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CAMPAIGN PROFESSIONALISATION: LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELD OR TIPPING THE SCALES?

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To paraphrase William Gibson's famous quote about the future: campaign professionalisation is here, it is just not evenly distributed. In the past 12 months I have interviewed over 60 campaign directors and party leaders from 14 of Australia's major and minor political parties, and asked them in-depth questions about their approach to designing and delivering election campaigns. It is clear from this that—with a very few exceptions—Australian political parties have embraced a professionalised mode of election campaigning. This observation is not limited to the major Labor and Liberal parties; even parties that would be considered quite minor or niche in terms of their electoral presence appear to be deliberately and consciously pursuing professionalisation in how they structure their campaign organisations, how they fund and implement campaigns day-to-day, and how they go about achieving their particular goals as a party. To observe that all parties are *embracing* professionalisation is not to say that all parties have fully *realised* this yet, as access to financial, knowledge and other resources plays a significant role in facilitating or inhibiting their efforts towards this. But it is clear from my research that the majority of Australian parties see professionalisation as a goal and have made progress towards this to the extent that they are able.

Running parallel to this embrace of professionalisation, however, is a movement that is seeing major political parties attempt a return to their roots by engaging voters in one-on-one conversations about their hopes, desires and daily needs. A response to public apathy with politics and an increasingly fractured media landscape, this style of electioneering mimics the activist-driven, grassroots campaigns of the early 20th century, and explicitly replicates the inclusive and empowering style of engagement which has long been a strength of minor parties such as the Australian Greens. Of course, this is homespun politicking with a high-tech twist, as the majority of these conversations take place by phone, email or through social media forums such as facebook and Twitter, rather than in the churches and social clubs of old. What's more, every conversation is both informed by, and then feeds, the collection of data, which allows parties to track and monitor their relationship with the electorate and target their campaign efforts in ever-narrower ways. But the fundamental principle is personal, direct engagement between passionate party activists and ordinary voters— something Australian major parties are relatively unfamiliar with after 40-odd years of running centralised, media-driven election campaigns which touched people only through their TVs.[1]

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[1] Sally Young. *The persuaders. Inside the hidden machine of political advertising.* (Pluto Press: North Melbourne, 2004), 85

So we face a situation where Australian minor parties are adopting many of the professional practices and techniques pioneered by major parties both here and overseas, while at the same time those major parties are looking to minor parties and activist groups for insights into how to reconnect with their declining voter base. In such a situation, it is timely to ask whether these parallel trends may be leading to a levelling of the electoral playing field between big and small parties. Certainly, much of the public and scholarly commentary about the revival of grassroots-style campaigning and new data-driven approaches has focused on how these trends will favour smaller parties who were unable to compete when campaigning was dominated by multi-million dollar advertising spends and torrents of direct mail.

Unfortunately, however, my current research suggests that this is simply not the case. Rather, what I see is minor parties struggling to catch up to the major parties in terms of professionalisation, even as the major parties use the campaign techniques that are their traditional strengths to move ever further ahead of them. To put it another way, where it may have been hoped that these parallel trends would lead to a levelling of the playing field, current evidence suggests that they are actually tipping the scales even further in favour of the established major parties.

Professionalisation of what? By whom?

Before we can explore this point further, it is necessary to briefly outline what is meant by the 'professionalisation' of campaigning, as within the academic literature there are two streams of thinking on what this term denotes.

The first emphasises the increasing role of paid, career professionals within election campaigning. In this view, professionalisation involves the 'supplanting of...volunteers and party loyalists' by 'professional consultants who make the key decisions, determine strategy, develop campaign communications, and carry out campaign tactics for their clients.'[2] As authors such as Stephen Mills point out, this has been an important trend of the last 30 years, and one which has narrowed the number and diversity of people involved in party campaigning in ways that have significantly altered how campaigns are run.[3]

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[2] Dennis Johnson. *No place for amateurs.* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 7
[3] See, for example, Stephen Mills. 'The party official as political marketer: the Australian experience' in Jennifer Lees-Marshment (ed). *Handbook of Political Marketing* (Routledge: London, 2011), 90–201; Stephen

The second stream of literature looks not at the people involved in campaigns, but at how campaigns themselves are structured, presented and targeted towards particular audiences. Authors within this stream see professionalisation as 'a gradual shift from electioneering as essentially a localist, part-time affair directed at party loyalists' to one 'personified by a focus on slick presentation...and an emphasis on the marketing of image and campaign issues'.[4]

Although these streams are sometimes pursued separately in academic discussion, I have found that the professionalisation of staff and the professionalisation of campaign delivery are closely intertwined. That is, parties employ professional staff because they want to market and present themselves better, and the presence of professional staff inevitably brings a sharper edge to parties' efforts to communicate and engage with the public. So I assess parties' levels of professionalisation based both on whether they use paid, professional staff to design and deliver their campaigns, and the extent to which they employ marketing techniques, formal research such as polling and focus groups, demographic targeting and other tools to increase the 'slickness' of those campaigns.

How professionalised are Australia's parties?

With this dual definition in mind, how professionalised have Australia's political parties become in their campaign efforts? Table 1 provides some interesting insight into this.

Mills. 'Contrasting paths: political careers of Labor and Liberal state party officials'. *Paper delivered to the Australian Political Studies Association Annual Conference*, 27–29 September 2010, Melbourne, Australia
[4] David M. Farrell, Robin Kolodny and Stephen Medvic. 'Parties and campaign professionals in a digital age: political consultants in the United States and their counterparts overseas'. *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics,* 6 (2001): 11–30

Table 1: Party professionalisation snapshot

Election	Party (state branches)	Paid campaign director	Used paid media/ communication consultants	Commissioned polling/focus group research	Paid for advertising
WA 2013					
	ALP	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Australian Christians	Y	N	N	Y
	Greens	N	Y	Y	Y
	Liberal Party	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Nationals	Y	Y	Y	Y
QLD 2012					
	ALP	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Greens	N	Y	Y	Y
	Katter's Australian Party	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Liberal National Party	Y	Y	Y	Y
	One Nation	N	N	N	Y
NSW 2011					
	ALP	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Christian Democratic Party	N	Y	Y	Y
	Family First	N	N	N	Y
	Greens	N	Y	Y	Y
	Liberal Party	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Nationals	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Socialist Alliance	N	N	N	N
VIC 2010					
	ALP	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Australian Sex Party	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Country Alliance	N	N	Y	Y
	Democratic Labor Party	N	Y	N	Y
	Family First	N	N	Y	Y
	Greens	N	Y	Y	Y
	Liberal Party	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Nationals	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Socialist Alliance	N	N	N	N
SA 2010					
	ALP	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Dignity 4 Disability	N	N	N	N
	Family First	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Greens	Y	N	Y	Y
	Liberal Party	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Nationals	N	N	N	Y
TAS 2010					
	ALP	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Greens	N	Y	Y	Y
	Liberal Party	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Socialist Alliance	N	N	N	N

Source: Original data compiled by author based on 61 semi-structured interviews with campaign directors and party leaders. Interviews conducted September 2012 – October 2013.

If we look at a range of commonly-cited indicators of professionalisation—including the presence of a paid campaign director, the employment of marketing or communications consultants, the use of commissioned market research and the deployment of paid advertising[5]—it is clear that almost all parties contesting the six most recent Australian state

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[5] These indicators have been drawn from the CAMPROF Index developed by Rachel Gibson and Andrea Rommele, which provides a comparative tool for examining levels of party campaign professionalisation. See

elections have attained some level of campaign professionalisation. The exception in several states is the Socialist Alliance party, which has an ideological objection to professionalisation on the grounds that it represents a further take-over of politics by capitalist, and specifically neo-liberal, economic interests. The South Australian Dignity 4 Disability and National parties, Queensland One Nation and New South Wales Family First parties also showed limited signs of professionalisation during the selected campaigns in this data set, but in each case this was due to an extreme shortage of resources, rather than any lack of willingness to professionalise. The availability of resources is a crucial factor in determining parties' capacity to campaign in more professional ways; this point will be highlighted throughout the following paragraphs.

While Table 1 tells us that a majority of parties have adopted professionalised campaign techniques, it is necessary to drill down into the individual indicators to examine both their impact on campaigns, and the extent of their uptake. Looking first at the employment of a paid campaign director, this provides parties with two important benefits. Firstly, a paid employee is generally able to devote their full time and attention to the campaign, in contrast with volunteers who may have to juggle the campaign's management with competing employment pressures. Secondly, parties are able to attract candidates with relevant professional knowledge and expertise to paid positions—of the 20 paid directors running the campaigns in this data set, all had previously worked in paid campaign roles or as journalists, MP staffers or lobbyists before taking on a director's role.

However, the impact that a paid director can make is significantly influenced by the length of time they are afforded to design and deliver a campaign, and it is here that we see significant disparities across Australia's parties. The Liberal, Labor and National Parties had their campaign teams in place a minimum of 12 months out from election day; it is not uncommon for major recruitment and planning processes to start 18 months to two years in advance of a poll. By contrast, most of the minor parties which employed a paid director could afford to do so only for a short period immediately before the election—usually between three and six months. This provides major parties with a considerable advantage as their paid directors have the time to make well-considered strategic decisions and undertake significant logistical

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Gibson, R. & Rommele, A. 2009. Measuring the professionalisation of political campaigning. *Party Politics,* 15**,** 265-293, pp.267-268. The full list incorporates 10 indicators, however in my forthcoming thesis I argue that the four discussed here are the critical points for comparison as research suggests the other six indicators can either be attributed to factors other than professionalisation, or flow from this core four.

planning well in advance of the official campaign period. Minor party directors not only face contracted timelines for this decision-making and planning, but must also contend with a campaign context and media narratives that have largely been set by the major parties by the time they come onboard.

Turning to the use of paid media and communication consultants, this can take many different forms ranging from long-term contracts with public relations, media management and media buying providers, short-term hiring of media managers to work within the campaign team, or one-off graphic design and advertising production services. Again, there are huge disparities in the extent and range of communications services used by the parties surveyed for this project. The Labor and Liberal parties—and, to a lesser extent, the Nationals—reported drawing on a suite of external advisors, including media buyers, advertising companies, public relations and marketing agencies and social media consultants. These services are usually deployed under the supervision of in-house media and communications staff, allowing the major parties to deliver integrated, high quality communication campaigns which reach voters through a range of channels and with messaging targeted to their particular interests, demographics or geographic location. By contrast, resource constraints meant that most of the minor parties had to make do with just one or two of these services—media management and advertising production were the most popular choices.

As with the employment of campaign directors, the major parties engaged their communications advisors for extended periods in advance of election day, while the minor parties generally limited their use to fixed periods commencing on or near the official campaign period because this was all their budgets could stretch to. While this affects minor parties' ability to plan strategically and develop effective messaging, it also has practical impacts—for example, many minor parties reported difficulty securing advertising space or competitive rates as these things had been absorbed by the major parties well in advance of the campaign.

Related to this point, the use of paid advertising is an interesting indicator because it reflects not only a party's desire to engage with a broad cross-section of the voting public, but also its capacity to generate the funds to achieve this. With the exception of the Socialist Alliance and Dignity 4 Disability parties, every party in this project's data set made some use of paid

advertising, ranging from print and online ads to radio, television and ambient (outdoor) placements. There was unanimous agreement amongst these parties that paid advertising must occupy a relatively central role in any election campaign, although the reasons for this varied between major and minor parties. For the major parties, advertising was seen as a means of building momentum and establishing a narrative for the campaign, as well as presenting the party in a way that it could control entirely. By contrast, minor parties generally saw paid advertising as their only means of establishing a reasonable level of visibility in the public's consciousness, as most reported a lack of interest from media outlets in reporting on their activities or agendas in the news.

For major and minor parties alike, advertising costs occupied a significant proportion of their overall campaign budget, with the size of this budget being the primary factor guiding the extent of their media presence. That is, each of the parties interviewed for this project reported doing as much advertising as their budgets would allow, while still leaving room to complete other essential tasks such as organising volunteers, printing how-to-vote cards and similar. Of course, party campaign budgets vary wildly and campaigners are notoriously tight-lipped about the specifics of these, but thanks to recent legislative reforms in Western Australia, Queensland and New South Wales it is possible to gain some insight into the volume of money raised in total, and the amount spent for this aspect of campaigning. Table 2 details the amounts raised and spent by all participating parties at the 2013 West Australian state election,[6] and provides an excellent illustration of the enormous disparity between major and minor party spending.

Table 2: WA party budgets and advertising spending

Party	Election	Total reported campaign expenditure	Total advertising spend*
ALP	WA 2013	$2,756,512	$1,840,446
Australian Christians	WA 2013	$60,460	$30,138
Greens	WA 2013	$446,090	$380,957
Liberal Party	WA 2013	$5,141,459	$2,848,000
National Party	WA 2013	$323,692	$286,559

*Rounded to nearest full dollar.

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[6] The Queensland and New South Wales disclosure legislation requires parties to report their spending as individual line items, rather than as an aggregate figure as in Western Australia, so work is still underway on compiling these figures. Full disclosure reports can be accessed from the NSW Election Funding Agency (http://searchdecs.efa.nsw.gov.au/partyreportpivot.aspx); the Electoral Commission Queensland (http://www.ecq.qld.gov.au/returns_index.aspx?folderid=1169&ekmensel=c547ab44_6_87_8430_1) and the Western Australian Electoral Commission (http://www.elections.wa.gov.au/candidates-and-parties-funding-and-disclosure/election-returns#PoliticalParties)

It should come as a surprise to no one that major parties have far more money to spend on advertising, and are therefore able to reach many more people with their campaign messages than minor parties are. Furthermore, they are able to use a more diverse and complex mix of advertising channels to reach voters at different points in the campaign, whereas minor parties are more restricted in the range of options open to them. While many of the minor parties in this project reported making deliberate attempts both to raise more money and to shift the balance of their campaign budgets towards a greater advertising spend, the reality is that minor parties still lag far behind the major ones when it comes to their advertising reach.

Finally, the use of commissioned research such as polling and focus groups is an important indicator of professionalisation because it speaks to parties' willingness to target and refine the content of their campaigns to appeal to particular segments of the electorate. Market research can give parties valuable insights into how to achieve this, but such insights do not come cheap: at the 2013 Western Australian election the Liberals and ALP spent $182,000 and $159,000 on polling and focus group research respectively, while the Green and National parties both spent just over $20,000 each on this.[7]

While a significant number of minor parties have embraced market research and the insights it can provide, their use is several orders of magnitude smaller than the major parties—as suggested by the spending figures quoted above. The impact of this is felt both strategically and practically. Strategically, major parties enter election campaigns with a much clearer understanding of the electoral landscape than their minor party counterparts, and are able to adapt their tactics as needed if that landscape shifts throughout the campaign. Practically, they are able to make much more accurate decisions about where to allocate human and financial resources to maximise their impact, and can move these around as individual seat contests become more or less critical. The difference is comparable to navigating a major city with a GPS which provides minute-by-minute updates of traffic conditions, versus doing so with a years-old paper street directory.

This discussion of the uptake of professionalised modes of campaigning illustrates two important things. Firstly, Australia's minor political parties have made—and are continuing to make—significant progress towards the professionalisation of their election campaigns.

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[7] '*Election Returns'*. Elections WA, accessed 11 October 2013, http://www.elections.wa.gov.au/candidates-and-parties-funding-and-disclosure/election-returns#PoliticalParties

The professionalisation of the major parties has been very well documented,[8] but with the exception of the Greens, this progress by the minor parties has largely gone unnoticed. This is primarily because Australian journalists and academics rarely look closely at minor parties unless circumstances conspire to place them at the centre of the political agenda, as in the 2013 federal election.

Secondly, the growing vote share won by minor parties such as the Greens at elections in the past decade suggests that professionalisation *is* helping these parties engage more effectively with the electorate.[9] But there is a limit to how much they can professionalise with limited resources, and the escalating arms race in campaign spending means that minor parties are continually playing catch-up even as they find ways to raise more and more money. So while there is no question that professionalisation has been embraced by Australia's major and minor political parties alike, this has had little impact in terms of creating a more even electoral playing field.

Big data and the return to the grassroots

Turning now to the second important trend in campaigning in recent years, the revival of grassroots-style community activism and its combination with data-driven targeting has significantly altered the dynamic of campaigning since Barack Obama popularised these techniques at the 2008 US Presidential election.

Face-to-face contact and word of mouth advocacy formed the basis of election campaigns throughout the 18th and 19th centuries (the 'pre-modern era' of electioneering), but the rise of mass broadcast media in the 20th century allowed parties to disseminate their messages to millions of voters at once and so diminished the need for time consuming and unpredictable

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[8] See, for example, Ian McAllister. 'Australia: Party politicians as a political class', in Jens Borchert and Jurgen Zeiss (eds). *The political class in advanced democracies: a comparative handbook*. (Oxford University Press: London, 2003); Stephen Mills. *The new machine men: polls and persuasion in Australian politics*. (Penguin: Sydney, 1986); Ainslie van Onselen and Peter van Onselen. 'On message or out of touch? Secure web sites and political campaigning in Australia', *Australian Journal of Political* Science 43(2003): 43–58; Ian Ward. 'Parties, governments and pollsters: a new form of patronage?', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 36(2001): 553–565

[9] Data on vote share for major and minor parties at state and federal elections 2000 to 2013 has been compiled as part the data gathering for this thesis project. All vote share data has been collected from Australian Politics and Election Database, The University of Western Australia: http://elections.uwa.edu.au/. The Australian Greens' performance at the 2013 Federal Election is an exception to this trend, as the party's vote fell back significantly from 11.8% to 8.4%. It remains to be seen whether this is a temporary reversal caused by the Greens' involvement in the Gillard minority government, or the beginning of a longer decline for the federal party.

one-on-one interactions (the 'modern era' of campaigns). However, in the 21st century the mass media market has fractured into thousands of sub-markets spread across multiple communications platforms, and the public sphere has became increasingly noisy with competing messages and products. In response, parties have begun turning once again to the personal and direct contacts of old, albeit facilitated by new technologies and social media (the 'post-modern era' of campaigning).[10] Although his campaign team would have us believe otherwise, Obama's 2008 campaign was notable not because it pioneered this approach, but because it brought together a range of tools and methods which had been gaining traction up to that point and put them to work in an integrated way.

Briefly, this style of campaigning aims to engage with voters as individuals, and at the level of their specific interests—whether that be large-scale international issues such as the environment, national issues such as education and the economy, or local issues such as roads and hospitals. Parties try to find out as much as possible about what voters care about and how they are affected by different policies or events, so that they can then engage in targeted and specific conversations which win voters to their side.

While the core of this campaign approach is as old as politics itself, in its current iteration it draws heavily on an ethos of personal political empowerment which sprang out of the environment and peace movements of the 1960s and 1970s—the idea that impassioned activists can change the world by converting one person at a time. Furthermore, its tools are the same ones that activists have long employed to fight political or social injustice: the telephone tree, the street corner conversation and, more recently, the blog, email or tweet. For these reasons, it has been suggested that minor parties might have an advantage in this current campaign phase, as they have an unbroken history of attracting and utilising fired-up activists and building the networks needed to deliver effective grassroots campaigns. By contrast, the major parties are distinctly out of practice at this after several decades of centralisation and elite dominance of both campaigns and policy-making.

But as with professionalisation, my research suggests that the financial and human resources of Australia's major parties more than compensate for any disadvantage they may experience by operating outside their campaign comfort zone. The following section briefly highlights

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[10] Fritz Plasser and Gunda Plasser. *Global political campaigning: a worldwide analysis of campaign professionals and their practices*. (Praeger Publishers: Westport, 2002), 6

several key disparities in the direct contact efforts waged by major and minor parties, to demonstrate why cash remains king even in the world of grassroots campaigning.

Firstly, although cheaper than large-scale broadcast advertising, this type of campaigning still costs significant amounts of money. Office space, phone lines and transport must be organised, volunteers must be trained, fed and outfitted, databases must be built and maintained. These costs have traditionally occupied a significant proportion of minor party campaign budgets, but as discussed above, the embrace of professionalisation has seen these parties commit more resources to advertising, research and the employment of paid advisors. Many of the minor parties participating in this project reported having to choose between grassroots engagement and media visibility because their budgets did not allow them to deliver both to an effective standard; some chose to pursue a greater ad buy, and others to continue with their on-the-ground activism. By contrast, the major parties appear to have simply added direct contact to their already extensive suite of campaign tools, engaging with voters individually as a supplement to, and reinforcement of, their advertising and media campaigns. This places minor parties in a difficult bind: do they attempt to compete in the war for the airwaves and so abandon some of their traditional high ground, or do they continue to focus on grassroots engagement at the expense of wider visibility to the electorate? Either choice appears to cost them, with the first leading to dissatisfaction amongst core party supporters, and the second making it difficult to win votes beyond this base. By virtue of their far greater budgets, the major parties are spared from having to make such a choice and can instead fire on all cylinders to protect their electoral position.

Secondly, effective voter engagement in elections involves two steps: identifying the voters you need to communicate with, and then reaching them with a phone call, letter, email or visit to persuade them to support you. If you cannot manage the second step, the first is largely redundant. Yet this is the situation that many of the minor parties in this project reported facing on a regular basis: they are able to identify potential supporters (both through formal canvassing and their broader activities within the community) but are then unable to reach out to them in a meaningful or sustained way because they lack the resources to do so. This gulf between knowledge about the electorate and capacity to act on it is a source of enormous frustration for many minor party campaigners, particularly as they see the major parties knocking on more doors and making more phone calls than they could ever realistically manage. In the past, the efforts made by minor parties to engage with people one-

on-one marked them apart from the major parties and added to their political appeal, regardless of how limited these efforts were in scope. But now that the major parties have also turned their attention to this mode of campaigning, it appears that their superior resources are allowing them to blitz the minor parties in the ground war, just as they have long done in the media air war.

Finally, one significant resource advantage that minor parties themselves believe they enjoy over major parties is the presence of experienced, committed activists who are steeped in the ethos of grassroots democracy. The major parties—so the argument goes—have grown so distant from their members and supporters that they do not even know how to begin engaging them in a meaningful dialogue about their ideas and aspirations, or how to build on such a dialogue to turn passive supporters into active campaigners for their cause. However, in placing so much importance on the experience and outlook of their activists, minor parties overlook two things. Firstly, Australia's major parties can afford to simply hire in whatever expertise they do not possess themselves, including people with grassroots campaign nous. Secondly, while these paid campaigners may not have the commitment to a party that long-term activists do, some major party representatives reported seeing this as an actual advantage. They believed that outside campaigners could take a clearer-eyed view of the party's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats than more committed partisans could, and that this could actually help them as they moved towards greater engagement with the public.

It should be clear from this brief discussion that the recent trend towards more direct voter engagement in political campaigns provides little advantage to minor parties, despite this being their traditional area of strength. Australia's major parties can bring their superior resources to bear in running grassroots campaigns which eclipse minor parties' efforts in both their scale and reach, and do so in addition to their catalogue of other campaign activities. By contrast, minor parties face a frustrating series of trade-offs: between engagement and visibility, knowledge and action, depth and breadth. As a result, we appear to be seeing an extension of the major parties' entrenched strategic advantage into yet another area of Australian electioneering.

Implications?

Having explored how the parallel trends of professionalisation and grassroots engagement are affecting Australia's political parties, it is worth briefly highlighting two broad implications arising from this.

The first is that this further entrenchment of major party advantage is likely to lead to renewed calls for campaign spending caps and donation limits. Minor parties are acutely aware that the electoral playing field will never be levelled until the question of money is addressed, and a number of participants in this project mentioned that their parties were looking to recent reforms in New South Wales and Queensland as models of campaign regulation that could be pursued elsewhere. In particular, the introduction of spending caps is seen as an important reform which would help scale back the arms race of political spending and allow minor parties to compete more effectively.

The second implication of the trends discussed in this paper is that campaigns are growing more and more intrusive in their reach while also becoming more opaque in their operations, and this should lead us to question the adequacy of existing disclosure arrangements. Australian parties are reaching further and further into our lives using public and privately-harvested data, but they are doing so at a level which is increasingly only visible to the voters these efforts are targeted at. At least when campaigning primarily involved an all-out assault of advertising, there was a level of transparency in that everyone could see what parties were up to and what messages they were conveying to the community. Their activities could then be scrutinised and challenged by other political actors as part of the ongoing campaign argy-bargy. But the emerging focus on personalised and targeted voter contact minimises opportunities for public scrutiny because only the parties and their target voters know what is really going on; even then, those target voters may just be privy to a small fraction of a much wider campaign effort. Existing approaches to transparency have primarily focused on financial disclosure, but there is a question about whether this is adequate as a means of ensuring transparency within this vital area of Australia's democratic process.

In the current campaign climate, there is a need to think creatively about what 'public disclosure' might actually encompass, and how the non-financial activities of political parties can also be made more transparent. Examples may include bringing political parties which receive public funding under the jurisdiction of the Freedom of Information Act, or requiring them to lodge copies of all campaign materials disseminated to voters alongside spending and

donations reports. At the very least, there is a need for a renewed discussion about what public disclosure is actually intended to achieve, and how new forms of this might increase transparency in response to an evolving campaign landscape.

Like many other facets of the world today, election campaigning has been significantly changed by the social and technological developments of the past few decades. The parallel trends of professionalisation and direct engagement represent important shifts in how parties organise themselves and connect with the electorate, as well as how we, as voters, experience electoral politics. But while the dynamics of campaigning may have shifted, this has done little—if anything—to dislodge Australia's major parties from their dominant position at the scoring end of the electoral playing field. The until-now unspoken assumption of this paper is that this is no good thing, and that Australian democracy would be better served if a wider range of political actors were able to compete on a more level footing. Others may not share this view, and so will see no reason to worry about campaign trends which entrench the systemic advantage of some players. But for those who believe that more fair and balanced electoral competition *is* a social good, this paper has identified a range of ways that evolving campaign practice works against this. Hopefully this may spark a renewed discussion about the relationship between campaigns and the breadth of representation on offer in Australian politics today.