the second-lowest scoring candidate, the Greens candidate went ahead of the Labor candidate in the count. The Greens' lead over Labor was extended with the exclusion of the UAP and ON, with a greater share of these preferences being allocated to the Greens over the ALP. With Labor's eventual exclusion, 83.15 per cent of these preferences were reallocated to the Greens candidate, thereby enabling the Greens to overtake the LNP, and claim the seat.

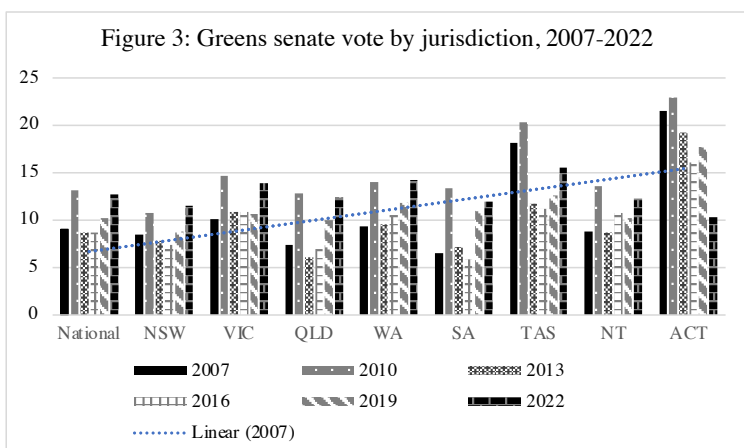
The victory in Ryan defies the received wisdom that the Greens have lower prospects in right tending, outer-metropolitan seats. Ryan is an outer-metropolitan seat, and it has been dominated by the Liberals/LNP since its creation in 1949. Yet in 2022, the Greens won the seat. Part of the explanation lies in the fact that the electorate does include some of the (inner-metropolitan) western suburbs that fall within the city of Brisbane. The electorate covers suburbs such as St Lucia and much of the city's affluent western suburbs. Parts of this electorate also overlap with the state seat of Maiwar, which the Greens also claimed from the LNP in Queensland's 2017 state election and successfully defended in 2020. There were also warning signs for the LNP in the federal seat in 2019. While the LNP's share of the state-wide vote in Queensland increased by 0.5 per cent in 2019, it fell in the seat of Ryan by 3.5 per cent. Assisting the Greens in 2022 was the historical hostility that some LNP supporters typically hold towards Labor. Much of the 10.1 per cent swing registered against the LNP was reflected in the gains made by the Greens, thereby enabling the Greens to finish in second place (30.21 per cent) behind the LNP (38.5 per cent) and well ahead of Labor (22.30 per cent). Preference flows from lower-order candidates enabled the Greens to maintain their lead over Labor throughout the count, and, following Labor's eventual exclusion, to win the seat.

Senate outcome

The Greens had a healthy representational buffer in the Senate going into the 2022 election, with only three of the party's nine senators facing re-election. By the election's end, the Greens had retained its three incumbent senators (Dorinda Cox, Lydia Thorpe and Peter Whish-Wilson), while also gaining three additional senators (Penny Allman-Payne, Barbara Pocock and David Shoebridge).

Consistent with their performance in the House, the Greens' Senate primary vote increased in virtually every state and territory. As Figure 3 shows, the trendline for the Greens' Senate vote is similar to the House, marked by an upward sloping trajectory. Also, in line with their historical election performances, the Greens' Senate state-wide primary vote was generally stronger than the House vote in the corresponding jurisdiction, suggesting that some electors may regard the Greens primarily as a check on government, rather than a party of government. This appears to be the case particularly in Tasmania, where the Greens' Senate vote (15.48 per cent) was 3.48 percentage points higher than its state-wide House vote. Tasmania was also the only jurisdiction where the Greens attained a full quota on primary votes.

There were three jurisdictions where the party's Senate vote diverged from their counterparts. In Queensland, the ACT and South Australia, the party's state-wide House vote was greater than the Senate vote. In the case of Queensland (0.55 per cent) and South Australia (0.75 per cent) the discrepancy was slight but in the ACT the margin of difference was more pronounced (6.41 per cent). Here, the Greens, along with major parties, haemorrhaged vote share to David Pocock (21.3 per cent), the only electorally successful Senate teal independent. Pocock's victory, much like that of his counterparts in other contests, came at the Coalition's expense, and not Labor's.



Green voters: A portrait of stability

The distinctiveness and stability of the Greens' constituency held in 2022. In line with the findings from previous studies (Miragliotta 2013; Cameron and McAllister 2019), 2022 AES survey data compiled by Nicholas Biddle and Ian McAllister confirmed that Greens voters were slightly better educated, much more likely to have completed year 12 and to hold a tertiary degree. Other characteristics likely to predict the Greens vote were gender, with the party drawing stronger support from among female voters, and age, with Greens electors having a younger age profile. Green voters were also more likely to be born in Australia or another English-speaking country (Biddle and McAllister 2022: 6-7).

Biddle and McAllister's post-election study affirmed the underlying stability of Greens voters, as indicated by respondents reporting that they voted for the same party in 2022 as they did in 2019. Repeat voting among Labor and Coalition electors was 72.5 per cent, and 72.3 per cent respectively. In the case of Greens voters, 74.7 per cent of those surveyed 'repeat' voted in 2022, making Greens voters slightly more stable than Labor and Coalition voters (2022: 9).

Another approach that can help identify the orientations of Greens supporters is to track the preference flows from excluded Greens candidates. While voter preference allocations are a crude metric of support (Miragliotta 2004), they do provide some indication of which major party grouping Greens supporters prefer most. As Table 3 shows, preference flows from excluded Greens candidates heavily favour Labor candidates over Coalition candidates by a significant margin, with more than eight in 10 votes from excluded Greens candidates being redistributed to Labor candidates. The data reveals some interesting state-based variation, with the preferences of excluded Greens candidates in the ACT (88.72 per

Table 3: Two party preference flow from excluded Greens candidates

	<i>Coalition %</i>	<i>Labor %</i>
National	14.34	85.66
NSW	15.21	84.79
VIC	12.17	87.83
QLD	16.67	83.33
WA	14.82	85.18
SA	15.18	84.82
TAS	11.28	88.72
ACT	8.54	91.46
NT	18.14	81.86%

Source: AEC 2022a

cent) and Tasmania (91.46 per cent) strongly directed to Labor candidates, whereas in Queensland (83.33 per cent) and NT (81.86 per cent) there was greater leakage to Coalition candidates, potentially suggesting that disaffected Coalition electors in these jurisdictions parked their vote with the Greens. Notwithstanding this, the preferences from excluded Greens candidates were much more likely to be channelled to Labor candidates over Coalition candidates, suggesting strong support for Labor at best, and forbearance at worst.

While Green preferences mostly benefited Labor over Coalition candidates, the same is broadly true for the preferences of excluded Labor candidates, which favoured Greens candidates when the penultimate choice was between a Green and a Liberal candidate. As Table 4 shows, there were only two seats where the Labor candidate was excluded before either the Greens or Coalition candidate. Notwithstanding the small number of cases, the data indicates that Labor preferences are significantly more likely to favour Greens candidates over Liberal contestants. The same, however, is less true for Coalition preferences which overwhelmingly favoured Labor over Greens candidates. This suggests that a certain core of Liberal voters continue to perceive the Greens as more unpalatable than the party's traditional enemy, Labor.

Table 4: Two party preference flows in non-classic seats

	<i>Labor to Green</i> %	<i>Labor to Liberals</i> %
Brisbane	84.50	15.50
Griffith	82.14	17.86
	<i>Liberals to Greens</i> %	<i>Liberals to Labor</i> %
Cooper	31.71	68.29
Melbourne	29.75	70.25
Ryan	31.71	68.29
Wills	26.67	73.33

Source: AEC 2022a

Implications

In this section, we contemplate some of the likely implications that the 2022 outcome will have on the Greens' party organisation, party room and position within the Australian party system more generally.

At the level of the party organisation(s), the outcome is a boost to the party's confidence, especially in the state of Queensland. That the party has increased its representation to 12 federal senators and four House members energises the membership and it also enhances the finances of the state divisions. A larger parliamentary contingent also provides greater opportunities for suitably

qualified party members to gain employment within the offices of Greens elected members, thereby creating career pathways for the next generation of aspiring green politicians and apparatchiks. While such opportunities enable the party to build and retain expertise within their ranks, it also generates some challenges. Specifically, the expansion of the Greens' parliamentary and professional personnel may hasten the party's *professionalisation*, an organisational outcome associated with an increased emphasis on electoral politics over grassroots activities and a growing reliance on paid professionals over the party membership (Jackson 2016: 29). Professionalisation risks the Greens acquiring some of the tendencies of the established parties that they emerged to defeat.

In the parliamentary context, an enlarged party room enables the sharing of shadow portfolio responsibilities across a greater number of elected members. This will enable the parliamentary party to more effectively shadow government ministers and scrutinise proposed legislation before parliament. However, increased parliamentary capacity may increase the complexity of balancing responsiveness (to the party, policies, and supporters) and responsibility (governing prudently, recognising the governing party's mandate). With Labor having only 26 senators, the 12 Greens' senators are a necessary but not a sufficient voting bloc in the event the Coalition refuses to support a bill. Already, the Greens have made decisions likely to disappoint some supporters, namely agreeing to support the Albanese's Government's Climate Change bill that provides for a 43 per cent emissions reduction target by 2030 and net zero emissions by 2050, significantly lower than the Greens' target. At the same time, rejecting government bills brings its own political risks, especially those on which the government campaigned and for which it may claim a mandate. The Albanese's Government's proposed referendum on the Voice to parliament provided an early such test for the Greens. Prior to the election, the Greens had declared that Treaty and the creation of a truth and recognition commission was a priority over Voice, with one Greens senator labelling the referendum a 'waste' (Collard 2022) and indicating that 'explicit' support for Voice is conditional on the Albanese government making 'concrete progress on all three aspects of the Uluru statement, not just one' (Butler 2022b). More voices in the party room may make it difficult for the party to agree on parliamentary tactics.

What of the Greens' longer-term place in the party system? More specifically, to what extent is the Greens' electoral fate tied to the policy manoeuvrings of one or both major parties in relation to climate and the environment? Certainly, Labor has made greater substantive commitments in this policy domain that might conceivably blunt the Greens' appeal. However, there is research to suggest that even if Labor adopts a more

accommodating position on climate/environment this might not be sufficient to neutralise the Greens, particularly if the Coalition remains combative on these issues (Barber and Klassen 2021: 66), as the Coalition was in 2022 and seems likely to continue (SBS, 2/8/2022). This follows another recent study which shows that natural disasters generally drive support for the Greens, especially among Labor voters (McAllister and bin Oslan 2021: 2). Given that frequent natural disasters are anticipated, the Greens' ownership of this issue domain seems secure and thereby their place within the party system.

Conclusion

The 2022 election outcome was unprecedented for the Greens in that they increased their parliamentary representation by six and they won three additional seats in the House. However, the party's representational gains did not reflect a surge in electoral support but rather built on a pattern of incremental growth in their primary vote. The House seat gains were noteworthy, but the party's nation-wide and state-wide vote share increased by a modest percentage. While this might seem like bad news, it may, in fact, be a good news story for the party. Incremental growth in the Greens' primary vote indicates that they may be benefiting from a realignment of the party system, building a lasting voting bloc that will not abandon them even if the major parties change their issue position on issues, such as climate and the environment, to align more closely with the Greens.

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from *Venetian Mirrors**

The Riva here is empty. You begin
(near coloured lights above a cafe door
that leads both in—onto the sawdust floor—
and *out* the circus dome beneath the skin)

anew the ramifying narrative:
stray conversations in the dialects
of ruined textures, books of plaster sects;
seeing light trace a shadowed pendentive;

avoiding pigeons, grey as refugees,
who mill, hunch-shouldered, in internment camps
beneath stone towers with their flashing lamps;
the midnight bells of tourists fumbling keys;

a water rat whose wake unstitched a seam
of satin lining, deep within the folds
of sober black. The ancient truce still holds
among the frontline trenches of a dream.

a ruined light towers flashing anew among ramifying conversations
tourists dialects stray leads deep folds of lining unstitched the
dream shouldered beneath a shadowed narrative the satin
internment dome of the ancient of greys above who holds the keys
to a stone circus whose hunched black lamps wake and trace the
camp within mill sober refugees frontline sects in their plaster
fumbling the sawdust in both still textures you avoiding the empty
midnight without door here near the seam of seeing coloured
trenches of light's truce at the skin as thin bells of water pendent
begin a Riva cafe pigeons books beneath on the floor a rat

JAKOB ZIGURAS

* Note: *Venetian Mirrors* contains pairs of poems: a formal poem on the left, and a free-verse reflection, composed by re-arranging the words of the corresponding formal poem.

It has been sinking since before before:
a stranded Argo—slowly ossifie
in aeons past, when all the heroes died,
never regaining their paternal shore—

become a reef held hostage by the swish,
the lace ennui of sentimental tides
beneath whose babble ghostly Byron rides
through congregations of myopic fish.

In sun-bleached cells, in every coral niche,
eroded saints, whom floating gulls attend,
sink down into reflections without end,
blending into a bottomless pastiche.

Flapping in flocks, and bright as tropic birds,
street-sellers hope to satisfy the Fates.
In pregnant puddles semblance propagates,
and hands wear down the currency of words

eroded Argo hostage in a reef of babble without sentimental fates
sink through the street beneath paternal words never regaining
hope whose bright cells held all stranded heroes when the has-been
Byron rides a sun sinking slowly down into bottomless puddles
attend down in ghostly congregations of ennui the swish lace sellers
(to whom since it died the end hands tropic semblance and
propagates as before in myopic tides) before blending into their
coral niche become the saints of pastiche and wear down every
ossified past and bleached currency birds in reflections and
floating fish satisfy the flocks of pregnant aeons flapping down

JAKOB ZIGURAS