

# The High-Performance Political Party (2000 Words)

**(July 2022 Version)**

The High-Performance Political Party is a concept about creating a new progressive organisation within our political system. Progressive Australians, those who want to see us face our challenges together and maintain a healthy human society, should have a rational conversation about how to best organise ourselves in the 21st century.

Two key aspects of our system of government are that it produces two options for executive government, and that the executive is drawn from the legislature. The best way to describe Australia's current political divide is 'progressive versus conservative'.

This means being able to see the difference between our hybrid Westminster system of government itself, and the state of the current major parties incumbent in those two positions. What is the situation that we find ourselves in? How do the political systems that we have around us work and function? And what are functional ways that we can make the system work to our advantage?

The people on the progressive side are best served if we have a single, open, modern, transparent organisation with a large number of people involved, with an open meritocracy to produce leaders. This will give the organisation and its people more integrity. It is in our interests to better position ourselves to consistently win majorities and provide Australians with excellence in executive government.

It is not in our interests as progressive Australians to fracture into smaller groups or tribes. The ALP is becoming a smaller group, with many more progressives outside the tent rather than in it. The Greens are not broad enough to set themselves up to offer an alternative executive government. Independents are not capable of forming an executive.

How we choose to organise ourselves matters. It will have a tangible effect on our lives. This is much more likely to be achieved by working within our system rather than against it. A primary step to achieving this goal is the organisational design of any new party.

The major political parties we have today are designed for a 20th century Australia which no longer exists. They are not functioning effectively. Australians will be best served by making a large new political party that is open, modern and transparent. It would seek to become the progressive option for government within our two-party system. How well we are able to organise ourselves will have a tangible result on what we are able to achieve. The current organisational state of Australia's two main political parties presents an opportunity for a big evolutionary leap forward in organisational structure and design, rather than small, hesitant steps.

In the 21st century, Australians are going to experience significant and growing challenges such as climate change and resource depletion. Progressives will be best served by a single, modern, vibrant organisation that is open and transparent. Key characteristics of our Westminster system of government include:

1. It produces two-party outcomes; at each election there is a choice of two options for which party forms executive government.
2. The executive branch of government (the Prime Minister and Cabinet) is drawn from the legislative branch (the people elected to Parliament).

There are only really two major countries – Australia and the UK – that have both of these characteristics.

To have the best chance of making a difference, we should organise into a party that can attract a large number of people to join it. It should be an easy and appealing organisation to join and to participate in. It is in our interests to build a systematic approach to producing future leaders – one that will be able to successfully channel both a quantity and quality of talented individuals into parliaments across the country.

This type of organisation is much more likely to lead to sustained periods of functional government. Our party structures are not set in stone and must have the capacity to evolve in line with societal needs. It is not in our interests to break up into smaller groups and parties. Our system does not reward this approach. It is in our interests to work out rational and logical ways to work together. If we are unable to organise in sufficient numbers and in a way that is relevant to life today we will be unlikely to effect significant and sustainable change necessary for the 21st century. Sentimental attachment to the political structures and parties of the past and present will not help.

There is no clear pathway to change how our political system works. It also has significant strengths that enable stable governments. A more successful path is understanding how it works and using it to our best advantage. This is about understanding how governments are formed—not how legislation is passed. Australia can be described as a ‘disguised’ two-party state. There is a smorgasbord of party options, but only two of them are realistic choices for government. Our system allows people to go out and start whatever party they want but makes it very unlikely they will become part of a government.

The current divide that best describes 21st-century Australian politics is ‘progressive versus conservative’. Most people do not naturally think of the world in terms of two conflicting sets political ideas. Our political system, however, frames it as such, and we have to be able to give labels to those ideas. It is in our interests as progressives to have an organisation which reflects this reality. It is only a small percentage of the population who would agree on everything in each camp. Everyone has a bunch of different opinions and influences—their own personal politics.

Australia has had a consistent structure in its options for government since 1946, the first year that the contemporary Liberal Party stood in an election. The Labor Party began its occupation of one of the two governing spots much earlier, in the 20th century. These parties have held the two spots at the table, uninterrupted, since this time. It is unrealistic to expect that this arrangement will continue to be effective and functional for eternity. It is in our interests to have a highly functional organisation as the progressive option.

Political parties are a form of social technology. Both current major parties are organisations designed for the 20th Century. Both are undergoing problems relating to 21st century life. They are also firmly entrenched with all the advantages of incumbency. Both are becoming more disfigured as time goes on. They are being abandoned by the general population. Labor is inaccessible and the Liberals have been infested by various toxic demographics and the worst of vested interests. Both parties use methods of interaction, membership and organisational design that found success in the 20th century, but no longer work. Meanwhile, our lives today are dominated by organisations, like the tech giants, that are only around 20 years old. Organisations work differently now. In any other field, organisations so outdated would no longer exist.

Labor’s narratives and organisational structure are not set up for the 21st-century world. To judge the organisation is not to judge its people, the party faithful, or any of its leaders as individuals. The intent is to highlight the problems within the organisation itself. The party is in an irretrievable state of decline. Its structure is archaic, and it has years of baggage.

Organisations have lifespans. They become stagnant over time. To many Australians, the ALP is a murky and outdated organisation with unnecessary complexity, factional wars and continuous corruption scandals. It has lost the ability to make meaningful reform. Its last big organisational review in 2010 and the lacklustre response has been a demonstration. It displays all the signs of the crippling decay that affects anything at the end of its effective lifespan.

It is becoming a smaller and smaller group, with more people outside the tent than in it. The party is ill-equipped to address the challenges of a rapidly evolving 21st century. Society has moved on, and the ALP's traditional narratives are stale and ineffective. The two-party system is far older than the Labor Party and the system is in no way contingent on the Labor Party being one of its two options.

The Liberal Party of the 2020s is a conservative force. The more conservative parts of the organisation have essentially taken over. In recent years there has been a massive influx of Pentecostal Christians and other deeply conservative groups. They have come into the organisation and increasingly become more powerful and vocal. The current leaders of the organisation are conservatives, and the next generation of leaders are also deeply conservative. The Liberal Party has always been the party representative of, and funded by, business and corporate interests, but in the 2020s it is infested with the worst of them. Vested commercial interests have become increasingly powerful within the organisation and created a situation of paralysis, where it's difficult to make decisions in the national interest, like reducing our carbon emissions, because someone, somewhere will lose money.

As for the Greens, former party leader Bob Brown's vision of the Greens slowly replacing the ALP as Australia's leading progressive party over the next half-century is a dystopian nightmare. It implies that the progressive side will take until 2061 to get our act together. The Greens in no way provide an option for executive government. A coalition between Labor and the Greens would just put both parties' flaws on display. Like Labor, the Greens only appeal to a section of the progressive Australian population that identifies as being part of that tribe. A large portion of progressive Australians are not attracted to either organisation.

People don't have to agree on everything to be part of the same political party, especially in a system like ours. The idea of bunching up in smaller political groups and tribes is something that needs to be actively resisted. It is a path to political impotence. The fragmentation of the progressive vote means that there is no strong base to help win majority government through a functional institution.

It is in our interests to work out productive ways to come together and work within a single large organisation. Society has gone through many changes, and people are interacting with each other in new and different ways. It is in our interests to create a scenario where many diverse groups of individuals, located in different parts of the country, are able to participate in the same organisation.

How people participate in 21st century volunteer organisations is rapidly evolving. It is becoming distinctly different to participating in 20th century organisations. There is likely no other point in human history where organisational methods have changed so quickly. Members of the party, and the general public, should be easily able to look into the organisation, witness how its processes operate, and understand how decisions are made. This does not ensure that you automatically trust the people within it, but if you can see into the organisation—how decisions are made, who has what power and why—you are more inclined to respect the organisation's integrity.

A new major progressive party would be best placed to spring into existence with a critical mass of people supporting it before it even exists. It would be beneficial to have a planning and design process that can attract the people necessary to make critical mass possible. A party of this type—a large, broad and functional umbrella organisation operating within a two-party political system—needs large numbers of people to work and be functional.

## Participants

A potent political force needs people to achieve its goals. We are living in an era of individualism, personalisation, self-identity and expression. This has been happening in most democratic countries around the world. Australians are more likely to be involved in micro-political forms of participation, such as donating money, signing a petition, or purchasing particular types of goods that don't require interacting with other people. There is, however, an abundance of Australians who are interested in creating a progressive future for their country. There is no reason that a potent political organisation shouldn't be able to attract a large number of people to participate in it.

It is about participating, not any traditional ideas of membership. There is a movement by political parties around the world towards the US model of primaries, for selecting their representatives in elections. This sees a large number of people take part in choosing the candidates, as a normal part of being a voter. While US democracy may have many flaws, public participation is not one of them. The idea of open processes that could include a million Australians is better than a closed process that includes almost no one.

## Leaders

We need a political institution and an organisational culture that is conducive to attracting the best and brightest Australia has to offer. It is in our interests to create fertile ground for a high number of quality leaders to emerge. Australia is producing tons of amazing people. The goal is to find and develop a large number of potential cabinet-level leaders and demonstrate excellence in executive government. It is also in the interests of the 99.9% of Australians who are not seeking political office, to create open and competent processes for the 0.01% that do. Broadly, this would involve creating clear and transparent pathways into politics; drawing from a large talent pool; developing potential leaders; and assessing those potential leaders. There is also the opportunity to create new selection processes that balance the need to channel talent into parliaments with giving a large number of people a say in who represents them. It is like creating a better technology to make use of the hybrid Westminster government that we have.

## Structures

Many of the structures and positions that exist in 20th century organisations are unnecessary and superfluous in a 21st century organisation. We can make use of advances in communications technology previously unavailable to society. An effective organisation in the 21st century must reflect the ways that we communicate and seek social and political involvement. Ideally a new institution would be modern, transparent, represent a broad cross-section of the community and produce a high number of quality leaders.

A new organisation can be custom designed for 21st century Australia—a bit like pressing the organisational ‘reset button’ and going from the 1890s to the 2020s. A large new 21st century organisation of this type can be started with the advantages of a clean slate and no baggage.