State Government Convergence and Partisanship: A Long-Run Analysis of Australian Ministerial Portfolios

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This article uses ministerial portfolios to analyze the *scope* of government activity across a number of jurisdictions in order to shed light on questions of convergence and the impact of partisanship of government. It establishes the utility of the portfolio measure by comparing it with more commonly used indicators of government activity: public expenditure as a proportion of gross domestic product and public employment as a proportion of total employment. It then investigates two questions regarding government: first, whether the scope of state government activity in Australia has converged over the last century and, second, whether partisanship has had any consistent impact on the scope of government in the states.

The term scope of government refers both to the *range* of activities and the *degree* to which these are pursued, although in this article the two dimensions are collapsed.[1] Whereas government tends to be

1 See Jeremy Moon and Anthony Sayers, "The Dynamics of Governmental Activity: A Long-Run Analysis of the Changing Profile of Australian Ministerial Port-

Acknowledgments: This article emerges from the Australian Research Council project "Politics and Government in the Australian States," directed by Campbell Sharman, University of Western Australia, and Jeremy Moon, University of North London. Thanks to Imogen Fountain, Richard Miles and Mark Pickup for their assistance with data manipulation, Inayat Jetha for research assistance, and to Ruth Abbey, Alex Coram, Hugh Emy, Campbell Sharman, Bruce Stone, Anthony Perl, Patrick James and the JOURNAL's referees for their helpful comments.

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Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique
35:3 (September/septembre 2002) 589-612

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423902773360 Published online by Cambridge University Press

measured in terms of its size, notably in the big government and overload debates, this analysis is more concerned with the measurement of the scope of what governments do. This also enables a comparison of the profiles of government, or the balance of their activities among three categories: defining, physical resource mobilization and social; and to consider whether the profiles of government are converging over time.

The idea that the activities of government might converge in response to secular pressures associated with modernization and industrialization is a staple of comparative public policy analysis.[2] Interest in the effects of globalization and the growth of trading blocs has spawned a growing literature on whether there is increasing congruence in the goals, styles, content and instruments adopted by state policy makers.[3] A broad, neo-liberal, policy convergence has been detected among emerging economies in Asia, as well as the advanced economies of Western Europe.[4] Convergence of specific social policies in countries of the European Union has flowed from the criteria for membership of that body, while in the Americas, policy co-ordination has been a component of the North American Free Trade Agreement and discussions over a larger free trade zone.[5] Subnational units of federal states provide another opportunity to consider convergence.[6]

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folios," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 34 (1999), 149-67. See also O. Borre and M. Goldsmith "The Scope of Government," in Ole Borre and Elinor Scarbrough, eds., *The Scope of Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 4.

2 Alan M. Taylor, *Sources of Convergence in the late Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge Mass: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1996); Clark Kerr, *The Future of Industrial Societies: Convergence or Continuing Diversity?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); and Jeremy Moon, "Convergence/Divergence Hypotheses of Government Activities: Some Methodological Considerations," *Politics* 22 (1987), 36-45.

3 William D. Coleman, "Policy Convergence in Banking: A Comparative Study," *Political Studies* 42 (1994), 274-92.

4 Steven A. Hoffman "The International Politics of Southern Asia," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 33 (1998), 43-61; and Wolfgang C. Muller "Political Traditions and the Role of the State," *West European Politics* 17 (1994), 32-51.

5 Salvatore Pitruzello, "Social Policy and the Implementation of the Maastricht Fiscal Convergence Criteria: The Italian and French Attempts at Welfare and Pension Reforms," *Social Research* 64 (1997) 589-642; Thomas J. Courchene, "Room to Manoeuvre? Globalization and Policy Convergence," proceedings of a conference held at Queen's University School of Policy Studies, November 1998 (Kingston: School of Policy Studies, Queen's University, 1999); and Donald Barry and Ronald C. Keith, eds., *Regionalism, Multilateralism, and the Politics of Global Trade* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999).

6 For example, Panayiotis C. Afxentiou, "Convergence across Canadian Provinces," discussion papers series (University of Calgary Department of Economics, No. 99-03, 1999).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423902778360 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Abstract. This study makes use of ministerial portfolios to analyze the scope of government activity. It shows that in comparison with expenditure and employment measures, portfolios have a number of advantages in terms of stability, absoluteness, and in identifying when new activities attract sustained government attention. Portfolios are used to investigate whether there has been any convergence in the scope of government activity across state governments in Australia over the century since 1890, and, also, whether partisanship has had any consistent impact on government activity. Neither hypothesis is confirmed. Rather, long-term patterns of activity are complex and appear to be driven by a wide range of forces.

Résumé. Les budgets ministériels sont des indicateurs plus fiables de l'action des gouvernements que les dépenses publiques et les politiques de création d'emplois parce qu'ils sont plus stables et intangibles. Après avoir justifié cette hypothèse, les auteurs analysent les budgets ministériels des gouvernements australiens depuis l890 afin d'évaluer l'ampleur et la convergence de leur action d'une part, et l'impact des affiliations partisanes sur cette action d'autre part. Aucune des hypothèses précitées n'est cependant confirmée, ce qui tend à démontrer que l'ampleur de l'activité des gouvernements sur le long terme est un phénomène complexe déterminé par un large éventail de variables.

Despite its appeal as an analytical framework, evidence of convergence is not overwhelming, and many studies have identified continued diversity in policy outcomes and the importance of local conditions in shaping public policy.[7] Robert Seeliger suggests that standards for measuring convergence may have been too lax, leading to an overestimation of the degree and frequency with which it occurred.[8] There are a number of alternatives to the possibility that governments might be converging on some common set of activities. The activities of governments might be systematically diverging, reflecting the logic of their separate constitutional standing and distinctive institutions, political culture, partisanship and economic activities. Governments may change in parallel, reflecting common directions of change in response to external factors but from different levels of activity structured by long-standing fundamental variations in the character of governments and societies. Finally, it is possible that the scope of government efforts continue to differ because of the diversity in political conditions and demands each confronts. Thus the four options explored here are whether Australian state government activities converged, diverged, changed in parallel or rather reflected dynamic diversity.[9] This is achieved by comparing the scope of state

7 R. W. Hafer and A. M. Kutan, "A Long-Run View of German Dominance and the Degree of Policy Convergence in the EMS," *Economic Inquiry* 32 (1994), 684-95; and David A. L. Levy, "Regulating Digital Broadcasting in Europe: The Limits of Policy Convergence," *West European Politics* 20 (1997), 24-42.

8 Robert Seeliger, "Conceptualizing and Researching Policy Convergence," *Policy Studies Journal* 24 (1996), 287-306.

9 Seeliger suggests four similar categories: convergent, identical and synchronous, divergent and indeterminate (ibid.).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423902778360 Published online by Cambridge University Press

government activities and their rates of change over the twentieth century, as well as the profiles—or changing balance—of state government activities.[10]

While much convergence literature suggests that structural forces shape the scope of government activity, there is also the matter of whether the electoral choices of voters may drive any process of convergence or divergence. It may be that political parties act as proxies, allowing structural forces to find expression as voters favour one or the other approach to government activity as embodied in party platforms.[11] This study also investigates the extent to which the largest party in Australia, the Australian Labor Party, had a discernible effect on the increased scope of state governments in general and on a disproportionate state government emphasis on physical resource mobilization or social activities, as might be expected of a left-of-centre party.[12]

Federal systems provide a unique similar-system perspective on this question, as a range of critical political variables can be held constant across different governments and the impact of other factors on government activity can be assessed.[13] Moreover, such comparisons are important because "significant intranational diversity would call into question this basic tenet [that convergence is associated with modernization or industrialization] of the convergence hypothesis . . . and provide an indicator, for example, for the efficacy of international forces and for the endurance of domestic processes and institutions

10 Moon and Sayers compare state and Commonwealth government profiles ("The Dynamics of Governmental Activity").

11 Linda A. White, "Partisanship or Politics of Austerity? Child Care Policy Development in Ontario and Alberta, 1980 to 1996," *Journal of Family Issues* 18 (1997), 7-29; and Nathan S. Balke, "Partisanship Theory, Macroeconomic Outcomes and Endogenous Elections," *Southern Economic Journal* 57 (1991), 920-35.

12 See Carles Boix, "Political Parties and the Supply Side of the Economy: The Provision of Physical and Human Capital in Advanced Economies, 1960-90," *American Journal of Political Science* 41 (1997), 814-45, and "Partisan Governments, the International Economy, and Macroeconomic Politics in Advanced Nations, 1960-1993," *World Politics* 53 (2000), 38-73; Marsha A. Chandler, "State Enterprise and Partisanship in Provincial Politics," this JOURNAL 15 (1982), 711-40; and Muller "Political Traditions and the Role of the State."

13 Harold Laski, "The Obsolescence of Federalism," *New Republic*, May 3, 1939, 367-69; for Australia, Rae Else-Mitchell "Uniformity or Diversity," in J. Aldred and J. Wilkes, eds., *A Fractured Federation?* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1983); Brian Galligan, ed., *Australian Federalism* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1989); and A. Lijphart "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method," *American Political Science Review* 65 (1971), 682-93, and "The Comparable Cases Strategy in Comparative Research," *Comparative Political Studies* 8 (1975), 158-77.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423902778360 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that shape policy."[14] This is particularly so when, as with the Australian states, the subunits retained similar constitutional arrangements over many decades, and similar party systems in which the ALP, as the major long-term left-wing party, played a dominant role.

The analytical strength of research in federal systems is further enhanced when there is available a long-run data series collected across a period when the constitutional rules of the constituent units remain similar. This study uses such a data collection of ministerial portfolios to explore the changing scope of government activity in the six Australian states from 1890, when all states had achieved self-government, through 1900 when the colonies federated to form the Commonwealth of Australia, until 1997.

As we shall see, the portfolio measure paints a distinctive picture of government activity over the last few decades under study when compared with either of the two more commonly used expenditure or employment measures. As a stable, absolute and a meso-level indicator of government activity, it avoids difficulties associated with micro-level measures of policy development, and is not plagued by the problems of averaging or aggregating individual policies across time periods, policy sectors and policy dimensions. It also avoids definitional anomalies found in time-series data. These characteristics enhance the reliability and comparability of the measure.[15]

Over the twentieth century there were complex and competing patterns of change in Australian state government activity that cast doubt on the convergence thesis. Regarding partisanship, there is no evidence that ALP ministries were strongly associated with increases in the scope of state government activity. Nor were non-ALP (Coalition) parties[16] associated with decreases in the scope of activity, as might be expected. Space does not permit an investigation of the contextual factors underpinning these findings, but identification of these trends is an important test of the convergence and partisan theses, and enhances our understanding of government activity in Australia.

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14 Seeliger, "Conceptualizing and Researching Policy Convergence," 303.

15 Ibid., 301. This approach is consistent with the principles of theory building outlined in Mario Bunge, *Finding Philosophy in Social Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

16 The term Coalition refers to the parties which have constituted the main opposition to the ALP, the Liberal and National parties, and their predecessors, governing together or individually. See Michael Lusztig, Patrick James and Jeremy Moon, "Falling from Grace: Non-Established Brokerage Parties and the Weight of Predominance in Canadian Provinces and Australian States," *Publius* 27 (1997), 59-82. All other ministries are excluded (for example, coalitions of independents known as Ministerialists).

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Three Measures of the Scope of Government Activity

The question of how to measure government has rightly been at the centre of many methodological debates in political science. Indicators have different attributes in terms of their availability and amenity to statistical manipulation, their comparability across time and systems, and the extent to which they are integral to government or are epiphenomenal. This discussion compares two of the most frequently used indicators of government activity, the percentage share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) absorbed by government expenditure and the proportion of the total workforce engaged in public service, with ministerial portfolios, over a 10-year period across the 1980s and 1990s. While none of the measures presents a total picture (not surprising given the complexities of its substantive as well as symbolic activity), each adds something unique to our understanding of government.

The indicators of public expenditure and employment are easily available in Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation countries and have provided a ready source for political scientists. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has collected data that have been deployed by students of politics.[17] Both indicators are amenable to relatively sophisticated statistical analysis. Indicators of public expenditure between 1985 and 1994 suggest relative stability in the scope of government across the period, with three, Tasmania, South Australia and New South Wales tracking upwards, one, Victoria, remaining flat, and the remaining two tracking down. All this movement is in the range of zero to three percentage points which, at its greatest, in Western Australia, constitutes about a 15 per cent decrease in government spending by this measure over the period.

Given the nature of this measure, these changes are relative. The proportional decrease in government spending in relation to Gross State Product (GSP) in WA occurred while real dollar spending increased by about 30 per cent from $4723 million to $6173 million. The increase of more than 2 per cent in government spending in Tasmania across the period represents about a 27 per cent increase in real government spending, from $1,531 million to $1,945, which was less than in WA. In this sense, relative measures are somewhat misleading when used to determine changes in the scope of government and may lack substantive integrity. It is likely that one of the reasons for the

17 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian National Accounts* (State Accounts, 5242.0) (Canberra: Government Printing Office, 1995); and Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Statistics* (Wage and Salary Earners, 6248.0) (Canberra: Government Printing Office, 1995). For an example of how they are employed, see Hugh Emy and Owen Hughes, *Australian Politics: Realities in Conflict* (2nd ed; South Melbourne: Macmillan, 1991).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423902778360 Published online by Cambridge University Press

proportional decrease in spending in WA and the increase in Tasmania is different rates of economic growth, with WA growing rapidly in this period and Tasmania growing much more slowly. Thus, this measure is susceptible to the impact of recessions and booms in the overall economy quite independently of the governments' decisions regarding the scope of their activities. The period for which we have detailed state budget papers is much more limited than for ministries, preventing long-run analysis, and comparability issues are rife as the definitions of spending categories vary across the states.

The same points about relativity and the availability of data can be made for the employment measure, which reveals very different conclusions from the expenditure data. Whereas consumption expenditure overall presents a fairly neutral view of changes in the scope of government, state public sector employment fell in all jurisdictions across the decade. Some of these changes, such as the 31 per cent reduction in Victoria, are very substantial (in this case, reflecting a 19% decrease in the number of employees at a time when the overall workforce was growing). Furthermore, the variability in the expenditure and workforce measures is quite distinct, with the former much more susceptible to short-term change. One of the few consistencies across the two measures is in the rankings of state activity. Tasmania sustained the greatest and NSW and Victoria the most limited commitment to government activity across the decade. The other three states move around in the middle of the range.

A failure to collect relevant data, or variations in their definition, has meant that it is difficult to generate long time-series of comparable data for employment or expenditure measures.[18] For example, in an attempt to discount the impact of inflation, the values of GSP and Government Final Consumption are calculated in 1989-1990 prices (that is, a deflator is introduced). While this is a sensible approach, it is experimental. ABS statisticians warn, "at times, there may be movements that cannot be fully explained which have been introduced . . . through the use of this proxy deflator."[19] Financial and employment figures appear reassuringly precise but, particularly for longitudinal research, the underlying data often belies this precision.

There is a yet more fundamental aspect to the integrity of public expenditure and employment as indicators of the scope of government. Public expenditure tells us a lot about just that: public finance in relation to the overall economy. Public employment does the same with respect to overall employment. But these are poor indicators of government activity that is not finance-or employment-intensive. Some

18 Ibid., 396.

19 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 5242.0.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423902778360 Published online by Cambridge University Press

analysts have therefore tried to combine a wider range of indicators to capture the different aspects of government activity.[20] While these approaches enrich our understandings of governmental activity and change, they are difficult to deploy comparatively and parsimoniously, which brings us to our indicator: ministerial portfolios.

In parliamentary systems, cabinets comprise ministers with portfolios, or areas of responsibility within the overall work of government.[21] As Richard Rose notes, portfolios reflect the work of government in the broad, be it law-, finance-, or organization-intensive:

> The creation of a department of state with its head an *ex officio* advisor to the chief executive . . . institutionalises a government's commitment to action. . . . It is a sign that a cluster of policy commitments have become too numerous to be undertaken on a part-time or an ad hoc basis . . . a department is an incentive for those employed within it to advance the state's commitment in their field . . . [and] provides groups outside government with access to authority . . . a variety of activities can be found [within a department] reflecting a government's belief that they positively belong together, or at least, have least dissimilarity. The name given to a department states a concern considered important by governors.[22]

The naming of a portfolio is distinctive and valuable because it indicates the moment at which the political system recognizes the importance of a particular policy area from amongst all potential government activities, signifying a governmental commitment as altogether real as anything identified by employment or spending measures.

Because ministerial portfolios are integral to the nature of government, they are representative of the scope and diversity of government activity. They indicate the breadth of government activity over time. And because they are easily coded, and do not suffer from many of the definitional and exogenous variability difficulties associated with financial and employment measures, they are well suited to long-term comparative analysis. This robustness is particularly true for comparisons of subunits of federal states, but is applicable across many parliamentary systems. Moreover, just because the naming of ministries is a public and political act, it can be expected to highlight partisan differences in approaches to governance.

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20 Brian Hogwood, *Trends in British Public Policy* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992); and Richard Rose, *Understanding Big Government: The Programme Approach* (London: Sage, 1984).

21 Portfolio: "*fig* the office of a minister of state," in Lesley Brown ed., *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

22 Richard Rose, "On the Priorities of Government: A Developmental Analysis of Public Policies," *European Journal of Political Research* 4 (1976), 247-89, 253.

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Although portfolios are not necessarily of equal programme weight (for example, financial or organizational commitment), they do possess an approximate political equality in parliamentary systems.[23] Because portfolios frame areas of ministerial responsibility, they parallel fiscal classifications, the organization of government employees and the environment in which policy is prepared and reviewed. An increase in the number of portfolios signifies a widening of the scope of government, a reduction a narrowing of scope.[24] Analysis of the different categories of activity in which a government is engaged at any one time provides an indication of that government's profile, that is, the balance of various activities undertaken.[25]

In Australia, portfolios have had a broadly similar meaning among the states since self-government, with similar constitutional requirements and conventions for their creation.[26] Each portfolio is represented by a minister who receives a commission from the state governor and is accordingly susceptible to parliamentary questions and inquiry. While the creation or removal of any single portfolio may be due to one of a number of proximate causes, such as administrative criteria, the balance of power within cabinet, a response to a particular crisis or concern or the predilection of a head of government, aggregate analysis subsumes these idiosyncrasies.[27] Furthermore, data on ministerial portfolios in Australia are available from government and parliamentary records. Colin Hughes and Bruce Graham recorded portfolios for the period 1890-1984.[28] Our database updates this to

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23 We do not distinguish between ministerial and cabinet level portfolios. This distinction varies across jurisdictions and does not always indicate relative importance. It is the naming of a portfolio that indicates government commitment in a particular policy area.

24 Made up of either an extended *range* (new) or *degree of* (existing) activity.

25 Double- and triple-barrelled portfolio titles are unpacked into their constituent parts. See Colin Hughes, "The Proliferation of Portfolios," *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 43 (1984), 259. A ministry coincides with the appointment of a new premier, which may occur at elections, between elections, or may not coincide with an election at all if an incumbent is returned to office. See Colin Hughes and Bruce Graham, *A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics 1890-1964* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1968). We use this term in place of "government" which are commonly thought to arrive and depart due to elections.

26 Though see Campbell Sharman, "Australia as a Compound Republic," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 25 (1990), 1.

27 See Hogwood, *Trends in British Public Policy*. Because ministers may hold multiple portfolios, their number is not a direct function of cabinet size.

28 Hughes and Graham, "The Proliferation of Portfolios"; Colin A. Hughes, *A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics 1965-1974* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1977, and *A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics 1975-1984* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1986.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423902778360 Published online by Cambridge University Press

1997. Whilst some caution is required regarding the statistical significance of some subsets of the data set, the overall total of around 5,000 portfolios in a century of government in six states gives some grounds for confidence in basic aggregation and correlation techniques.

As a measure, ministerial portfolios are more periodic than either public expenditure or employment. This reflects the underlying electoral cycles that run for three to four years and which can produce abrupt changes over the short term. As it is unwieldy to graph every portfolio change during a term in office or at change of ministry, the data have been presented as averages for 10-year periods. This enhances the stability of the measure, as does the fact that portfolios are an absolute measure rather than ratios, and are therefore less susceptible to exogenous factors (for example, rates of economic or population growth) that influence employment and expenditure measures. Rather, it is integral to the thing it is indicating: the activity of government.

Ministerial portfolios present a different picture of Australian state government in the 1980s and 1990s from the other two measures. In fact, the states appear to have moved in different directions. In Table 1, the scope of government activity tended downward across the period in NSW, although with intervening low and high periods, while SA experienced repeated narrowing of scope that resulted in a 20 per cent reduction over the period. WA began and ended the series with a similar scope of activity, but experienced grand expansion during the period of over 20 per cent, which resulted in it being a high outlier, before narrowing occurred. Tasmania also began and ended the period at about the same scope of activity, but its activity narrowed more than any other state during the early part of the period, then widened again. Queensland ended the period with 41 per cent more government activity than at its start, after alternating between wider and narrower scope, while government effort in Victoria widened marginally over the period. All this results in very different rankings than for expenditure and employment measures. No longer do NSW and Victoria consistently have the narrowest government scope, nor Tasmania the widest. WA has the greatest scope and SA the smallest.

In its simplest aggregate form, the indicator of ministerial portfolios offers a different story about the scope of Australian state government over the 1980s and 1990s than do the other two indicators. The importance of this observation cannot be overstated: commonly used measures give only a partial view of government activity in Australia. The portfolio indicator better reflects the full range of fiscal-, organizational- and legislative-intensive government activities, and is more integral to government than public expenditure and employment measures which are, after all, relative. Furthermore, portfolios offer comparability across time and the six political systems. Given that all have particular strengths and weaknesses, the triangulation of government

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TABLE 1

State Government Portfolios Per Decade

TOTAL PORTFOLIOS

PERIOD	NSW	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	TOTAL	AVERAGE
1890-1899	12.50	12.60	8.47	8.66	18.40	9.00	69.63	11.61
1900-1909	12.50	11.00	10.20	9.80	18.60	9.75	69.85	11.64
1910-1919	16.75	12.30	13.00	10.33	16.17	14.50	82.05	13.68
1920-1929	16.82	13.67	16.75	12.50	18.24	20.00	97.78	16.30
1930-1939	17.50	15.00	19.25	15.50	19.00	19.67	105.92	17.65
1940-1949	24.50	17.50	19.25	15.00	20.17	22.00	118.42	19.74
1950-1959	27.00	22.50	19.25	17.00	24.60	29.00	139.35	23.23
1960-1969	29.50	26.67	24.67	24.00	24.60	29.00	158.44	26.41
1970-1979	40.25	28.67	33.66	31.67	37.00	36.00	205.25	34.21
1980-1989	41.75	45.00	46.00	42.00	43.00	52.33	270.08	45.01
1990-1997	47.50	42.50	42.50	46.00	45.50	59.00	283.00	47.17
AVERAGE	25.94	22.31	23.00	21.13	25.75	27.30	145.43	24.24
AVE DEV	10.23	9.42	9.97	10.75	8.77	12.52	60.92	10.15

DEFINING PORTFOLIOS

PERIOD	NSW	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	TOTAL	AVERAGE
1890-1899	5.25	5.60	4.30	4.33	8.00	4.00	31.48	5.25
1900-1909	5.50	5.00	5.40	4.00	5.80	4.13	29.83	4.97
1910-1919	6.25	5.30	5.40	4.00	5.17	4.50	30.62	5.10
1920-1929	6.12	5.00	7.25	4.25	5.87	6.00	34.49	5.75
1930-1939	6.75	5.00	7.00	4.75	6.00	6.00	35.50	5.92
1940-1949	9.00	5.50	7.00	6.00	5.50	5.50	38.50	6.42
1950-1959	8.50	7.50	7.00	6.00	6.40	9.50	44.90	7.48
1960-1969	7.50	5.67	7.33	8.00	6.40	9.50	44.40	7.40
1970-1979	11.00	5.67	8.67	8.67	11.00	8.50	53.51	8.92
1980-1989	10.25	10.00	13.00	10.00	12.50	14.33	70.08	11.68
1990-1997	11.00	11.00	11.00	13.00	11.50	15.00	72.50	12.08
AVERAGE	7.92	6.48	7.58	6.64	7.85	8.30	44.16	7.36
AVE DEV	1.85	1.85	1.81	2.39	2.26	3.07	11.74	1.96

PHYSICAL RESOURCE MOBILISATION PORTFOLIOS

PERIOD	NSW	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	TOTAL	AVERAGE
1890-1899	5.50	6.00	3.17	4.00	8.20	4.00	30.87	5.15
1900-1909	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.80	7.80	4.63	31.23	5.20
1910-1919	6.50	6.00	6.60	5.00	8.00	8.83	40.93	6.82
1920-1929	7.25	7.00	8.50	7.25	9.37	10.25	49.62	8.27
1930-1939	7.00	7.00	9.00	9.50	10.00	9.67	52.17	8.70
1940-1949	10.50	8.00	9.00	8.00	11.50	12.00	57.00	9.50
1950-1959	12.50	12.00	9.00	8.00	14.80	14.00	70.30	11.72
1960-1969	13.50	14.00	11.67	10.00	14.80	14.00	77.97	13.00
1970-1979	18.25	14.00	15.66	12.33	18.00	21.00	97.24	16.21
1980-1989	18.00	20.00	18.00	16.33	17.50	23.00	112.83	18.81
1990-1997	19.00	17.00	12.50	17.00	17.50	21.50	104.50	17.42
AVERAGE	11.18	10.55	9.74	9.11	12.32	13.89	65.88	10.98
AVE DEV	4.81	4.41	3.43	3.57	3.46	4.81	24.26	4.04

SOCIAL PORTFOLIOS

PERIOD	NSW	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	TOTAL	AVERAGE
1890-1899	1.75	1.00	1.00	0.33	2.20	1.00	7.28	1.21
1900-1909	2.00	1.00	0.80	1.00	3.00	1.00	8.80	1.47
1910-1919	3.00	1.00	1.00	1.33	3.00	1.17	10.50	1.75
1920-1929	3.25	1.67	1.00	1.00	3.00	3.75	13.67	2.28
1930-1939	3.75	3.00	3.25	1.25	3.00	4.00	18.25	3.04
1940-1949	5.00	4.00	3.25	3.00	3.17	4.50	22.92	3.82
1950-1959	6.00	3.00	3.25	3.00	3.40	5.50	24.15	4.03
1960-1969	8.50	7.00	5.67	6.00	3.40	5.50	36.07	6.01
1970-1979	11.00	7.00	9.33	10.67	10.00	6.50	54.50	9.08
1980-1989	13.50	15.00	15.00	15.67	13.00	15.00	87.17	14.53
1990-1997	17.50	14.50	19.00	16.00	16.50	22.50	106.00	17.67
AVERAGE	6.84	5.29	5.69	5.39	5.79	6.94	35.39	5.90
AVE DEV	4.21	4.06	4.78	4.87	4.02	4.72	25.85	4.31

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423902778360 Published online by Cambridge University Press

activity made possible by the addition of this measure to those more commonly used improves our understanding of government behaviour.

Long-Run Comparative Analysis of Australian State Government

The comparative design of this study is very different from most studies of Australian state governments. Since S. R. Davis' pioneering work, most have concentrated on the experience of particular states in volumes on single states,[29] or state-based contributions to edited collections (a pattern replicated in journals such as *Australian Journal of Political Science*, *Australian Journal of Public Administration)*.[30] Where there have been comparative studies, they have often been narrow in scope, excluding some states,[31] using short time periods[32] or focusing on a small number of state government features.[33] As a result, interpretations of state government activity are limited.[34]

There are two significant studies of Australian state governments that share a long-run perspective and inclusion of all the states.[35] On

29 S. R. Davis, ed., *The Government of the Australian States* (London: Longmans, 1960); Ernest A. Chaples, Helen Nelson and Ken Turner, eds., *The Wran Model: Electoral Politics in New South Wales 1981 and 1984* (Sydney: Oxford University Press, 1985); Mark Considine and Brian Costar, eds., *Trials in Power: Cain, Kirner and Victoria 1982-1992* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1992); Marcus Haward and Peter Larmour, eds., *The Tasmanian Parliamentary Accord and Public Policy 1989-92: Accommodating the New Politics?* (Canberra: Federalism Research Centre, Australian National University, 1993); Martin Laffin and Martin Painter, *Reform and Reversal: Lessons from the Coalition Government in New South Wales 1988-1995* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1995); and Andrew Parkin and Alan Patience, eds., *The Bannon Decade: The Politics of Restraint in South Australia* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992).

30 Brian Galligan, ed., *Australian State Politics* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1986); Brian Head, ed., *The Politics of Development in Australia* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1986).

31 John Halligan and John Power, *Political Management in the 1990s* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1992); and Martin Painter, *Steering the Modern State: Changes in Central Coordination in Three Australian State Governments* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1987).

32 Jeremy Moon and G. Harvey, "State Budget Outcomes and Australian State Politics Revisited," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 25 (1990), 241-50; and Helen Nelson, "Legislative Outputs," in Brian Galligan ed., *Comparative State Policies* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1988), 20-39.

33 Campbell Sharman and J. Stuart "Premiers' Departments: Patterns of Growth and Change," *Politics* 17 (1982) 46-58; and Campbell Sharman, Owen Hughes and Kevin Tuffin, "State Premiers," in Galligan, ed., *Australian State Politics,* 229-43.

34 Campbell Sharman, "The Study of the States," in Galligan, ed., *Comparative State Policies*, 2-17.

35 Helen Nelson, "Policy Innovation in the Australian States," *Politics* 20 (1985), 77-88; Hughes, "The Proliferation of Portfolios."

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423902778360 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the assumption that "State similarities are so pervasive and the differences so secondary . . . and that no state has struck out on a legislative path that others have not followed,"[36] Helen Nelson investigates whether it is possible to distinguish among the states in terms of their preparedness to innovate (that is, to introduce legislation that is new to that state) and whether some sorts of innovation are more readily undertaken than others from the period 1901-1984. Her indicator of legislation has the obvious merit of being integral to government. It also has drawbacks for the analysis of activities of government. Laws are not necessarily of equal weight and cannot be readily aggregated or averaged.[37] Furthermore, legislation does not necessarily reflect the breadth of government work. In Rose's terms, much government activity is not necessarily law-intensive.[38] Finally, Nelson tested state performance against cases of innovation that she had selected rather than against aggregate data.

Hughes's study of the proliferation of Australian ministerial portfolios shares both the indicator and the aggregate nature of our research.[39] But his investigation differed in analytical focus (he tested Edelman's "symbolic reassurance" theory of politics) and in design. Hughes was not able to exploit basic statistical techniques of aggregation and correlation, presumably because his database was not electronic.

Thus the indicator of ministerial portfolios offers untried and distinctive opportunities for research in comparative government in Australia. Moreover, we deploy a form of analysis that can be replicated in other federal parliamentary systems.

The Analysis

Convergence of the Scope of State Governments?

Data in Table 1 allow us to consider general questions about state government: How has the scope of each government changed over the century? Have some state governments been habitually characterized by a relatively narrow or wide profile? Has the overall change in the scope of government been reflected in all the states? Has each state's rate of profile change been smooth or volatile?

The data indicate that the combined scope of state governments has grown by a factor of 4 from a total of nearly 70 portfolios in the 1890s to 283 by the 1990s. The increase in scope of a notional average state has been from 11 to 47 portfolios over the century, or 3.3 each decade.

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36 Nelson, "Policy Innovation in the Australian States," 77.
37 Seeliger, "Conceptualizing and Researching Policy Convergence," 301.
38 Rose, *Understanding Big Government.*
39 Hughes, "The Proliferation of Portfolios."

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The First World War signalled the beginning of a period where on average just over 10 new portfolios were added each decade to the combined government activity for all states (for example, immigration, local government, land/water/environment, labour and health/social welfare). This increased to about 20 after the Second World War (for example, local government, industry and construction), jumping to 50 each decade between 1960 and 1970 (for example, local government, industry, energy, labour and leisure) and 70 each decade between 1970 and 1980 (for example, industry, land/water/environment, health/social welfare, leisure and specific people). The partial data for the last decade of the century indicate a return to a rate of increase of about 10 portfolios each decade. In sum, the scope of state government combined activity grew markedly over the century. However, this generalization requires qualification, for rates of change have not been uniform. Some decades have seen remarkable overall growth and in others the scope of government has barely changed.

Turning to patterns for individual state governments, Table 1 also indicates their comparative scope and their relative contribution to the combined total government effort. On average across the century, the scope of government was greatest in WA, followed by Victoria and NSW. These states can be grouped together as predominantly having wide scope government. WA and NSW had a wider-than-average scope for all but two of the decades, and Victoria for all but three. The other states, Tasmania, Queensland and SA, shared a similar scope across the century. Tasmania was below the average scope for every decade of our data series, Queensland for all but two and SA for all but three. In sum, the three states with a wide governmental scope, WA, NSW and Victoria, contribute disproportionately to the story of the widening of the scope of Australian state government.

In proportional terms, the range of ministry sizes that results from these patterns of change has shrunk over the century. In the 1890s, the state government with the largest number of portfolios (Victoria, 18.40) was more than twice the size of that with the smallest (SA, 8.47). In the 1990s, the state with the largest number (WA, 59.00) had about 40 per cent more than those states with the least (Queensland and SA 42.5). This apparent narrowing of range, or convergence, also reflects the small number of portfolios at the beginning of the century, which exaggerates the relative differences when compared with later decades.

Notwithstanding the fact that there have been habitually wide and narrow scope governments in Australian states, have *rates of change* been broadly similar across the states? On average, the rates of increased scope each decade for each state varied from 2.46 in Victoria to 4.54 in WA. Rates of growth in other states are clustered around 3.0 portfolios each decade. Government in Queensland increased in

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scope at a relatively low rate (2.72 each decade), while in NSW (3.18), SA (3.09) and Tasmania (3.39), it grew in parallel.

The diversity underlying patterns of growth in scope increases as the century is disaggregated. WA moves from having a narrow scope of government at the beginning of the century to an unusually wide scope by 1990, while in Victoria, ministries were much larger than average at the beginning of the century and below average in the 1990s. In the 1970s, government in Queensland had a very much narrower scope than the average. The scope of government in Victoria grew by only a factor of 2.5, whereas that of Tasmania and WA grew by a factor of 6.6 and 6.8, respectively.

Another way of investigating the extent to which diversity in the activities of state governments might be camouflaged by the long-run picture is to ask whether *each state's pattern of growth in governmental scope* has been steady or volatile. WA experienced the greatest variation in its progress, heavily influenced by its prodigious widening of scope over the last two decades under study, with an average deviation per decade of 12.5 portfolios.[40] Victoria, above the average until the 1950s and below it since, has the smallest average deviation, at 8.4 portfolios. Average deviations across the century for the other states are in a relatively narrow band bounded by Queensland at 9.5 and Tasmania at 10.6. Thus WA has a relatively uneven rate of widening government scope, Victoria has a relatively even one, and the other states lie between these extremes. There was diversity in the rate at which governments' scope grew, which further qualifies the hypotheses about convergence and parallel change. Rates of change in the scope of state governments were state and period specific, reflecting distinctive political choices across the federation, suggestive of dynamic diversity.

Convergence of the Profile of State Governments' Activity?

This section focuses on the particular balance of activities that governments undertake as signified by the categories of ministerial portfolio they deploy. The analysis adopts three broad categories of government activity suggested by Rose: defining, physical resource mobilization and social.[41] Defining portfolios refer to the sine qua non of government activity arising from its "territorial and coercive responsibili-

40 Average deviation per decade (the average of the absolute differences between the average number of portfolios in that decade and the number of portfolios in each ministry in that decade) is a measure of variability available to us because our data are a complete population rather than a sample. Given its limited assumptions, it is also more robust than estimators such as the standard deviation that assume normally distributed data.

41 Rose, "On the Priorities of Government"; and Moon and Sayers, "The Dynamics of Governmental Activity."

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423902778360 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ties'' such as defence, the maintenance of internal order and mobilization of finance.[42] The mobilization of physical resources refers to government endeavours to increase national economic resources.[43] Social activity refers to government provision of social benefits to citizens.[44]

Did governments do broadly the same things over time and across states? What was the relative temporal significance of the three types of government activity: defining, physical resource mobilization, and social? Figure 1 presents a picture of the changing balance of activity for the average state.[45] It shows that the overall balance of state government activity has changed markedly over time. At the start of the century, defining activities and physical resource mobilization were of equal importance. But by the end of the century, although defining activities had not declined in themselves, they had declined relative to the other categories of government activity.[46] Physical resource mobilization grew at a relatively rapid rate until the 1980s, the high point being the 1950s, when it accounted for about half of all state government portfolios. In 1890, governments had a very slender commitment to social activities, whereas in the last few decades of the twentieth century these grew at a great rate, not only to exceed defining, but also to match physical resource mobilization to account for well over one third of the total scope of government. As a result of the different rates of growth of the three categories, the balance of government activity changed over the century.

Given the essential character of defining activity, a degree of conformity in its contribution to government profile across states and time might be expected. Combined state government activity in this area at the end of the century was about 2.5 times that at its beginning (all data presented in this section are derived from Table 1). The state averages across the century are constrained in a narrow band, between 6.5 portfolios in Queensland and just less than 8 portfolios in WA and NSW. Across the century, NSW, WA, Victoria and SA experienced similar levels of defining activity, with Tasmania and Queensland

42 Ibid., 249. For example: First Ministers; Internal Affairs, Administrative Services; Finance; Law; Security; Defence; International, Interstate Relations; Federal Affairs; Migration; Local Government; Territorial Responsibility; and Constitutional.

43 For example: Industry; Public Industry; Land, Water, Environment; Agriculture, Fishing, Mining; Communications, Construction, Energy, Commerce, Small Business, and Regional Development.

44 For example: Education, Labour, Health/Social Welfare, Leisure and Social Identity.

45 Calculated by aggregating the figures for each state and dividing by six.

46 Limited state level defining activity at the end of the century reflects their growth at the Commonwealth level. See Moon and Sayers, ''The Dynamics of Governmental Activity.''

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423902778360 Published online by Cambridge University Press

clearly less committed to this type of government activity. The average deviations across the century for each state are similar (between 1.6 and 2.5 portfolios), with the exception of WA, whose average deviation of 3.1 reflects vigorous growth after the 1970s. WA moved from being a government with a modest scope of defining activities to one with wider commitments, and Victoria moved in the opposite direction. The inter-war period is notable for a decreased variation in the range of state government effort in defining activity, and the period after the 1970s for a widening of this range. A period of marked convergence was followed by one of equally marked divergence.

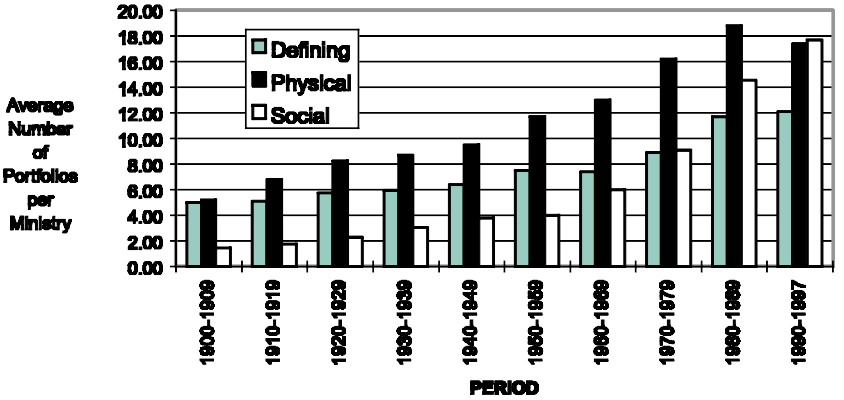
In view of the more contingent nature of physical resource mobilization, greater variation in commitment to this sort of activity across the states would be anticipated. This is borne out in Table 1. Whereas combined state activity of this type grew in scope by 3.5 times over the century, the average effort ranged from WA at nearly 13 portfolios to Tasmania at about 9. Again, WA's score is largely a function of expansion of the scope of government activity since the 1970s, although it was above average in size for all but the first two decades of our time period. Tasmania is notable for its modest commitment in this area, being below average for all but one decade. SA was below average for all but two decades. Consistent with activity in other areas, Queensland was below average for all but three decades. NSW moved from being below average in the first half of the century to above average in most subsequent decades. Victoria displayed a slight trend in the opposite direction. Average deviations across the century are similar, although WA stands out as having a greater average deviation, driven by growth since 1970. In sum, Tasmania, SA and Queensland moved broadly in parallel, WA deviated and finally diverged and NSW and Victoria demonstrated some continuing diversity.

There was a remarkable 17-fold increase in the scope of social activity across the century (Figure 1). Not surprisingly, the average deviation for state activity in this area nearly matches the average commitment across the century. Most of this growth was after the 1970s, and there was in general a high degree of conformity in the scope of social activities across the states. The growth spurt for social activities began in NSW in earnest in 1970, but did not affect WA and Victoria until the 1980s, resulting in a rare widening of the range of government commitment across the states. The increase in government activity in WA after the 1980s meant its average deviation is the largest of all the states. But average deviation across the states was tightly constrained, from 6.4 portfolios for WA to 5.3 portfolios in Queensland. Across the century, NSW stands out as having had above average commitment to social concerns, while Queensland and Tasmania were less committed. SA was generally below the average, while Victoria moved from somewhat above average early in the century to

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423902778360 Published online by Cambridge University Press

generally below average after the Second World War. Overall, four states moving broadly in parallel, but Victoria and WA diverging from the other states.

FIGURE 1
Balance of Average State Government Activity



So far we have seen that NSW, Victoria and WA had a significantly wider scope of government than the other states, and that Tasmania consistently had the narrowest. While there was an overall pattern of parallel growth, it masks a relatively sharp decline in the scope of government in Victoria, and a relatively steep widening of the scope of WA's government across the century. Furthermore, while WA had a relatively volatile pattern of growth, for the others, especially Victoria, the scope of government changed more steadily. While there was overall growth first of physical resource mobilization and later of social activities sufficient to change the overall balance of activity, the pattern was differentially manifested across the states. For WA, the pattern for physical resource mobilization echoes that of all activities: volatile growth overall and rapid growth in later decades. For NSW and Victoria there was some diversity, and for the others, growth was broadly in parallel. The later growth of social activity was initiated in NSW, and though followed by the others, Queensland and Tasmania remained consistently less engaged than the other states.

Overall, there is little evidence of convergence in the scope of government activities at either an aggregate level or within the various categories of activity. There is some evidence of divergence in both measures, as well as periods of parallel changes in scope and, finally, regular episodes of dynamic diversity across states.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423902778360 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Partisanship and the Scope of State Governments

The ALP has long distinguished itself rhetorically from its chief electoral opponents by proclaiming the advantages of government as a solution to social and economic problems. More specifically, it presented government involvement in the economy and as a provider of social goods as preferable to reliance on markets, self-help and charity. This informed a second hypothesis: ALP governments would be distinctly associated with a widened scope of both physical resource mobilization and social activity, especially relative to its Coalition counterparts.

First, was there a greater association of the ALP than the Coalition with a wide scope of government over the century? Table 2 indicates that across the entire period 1890-1997 and across all states, the average size of ALP ministries is 23.69 portfolios compared with 21.25 for Coalition governments. Thus there is an overall partisan effect of about 10 per cent.

As already noted, the expansion of government scope was not uniform across the century. The study therefore investigates the impact of partisanship in three broad subperiods. P1 stretches from 1890 until the last peacetime ministries before the outbreak of the Second World War, and is a period of comparatively low overall growth. P2 runs from the first ministries that governed during the Second World War until the last ministry before 1970 and captures the overall increase in government scope associated with the war and with the moderate growth in the quarter of a century thereafter.[47] P3 goes from the first ministries elected after 1970 until 1997, and is characterized by relatively rapid increases in the scope of government with some later decreases.

Table 2 reveals that in P1, ALP ministries (average of 14.92 portfolios) are associated with a 9 per cent wider scope of government than the Coalition ministries (average of 13.68). In P2, the Coalition ministries (average of 24.73) are associated with a 12 per cent wider scope of government than the ALP (average of 21.39). In P3, the Coalition ministries (average of 43.89) are narrowly (2.7%) associated with a wider scope of government than the ALP (average of 42.13).[48] In sum, the partisanship hypothesis has only been confirmed in a qualified sense. It holds overall but only by 10 per cent and when three subperiods are distinguished, it is only confirmed up until the Second World War.

To what extent does this conclusion hold within the six states? Does the ALP make a difference to the scope of government in partic-

47 Ibid.

48 Subperiod averages do not sum to overall averages because the divisors are different.

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TABLE 2

Average Ministry Portfolios by Period and Party

PERIOD 1	TOTAL ACTIVITY		DEFINING		PHYSICAL		SOCIAL	
1890-1939	ALP	COALITION	ALP	COALITION	ALP	COALITION	ALP	COALITION
NSW	16.14	16.00	6.29	6.14	6.57	7.00	3.29	2.86
QLD	12.60	13.50	5.20	5.00	6.20	7.00	1.20	1.50
SA	15.29	12.15	6.43	5.38	7.29	5.69	1.57	1.08
TAS	12.00	10.54	4.00	4.15	6.80	5.54	1.20	0.85
VIC	17.75	17.68	5.50	6.42	9.25	8.47	3.00	2.79
WA	15.75	12.21	5.00	4.43	8.25	6.64	2.50	1.14
AVERAGE	14.92	13.68	5.40	5.02	7.39	6.72	2.13	1.70

PERIOD 2	TOTAL ACTIVITY		DEFINING		PHYSICAL		SOCIAL	
1940-1969	ALP	COALITION	ALP	COALITION	ALP	COALITION	ALP	COALITION
NSW	25.60	26.00	8.40	7.50	11.60	11.00	5.60	7.50
QLD	17.25	26.50	5.75	6.25	8.00	14.25	3.50	6.00
SA	24.50	22.50	7.50	7.00	11.50	10.50	5.50	5.00
TAS	17.00	24.00	6.25	8.00	8.00	10.00	2.75	6.00
VIC	21.67	21.88	5.67	6.00	12.33	12.75	3.67	3.13
WA	22.33	27.50	6.67	8.00	11.00	14.00	4.67	5.50
AVERAGE	21.39	24.73	6.71	7.13	10.41	12.08	4.28	5.52

PERIOD 3	TOTAL ACTIVITY		DEFINING		PHYSICAL		SOCIAL	
1970-1997	ALP	COALITION	ALP	COALITION	ALP	COALITION	ALP	COALITION
NSW	45.67	42.00	10.33	11.25	20.00	17.50	15.33	13.25
QLD	38.00	45.50	10.00	10.50	14.00	20.00	14.00	15.00
SA	37.67	39.67	10.33	10.00	16.33	13.67	11.00	16.00
TAS	34.20	48.00	9.20	11.50	12.80	19.50	12.20	17.00
VIC	44.50	41.67	13.00	11.00	18.00	16.67	13.50	14.00
WA	52.75	46.50	13.50	12.75	23.00	19.25	16.25	14.50
AVERAGE	42.13	43.89	11.06	11.17	17.36	17.77	13.71	14.96

SERIES								
AVERAGE*	23.69	21.25	7.26	6.75	10.79	10.23	5.61	5.15

*Calculated using non-periodized data

ular states? This question has to be entertained with some caution, as in each period there are sometimes as few as half a dozen ministries per state. Eighteen state government periods can be compared by multiplying the six states by the three periods. Table 2 reveals that the patterns are broadly similar for the ALP and the Coalition ministries in NSW, SA and Victoria. In WA, there is some partisan effect evident in the swings from one period to another: ALP ministries have on average about 18 per cent more portfolios than their Coalition counterparts in the first period, 18 per cent fewer in the second period, and 12 per cent more in the final period. In Queensland, Coalition ministries have more portfolios on average in all three periods. While they have only marginally more portfolios than ALP ministries in P1, they have 50 per cent more on average between 1939 and 1970, and about 20 per cent more after 1970. In Tasmania, Coalition ministries have on average 40 per cent more portfolios than ALP ones in P2 and 30 per cent

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423902778360 Published online by Cambridge University Press

more in P3. In sum, there is no consistent partisan difference. In only four of the eighteen state government periods is the difference in portfolios 20 per cent or more between the parties, and in all cases in favour of Coalition ministries. This suggests factors other than partisanship account for the size of ministries.

It could be objected that our P1 is an unsatisfactory test of partisanship because the modern party system had not really stabilized until around 1920. But when the data are divided into two subperiods either side of 1920, there is no significant difference in the association of the formative versions of the modern parties with the scope of government for the post-1920 period.[49] The exception is Queensland in P2, where Coalition ministries were on average nearly twice as large as their ALP counterparts, perhaps reflecting the need to accommodate the interests of both Coalition parties in cabinet and the dynamics of a very long ministry during a period of secular expansion in government activity.

Testing for the relationship between partisanship and greater or lesser scope of all government activity across the entire period reveals no correlation between the two within a 95 per cent confidence interval. Again, our data suggest that there is no clear long-term impact of partisanship on the adoption of particular activities or overall profile of state governments and, accordingly, there is no distinctive ALP or, for that matter, Coalition profile of state government. There is no evidence in the data that the election of a Labor government is likely to lead to any predictable change in the scope of government activity or, similarly, that Coalition governments have been associated with such a change.

Partisanship and the Profile of State Governments

Despite our failure to find a clear and consistent confirmation of the partisanship hypothesis regarding the overall scope of government, it could still be the case that the ALP is more closely associated with the mobilization of physical resources and social activities across the three periods, yielding a distinct ALP profile of state government.

Multiplying the 18 state government periods by two yields 36 opportunities to test any distinctive association between the ALP and the two categories of government activity under investigation (see Table 2). In only seven cases do we find a clear association between

49 In P1, Coalition ministries are slightly larger on average in two states (NSW and Victoria); there is no difference in Queensland, and differences of 1 portfolio or less in the average size in the other states in favour of ALP ministries. In P2, ALP ministries are on average larger in NSW, Queensland and SA, smaller in Tasmania and Victoria, and nearly identical with Coalition ministries in WA.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423902778360 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the ALP and a greater scope of physical or social government activity.[50] Even in these, the difference is modest: P1: SA, Tasmania and WA (Physical); P2 SA (Social); and P3 Victoria and WA (Physical) and NSW (Social). In fact there are more (10) cases where the scope of Coalition government activities in these categories is significantly greater than for their ALP counterparts: P2 Queensland, Tasmania and WA (Physical), Queensland and Tasmania (Social); P3 Queensland and Tasmania (Physical), Queensland, Tasmania and WA (Social).

Testing for any association between the scope of various categories of government activity and partisanship across the whole period reveals no correlation between the two within a 95 per cent confidence interval in any of our three categories of government activity. For our second partisan hypothesis, we can say that ALP governments are nowhere associated with an increase in the scope of physical resource mobilization or social activity (nor do the reverse relationships apply).

Conclusion

This study investigated key questions about government convergence and partisanship in the Australian federal system over a century of government, arguing that the indicator of ministerial portfolios had various merits for this task. The indicator is accessible, comparable over time and between state systems, and a parsimonious measure integral to the range of government activities. Most importantly, it is logically consistent with Seeliger's strictures regarding level of analysis and also capacity to identify direction of change over specified time periods.[51]

Deploying the indicator, we have been able to depict the changing scope of Australian state government overall, comparative changes in state government scope and rates of change in, as well as range of, activity. Furthermore, it has enabled us to investigate the extent of three types of government activity, and as a result, examine the changing profile of state government as revealed in the shifting balance of these activities. All these measures are used to reveal whether there is convergence, divergence, parallel change or dynamic diversity in the scope of state government activity. As well, they are used to investigate the impact of partisanship on the scope and profile of state governments.

The states have all shown a general increase in scope over the period under study and broadly similar changes in the categories of

50 Includes only cases where the difference between parties in average number of portfolios in each period is 20 per cent or more for each activity, and excludes cases with very small *n*.

51 Seeliger, "Conceptualizing and Researching Policy Convergence."

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423902778360 Published online by Cambridge University Press

activity and profile of government. Yet these very general changes mask considerable diversity. There is no evidence of general convergence in the overall scope of state governments. Overall, four states changed in parallel, Victoria converged towards these four, and WA diverged from them. But further disaggregation of the data by decade and government activity suggests that even the finding of overall parallel change masks considerable state-specific effects, reinforcing the image of dynamic diversity. These findings confirm others in the United States, Canada and Australian Commonwealth government activity that reveal innovation to be issue- and time-specific.[52] In Seeliger's terms, it casts doubt on the central tenet of the convergence thesis that convergence is associated with modernization or industrialization.[53] Moreover, it suggests the endurance of domestic processes and institutions that shape policy.

Whereas there is some sense of a partisan impact on the scope of government, it is modest and concentrated in the pre-Second World War period. Overall, contrary to our hypothesis, the state government periods with the strongest association with a widening scope of government were in Coalition governments. This finding was repeated when the impact of partisanship on the balance of government activities was investigated: ALP governments were not distinctly associated with increases in physical resource mobilization or social activities. These results confirm Nelson's finding that party was not a powerful predictor of innovation.[54]

This analysis cautions against generalizations about Australian state government activity based on convergence or partisanship arguments. It also raises questions for further research. Concerning convergence, are there patterns of innovation and imitation that might explain the appearance of some lagged conformity overlaying the more mixed pattern found in the detail?[55] Case studies could help explain the unusual trajectories of Victoria and WA, whose government scope has consistently changed differently from the other four states, and the reasons for the relatively late and uneven increases in physical and social activity in the island state of Tasmania, perhaps cut off from a process of diffusion across mainland states. Closer investigation could

52 Virginia Gray, "Innovation in the States: A Diffusion Study," *American Political Science Review* 67 (1973), 1174-85; Dale H. Poel, "The Diffusion of Legislation among the Canadian Provinces: A Statistical Analysis," this JOURNAL 9 (1976), 605-26; and Moon and Sayers "The Dynamics of Governmental Activity."

53 Seeliger, Conceptualizing and Researching Policy Convergence."

54 Nelson, "Policy Innovation in the Australian States."

55 For an example of this approach, see Jack L. Walker, "Diffusion of Innovations Among the American States," *American Political Science Review* 63 (1969), 880-99.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423902778360 Published online by Cambridge University Press

be conducted into particular departures in the scope of government, such as the expansion of the social activities of government in the post-1970 period. As to partisanship, the failure to find differences between ALP and Coalition governments raises interesting questions regarding the demands faced by parliamentary partnerships such as that between the Liberal and National parties. The need to respond to a wide range of interests in order to sustain coalition governments may entail a more activist approach to governance than might otherwise be expected of right-wing parties. Finally, the deployment of the indicator of ministerial portfolios promises to enrich the study of comparative government within other federal parliamentary systems as well as cross-nationally.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423902778360 Published online by Cambridge University Press