The Politics of Party Policy

From Members to Legislators

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACS   Australian Candidate Study
ALP   Australian Labor Party
BRS   British Representation Study
CLP   Constituency Labour Party (UK Labour)
EPO   Extra-parliamentary party organisation
FCC   Federal Conference Committee (Liberal Democrats)
FPC   Federal Policy Committee (Liberal Democrats)
GST   Goods and Services Tax
HoR   House of Representatives
ICT   Information and Communications Technology
JPS   Joint Policy Committee (UK Labour)
LEC   Local Electorate Council (NZ Labour)
MEP   Member of the European Parliament
MMP   Mixed member proportional representation
MP   Member of Parliament
NEC   National Executive Committee (UK Labour)
NPF   National Policy Forum (UK Labour, Australian Labor Party)
NPC   National Policy Committee (Australian Labor Party)
NSW   New South Wales
NUS   National Union of Students
NZ   New Zealand
NZCS   New Zealand Candidate Study
PAC   Policy Action Caucuses (Australian Labor Party)
PCG   Policy Coordinating Group (Australian Greens)
PLP   Parliamentary Labour Party
PP   Parliamentary party
PRU   Policy Research Unit (Liberal Democrats)
SDP   Social Democratic Party (UK)
UK   United Kingdom
US   United States

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Introduction

In the last decade, the analysis of political parties as representative and participatory institutions where citizens can 'have their say' on policy issues has taken a decidedly pessimistic turn. Fuelled by widespread evidence of citizen disaffection and withdrawal from parties, political scientists have questioned the ability of these organisations to perform the function of linking citizens and the state. Recent comparative party literature suggests that political parties are no longer fulfilling their 'traditional' roles as vehicles for citizen participation and partisan representation, but rather are focusing their efforts on the goals of maintaining office and governance. This view prevails despite parties' recent attempts to democratise their decision-making processes and to open up policy development to increasing participation from the membership and the general public to achieve these two objectives: to make parties more participatory and to ensure their policies reflect the views of their supporters.

Although there is continuing normative debate over the exact role that political parties should play in linking citizens with those who govern them, the ideals of participation and representation are still held up to be the democratic benchmarks to which political organisations should aspire. Both are crucial to the concept of party government, and are held in high esteem by those who advocate for intra-party democracy – that the internal organisation of political parties should be democratic, responsive and accountable. They are also ideals that are still inherent in the formal organisation of many political parties, which claim to offer their members the opportunity to participate in intra-party decisions, including the formulation of party policy. In this model, policies and election manifestos formulated by the party (with the participation of its members) are approved by citizens in general elections and then applied by the party's elected representatives to legislative debates. The key assumption here is that what goes into the

party (policy input by members) corresponds to what goes out (policy output by legislators).

But is this the right way of thinking about intra-party policy development, particularly at a time when political parties are at the centre of much public criticism and seemingly inevitable decline? Naturally, the theory behind party government and policy linkage is not so straightforward when put into practice and numerous authors have argued that 'democratic' policy-making, based on the principles of participation and representation, is impossible to achieve in reality (not least Michels, 1962 and McKenzie, 1963). But the politics of policy development, and the intra-party contest, is always seen in relatively black-and-white terms: as a battle between conference and parliamentarians, or between activists and elites. I argue that this is too simplistic a conception, and call for a greater acknowledgement of the complexity of the policy-making process within political parties – who is involved, their motivations, patterns of engagement, and how these traits are in turn shaped by organisational, social and institutional pressures. Such a re-examination is crucial at a time when political parties in many established democracies are undertaking processes of reform and democratic renewal, patterns of citizen engagement in politics are changing, and societies re-evaluate how politics (both formal and informal) can best function.

As Mulé (1997, p. 497) has observed, 'discussions of party decline have prompted remarkably few re-examinations of the nature of political parties. Most predictions are based on the mass-party model and fail to differentiate notions of adaptation and change from notions of party decline'. Indeed, it is the premise of this book that it is unhelpful to argue that political parties are simply in decline; that their policy-making function (and particularly that of their memberships has eroded) – without undertaking a careful analysis of how policy-making occurs, how it has changed over time, and uncovering some of the normative assumptions that underlie how it should operate. Therefore, the book aims to provide an in-depth examination of the structures and processes that shape the development of party policy, the respective role of members and parliamentarians in the process, and the transferral of party policy to the legislative arena.

Key questions that are investigated are: How does the process operate? What factors facilitate or hinder participation? Do we really observe a correlation between the official policy programme of a party and the legislative actions of its parliamentarians? Rather than looking at the relative similarities and differences between the ideological positions and policy preferences of members, activists and party leaders (see

for example May, 1973; Norris, 1995), this book concentrates on the process that enables policy preferences to be articulated. The possible tensions that surround this process are empirical, theoretical and normative. Empirically, is there a practical way in which members' views can effectively and meaningfully be integrated into party policy? Theoretically, can policy ownership by the extra-parliamentary party be reconciled with the concept of independent representation that is central to parliamentary representation? Normatively, who should have a greater say over policy development – the public, party members, or parliamentarians, and what is the appropriate balance between them?

Given that policy-making is a fundamental role of political parties in representative democracies – twined with a party's functions as an articulator and aggregator of citizens' interests – it can also be used as a lens through which to examine some of the broader organisational changes that are taking place within political parties. These changes include the increasing power of the parliamentary party as the expense of the extra-parliamentary party organisation, a shift in the role and even the nature of the party membership and a corresponding 'hollowing out' of party structures. While the existing literature and original research presented in this book focuses specifically on the policy development process in political parties, it also addresses broader questions of party organisation and allows us to think about the implications of a potential policy-making shift for the operation of political parties in modern democratic societies.

One of the arguments put forward is that it is only vary rarely that we observe actual conflict between members and parliamentarians in terms of party policy. In this respect, the book confirms previous research that suggests this occurs because the policy development process of a given party is dominated by the leadership (centred within the parliamentary party). However, new insights are provided as to why this might be the case (including the nature of parliamentary politics and the representative role, the distribution of resources, and patterns of political participation – for example, the trend to establishing supporters' networks and consultative forms of engagement). In other instances, policy conflict is avoided because the body of policy developed by the membership bears little relevance to what is actually being debated in parliament. Yet to write intra-party policy development off because of its distance from national politics would be to discount layers of participation at local and regional levels, within smaller parties, and online, and to assume that policy participation has no real meaning, or efficacy, unless actual legislative changes ensue.

Understanding policy development

The way in which this book conceptualises and examines the process of intra-party policy-making and the relationship between political parties, their members and parliamentarians is through a comparative analysis of the development and application of party policy across three party families (social democratic, liberal democratic and green) in three parliamentary democracies (Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom). A total of eight different political parties are used as case studies throughout (see below, Table 1.1).

Table 1.1   Case Studies

	Party Family	Parliamentary Representation from 1997 to 2012
Australia		
Australian Labor Party	Social Democratic	Opposition (1997–2007); Government (2007–2010); Minority Government (2010–)
Australian Greens	Green	Minor Party with representation in the Australian Senate (1997–) and the House of Representatives (2002–2004, 2010–)
Australian Democrats	Liberal Democratic	Minor Party with representation in the Australian Senate (1997–2008)
New Zealand		
NZ Labour	Social Democratic	Opposition (1997–1999); Coalition Government (1999–2008); Opposition (2008–)
Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand	Green	Minor Party with representation in the NZ House of Representatives (1999–)
United Kingdom		
UK Labour Party	Social Democratic	Government (1997–2010); Opposition (2010–)
Liberal Democrats	Liberal Democratic	Third Party with representation in the House of Commons (1997–2010); Governing coalition partner with the Conservatives (2010–)
Green Party	Green	Minor party with representation in the Commons (2010–); No seats in the Commons (1997–2010)

The time period covered spans from 1997 (with the election of Blair's New Labour government in the UK and just after the defeat of the Australian Labor Party after 13 years in government) until 2012. This timeframe coincides with the start of a key period of modernisation within the social democratic parties, and allows an analysis of how variations in parliamentary representation might impact upon the nature of policy development (for example, the difference between being in government and opposition). Further details of the parties included and the dimensions of the comparative case studies are discussed in Chapter 2.

I focus specifically on the social democratic, liberal democratic and green party families as they claim to foster participation in policy development while generally demanding party discipline and adherence to policy amongst their parliamentarians, thus presenting the most accurate example of parties operating, at least in a formal sense, according to the model of representation and linkage outlined above. The concept of the party family is employed within the overall framework as it is a useful analytical tool through which to group political parties that share similar origins and ideological characteristics (Mair and Mudde, 1998, pp. 223–5), and allows for an examination of the relationship between a party's broad ethos and its decision-making processes (see further Chapter 3). However, while we might expect parties belonging to the same family to share similar organisational characteristics, part of this project is to explore variations that might occur both across and within party families, providing a more nuanced and critical application of the concept. The three Westminster democracies provide a good basis for comparison given the similarity of their parliamentary traditions, shared constitutional and cultural heritage, yet the interesting variations in their electoral and party systems. Each of these democracies has also experienced an interesting shift from majoritarian to coalition style politics, starting with New Zealand's electoral reform in the mid-1990s, and more recently in both the UK and Australia with the hung parliaments produced by the 2010 general elections.

The approach taken in this book comprises two distinct, yet interrelated, lines of inquiry. The first part examines whether political parties actually fulfil their roles as venues for participation through an analysis of the operation of the policy processes (formally and in practice) within each party family. I pose several questions: what types of participation do political parties prefer their members to engage in (for example, direct ballots or attending party conferences)? What

mechanisms are available for policy development? Who participates in the process? What is the relationship between the party's leaders, its members, its supporters and the general public in formulating policy? An analysis of who participates, the extent of this participation and the quality and meaningfulness of the participatory opportunities on offer is necessary in order to determine whether policy can be regarded as having been determined by a party's members or supporters or whether it is in fact dominated by the party leadership.

The second part shifts the analysis to the legislative arena – to the interpretation and application of party policy by members of parliament (MPs). The transformation of party policy to legislation is often overlooked in studies of party organisation, but this is a crucial link in many models of democratic representation (see Katz, 2006; Lawson, 1988) and it is here that a potential tension between constituency and party representation may arise. In the British context, McKenzie (1963) has argued that the constitutional design of government (features such as cabinet government, collective responsibility and parliamentary sovereignty) means that party members have little scope to influence their parliamentarians in policy decisions. This book builds on McKenzie's basic premise and updates it for the twenty-first century, examining just how the various forces of party and parliament interact, and the implications for intra-party politics, particularly at a time when we are witnessing greater calls for the accountability, transparency and efficacy of parliament as a policy-making institution (see for example Hansard Society, 2010). This part of the study examines whether legislative decisions of the parliamentary party reflect party policy and the extent to which party parliamentarians are responsive to the views of the membership through an analysis of attitudes to representation, the influences upon parliamentary decision-making processes and the maintenance of links to and consultation with the party membership. Can political parties (and their members) hold party parliamentarians to account in following policy? Do parliamentarians of different party families view their responsibility to the party and its policies differently? Do certain features of parliamentary democracy (for example, cabinet government and coalition politics) aid or hinder the transmission of members' views to the legislature?

By analysing policy decisions both within the parliamentary party (PP), the extra-parliamentary party organisation (EPO) and assessing the link (or disjoint) between them, I aim to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the policy-making process, the relationship between party members and legislators, and more broadly, the extent

to which political parties function as representative and participatory institutions. In this sense, it is important to note that I am conducting this analysis of the link between participation and representation in policy development as a *process*, identifying and evaluating key structures and practices rather than tracking the development of individual policies.

Investigating the link between members' policy preferences and legislative outcomes is not a straightforward task. With the exception of May's law of curvilinear disparity (May, 1973, pp. 148–9), which suggests that party members are more ideologically extreme than their legislative representatives, previous studies based on the respective ideological positions of members and elites (see for example Kitschelt, 1989a and Norris, 1995) have been unable to agree on a clear causal relationship, owing to its complexity and the myriad of intervening factors that might shape it. This book endeavours to build on these investigations by analysing the individual structures, processes, actors and interdependencies that form the links of the chain of policy development – rather than trying to establish or disprove one over-arching relationship. In this sense, I focus on the power exchanges between various actors within the party and the structures and processes that shapes these interactions, rather than on ideology and ideological difference (see also Mulé, 1997, p. 503 for a similar approach).

Material for this book has been gathered from a variety of different sources. First and foremost, I have aimed to bring together the existing bodies of work on both party organisation and parliamentary politics, which have not tended to speak to one another, to better illustrate the complex relationship between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary parties in party policy development. This material is both supplemented and expanded upon by some of the findings of my own qualitative research, consisting of an extensive documentary analysis of party rules and constitutions, internal documents, policy materials, websites, financial statements, conference and party meeting observations, media reports and a series of over 50 interviews with party members, office holders and parliamentary representatives conducted between 2003 and 2008. Details of the interviews appear in the Reference section of the book. Some names have been removed to protect participant confidentiality agreements. Interviewees were targeted for the positions they held within the party, and their role or particular interest in the policy development process. This evidence is further complemented by quantitative data obtained from previously conducted studies of membership participation and legislative behaviour.

Researching the internal politics of political parties is notoriously difficult, and the researcher/reader must be careful not to place too much reliance on any one particular account given the inevitable hurdles of representativeness and bias (see Gauja, 2009). It is with this caveat that the interview evidence presented in this book is intended to only be illustrative of a range of opinions rather than establishing a clear trend. However, interviews form a fundamental part of this project as they bridge the theory of politics with the reality, and provide a more engaging and grounded perspective on organisational dilemmas that otherwise might be obscured in documentary and statistical analysis alone. Taken together, the range of documentary, interview and survey evidence assembled is intended to underpin a robust, mixed-methods approach to the study of intra-party and legislative institutions, policy processes and decision-making.

Structure of the book

An introduction to the themes concerning intra-party policy development and the role of members and legislators is provided in Chapter 2. The chapter situates the book within the current literature on the decline of political parties in contemporary democracies, and some of the key theoretical ideas surrounding party organisation, participation and representation. I argue that the democratic performance of parties needs to be evaluated according to the role they play in linking citizen participation in politics with the representative function performed by political elites, and this necessitates looking at both the internal processes and the organisation of parties, and at the actions of legislators in the parliamentary arena. Reflecting one of the key themes of the research – the ideals of, and connection between, participation and representation – the remainder of the book is structured in two main parts. Chapters 3 to 6 assess the opportunities for, and patterns of, participation in these parties; whereas Chapters 8 to 10 examine policy transferral to the parliament and the operation of the parties as vehicles for representation.

Chapter 3 compares the way in which the parties belonging to the three different party families present themselves as participatory institutions and the importance they ascribe to facilitating membership involvement in policy development. Based on this rhetoric, I identify several types of participation: direct, delegate, representative and consultative. What is particularly interesting about parties' rhetoric is how it differs from academic accounts of how party organisations actually

work: parties say they are internally democratic and encourage participation, but most political scientists strongly doubt this. I attempt to reconcile these views by arguing that parties' rhetoric is largely the product of social expectations and the need for democratic legitimacy and thus is difficult to alter, and evaluate the reasons why political parties might want to give their members a say in the development of party policy.

This typology of participation developed in Chapter 3 is employed in Chapter 4 to analyse how parties put this democratic rhetoric into practice, evaluating the operation of a number of key forums for membership participation: local meetings, policy working groups, conferences, ballots and consultation exercises. The analysis draws on internal party reports, media commentary and interviews, and relays members' and activists' own perceptions of participation within their parties. I argue that party size is a key factor that determines the formal opportunities for participation that are on offer to members, but that there is an emerging trend amongst all parties to place greater emphasis on representative committees and consultation exercises as a means by which to ascertain members' views rather than more direct and 'traditional' forms of participation such as local meetings and party conferences.

A comparative assessment of the actual levels of membership engagement in these processes is presented in Chapter 5, along with an analysis of the locus of this participation. Data is drawn from previous surveys of membership participation in Australia, New Zealand and the UK, none of which has actually been systematically compared across democracies or party types. Membership inactivity is a common problem amongst all parties, despite the participatory opportunities that are on offer, which suggests that the internal organisational structure of political parties is not solely to blame for this trend. In response to declining levels of membership participation and engagement, Chapter 6 examines the emerging trend amongst parties to 'outsource' or to 'open up' policy development – to look beyond their own memberships for policy ideas and to expand participation to the general public. The chapter evaluates the consequences of this trend for the future of parties as membership organisations, and some of the strategies that party activists have employed to regain influence in this process.

Chapter 7 marks the analytical transition from membership participation to elite representation, and explores the role and influence of party elites (office holders, parliamentarians) and paid staff in the formal process of formulating 'official' party policy. I ask whether this

engagement is an attempt at overt control or merely a facilitation of the policy process and analyse the pressures of time and resources that these individuals face, the difficult political choices they make, and in doing so, I challenge the literature that suggests that party officers and staffers are simply puppets of the leadership.

Chapter 8 analyses the responsibilities of MPs in transferring policy to the legislature, as both party and constituency representatives – roles that could theoretically stand in conflict. The chapter outlines some of the ways in which the parties examined attempt to hold their elected representatives accountable for decisions made within the parliamentary arena, such a attending meetings, reporting back to conference and candidate selection mechanisms. In Chapter 9, I examine the influence of political parties on the task of representation, based on a comparative analysis of parliamentarians' perceptions of, and attitudes towards their legislative roles. I examine whether, in the minds of MPs, representing one's political party conflicts (both theoretically and in actual practice) with a duty to the parliament and representing a geographic electorate; and the extent to which political parties actually influence parliamentarians' legislative decision-making on an everyday basis, specifically by assessing the impact of party policy, MPs' engagement with their constituency parties, and the dictates of the party's parliamentary leadership. An analysis of the pervasiveness of these different dimensions is designed to address the broader question of how responsive parliamentarians are to their political parties.

Chapter 10 examines the extent to which the structure and everyday working mode of a parliamentary party facilitates or hinders the transfer of party policy to the legislative arena. It analyses the key decision-making groups and individuals within parliamentary parties, their relationship with the wider membership and some of the pressures that encourage the process of policy decision-making to occur in isolation from the broader party. Finally, given the institutional, cultural and practical constraints that shape the policy activities of parliamentary parties, the chapter explores some of the various ways in which MPs engage in 'alternate' ways of making party policy through means such as policy interpretation, private members' bills, discussion papers and election promises. Chapter 11 presents a summary of the key arguments presented in the book, examples and findings, and their implications for the role of parties as participatory and representative policy-making institutions in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

2
Linking Participation and Representation: Intra-Party Policy Development

Political parties have generally been regarded as an indispensable element of modern democracy and as a primary way of linking citizens and the state (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000, p. 275; Lawson, 1988, p. 14). From Schattschneider's (1942, p. 1) well-known claim that 'modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of political parties', to Sartori's (1968, p. 471) assertion that 'citizens in Western democracies are represented *through* and *by* parties. This is inevitable' – political scientists have acknowledged the paramount importance of these institutions. This sentiment is reiterated in public opinion – an analysis of survey data from 13 states revealed that three-quarters of respondents thought that political parties were necessary for democracy (Dalton and Weldon, 2005, p. 933).

Nonetheless, as Gunther and Diamond (2001, p. 3) argue, 'political parties are not what they used to be'. Indeed, society's acceptance of parties as actors in the political process seems to be deteriorating to that of a 'necessary evil' (Bale and Roberts, 2002). Despite public acceptance of parties as indispensable political actors, perceptions of parties are generally negative (Webb, 2009) and few believe they actually care what people think (Dalton and Weldon, 2005, p. 933). Consistent empirical evidence across the board in advanced industrial democracies suggests that party membership is in steady decline (van Biezen et al., 2012; Scarrow and Gezgor, 2010), that party activism, electoral turnout and campaign participation is dropping (Whiteley, 2011; Siaroff, 2009; Franklin, 2004; Wattenberg, 2003) and that partisan attachments have significantly weakened (Dalton, 2000). In 2006, the report of an independent inquiry into Britain's democracy, *Power to the People*, found that British citizens no longer wanted to join a political party or to get involved in formal politics

(Power Inquiry, 2006, p. 12). Similarly, the Council of Europe's paper, *The Future of Democracy in Europe*, argued that

> Today, one of the most striking features of European democracies is an apparently widespread feeling of political discontent, disaffection, scepticism, dissatisfaction and cynicism among citizens. These reactions are not, or not only, focused on a given political party, government or public policy. They are the result of critical and even hostile perceptions of politicians, political parties, elections, parliaments and governments in general (Schmitter and Trechsel, 2004, p. 25).

What are the causes and implications of this growing disaffection with political parties? For Mair (2005), it is a manifestation of parties' failure to adequately provide a mechanism by which citizens can participate in politics and heralds the gradual decline of popular government. The Power Inquiry (2006, p. 181) reported that the 'expert and practitioner evidence, the public submissions, and all of the research projects reveal a widespread sense that, at best, the main parties are failing in the *basic function of connecting the governed and governors*, and, at worst, are serious obstacles to democratic engagement' [emphasis added]. Although the findings of the Power Inquiry have been criticised (Bale et al., 2006), similar sentiments have recently been reiterated by parties themselves, for example:

- 'The shocking decline in Party membership is the consequence of the declining role of Labor members in their own Party. We need to return real power to the membership' (ALP Senator, John Faulkner, 2011).
- 'Activism among Labour members has diminished as members spend less time on party activities…Too often party members felt they had no influence on party outcomes' (UK Labour Party, 2011a, p. 11).

However, and somewhat ironically, trends indicating withdrawal from parties are apparent at a time when many parties are adopting increasingly democratic internal party structures (Whiteley, 2011, p. 26; Scarrow and Gezgor, 2010; Wauters, 2010; Webb, 2000a; Scarrow, 1999, 1997), seemingly designed to encourage membership participation, party responsiveness and transparency. As Scarrow (2005, p. 3) observes,

> The ideal of intra-party democracy has gained increasing attention in recent years because of its apparent potential to promote a 'virtu-

ous cycle' linking ordinary citizens to government, benefiting the parties that adopt it, and more generally contributing to the stability and legitimacy of the democracies in which these parties compete for power.

For example, back in 1997, New Labour undertook significant organisational reforms intended to 'democratise' the party's decision-making and policy formulation processes. These reforms were designed to grant members unprecedented opportunities 'to get involved in the party processes and debates…through a more deliberative and extended procedure' (UK Labour Party, 1997). Again in 2011, the party has sought to 'refound' itself by establishing supporters' networks reaching out to the public, establishing stronger policy-making institutions and 'involving our members' (UK Labour Party 2011a). By the same token, the 2010 National Review released by the Australian Labor Party (ALP) recommended that the organisation 'broaden participation in the Party to ensure a greater say for members, supporters and stakeholders' (Bracks et al., 2011, p. 5).

The idea of the internally 'democratic' party extends beyond parties of the labour movement. Green parties, which aspire to grassroots democracy, membership participation and consensus decision-making have steadily been gaining electoral popularity in democracies beyond Western Europe over the last decade, particularly in Australia and New Zealand. Similarly, liberal parties with individual-orientated democratic structures have been significant 'third forces' within Australian politics since 1977 (Australian Democrats) and from 1988 in the United Kingdom (Liberal Democrats). These trends, at least at face value, suggest that political parties do believe there are benefits to be gained from offering their members and say in intra-party decisions, or at the very least, in *appearing* to do so. The latest round of intra-party reforms has not occurred quietly: as Faucher-King and Le Galès (2010, p. 94) note with respect to the changes implemented within the UK Labour Party by Tony Blair, membership 'rights' 'received abundant publicity and were presented as proof of the party's democratization'.

Nonetheless, party membership continues to erode within advanced industrial democracies. Within Europe, party membership fell markedly between the beginning of the 1980s and the end of the 1990s, from an average of 9.8 per cent of the electorate to 5.7 per cent (Mair and van Biezen, 2001). The decline can be traced back even further, from an average of 14 per cent at the beginning of the 1960s (Mair, 2005). By 2008, average party membership as a percentage of the electorate in

27 European democracies was 4.65 per cent (van Biezen et al., 2012, p. 28).

Within the UK, the overall level of party membership as a percentage of the electorate dropped from 9.1 per cent in 1964 to 1.2 per cent in 2008 (van Biezen et al., 2012, p. 28; Webb, 2002a, p. 24). The trend, however, is not exclusive to Europe. Party membership in New Zealand declined from a peak of 12.5 per cent of the electorate in 1981, to 4.8 per cent in 1999 (Vowles, 2002, p. 416), and expert estimates now put this at well under 2 per cent. The most recent published statistics estimate Australian party membership at as low as 1 per cent of the electorate (Sawer et al., 2009, pp. 134–5), down from over 4 per cent in the 1960s (McAllister, 2002, pp. 389–91). Furthermore, if we survey the intentions of citizens to undertake political activity, these figures do not look as though they might recover anytime soon – the Hansard Society's Audit of Political Engagement reported that only 7 per cent of survey respondents indicated that they would probably or definitely spend time doing voluntary activity with a political party in the next few years (Hansard Society, 2011, p. 79). Interestingly, 25 per cent said they would undertake activity for a charity or campaigning organisation.

At face value, these trends raise questions over the continuing democratic legitimacy of parties given declining levels of popular engagement. However, upon deeper examination, it may be that parties still perform their function as participatory and representative institutions, even with fewer members. In any case, declining memberships would conceivably have a significant organisational impact on the way in which political parties formulate policy, both in terms of who is involved and the processes through which participants' views are aggregated. It is important to note, however, that whilst aggregate memberships have declined overall, some political parties (notably green parties) are actually experiencing sustained increases in party membership. Therefore, a key component of studying policy development within parties is examining how they have responded to the organisational challenge of changes in party size, whether this is an increase or decrease.

The role of parties as mechanisms of democratic 'linkage'

In criticising parties for 'failing in the basic function of connecting the governed and governors' the Power Inquiry, like much of the scholarly and popular debate on the decline of parties, has assumed that political parties should function (or at least used to function) as a mechanism to

link citizens and the state. This concept is commonly known as democratic 'linkage' and has been used in various ways by political scientists, although it can be most broadly conceived in Key's (1961, p. 411) terms as the 'interplay…between mass opinion and government' or as Wright (1971, p. 26) suggests, playing the role 'as intermediaries linking citizens with government'. Linkage is not a function vested exclusively in parties, and organisations such as environmental groups and community associations also actively assume this role. However, unlike these associations which must rely on 'external' political strategies such as protest and lobbying MPs, a political party is the only organisation that can create an entire linkage chain: from constituents and party members to candidates, elected representatives and government officials.

It is not within the scope of this book to engage in a normative debate on the desirability of political parties as mechanisms of linkage. Given the significant scholarly and community expectations that parties should function in this way and the fact that many parties say they will (as documented in their constitutions and rules), I have adopted this concept as a basis for the evaluation of parties' policy activities and processes. However, as the concept of linkage has been used in numerous (often inconsistent) ways (see Clark, 2003) it is necessary to clarify what it actually entails. Following the work of Lawson (1988) and Widfeldt (1999), I argue that linkage involves two main elements: the participation of citizens in politics and their representation by political elites.

Rather than treat these two concepts as distinct processes, Lawson (1988, p. 14) argues that 'it would make better sense…to treat both participation and representation as subsumed under "linkage" – links have two ends – and then to explore the nature of the connection between the two'. If citizen participation and elite representation are disconnected within the practices of parties, the link between citizens and the state is arguably weakened. The concept can also be applied to the practice of policy-making: so in exploring the link between policy developed by party members and that applied by parliamentarians, this book not only seeks to provide an analysis of the policy process, but also the operation of parties as mechanisms of democratic linkage in contemporary society.

Political parties as centres of participation

Political parties perform a key function in providing a forum for political participation: a role that is heavily emphasised by both deliberative

and participatory democratic theorists (Teorell, 1999; Pateman, 1970), although one which is criticised as being under-performed within competitive electoral systems – that is, those systems which prioritise the aggregation of citizens' interests through general elections (Webb, 2002b, p. 449). Participation of citizens in a party's policy formulation process is crucial, not only from the standpoint of providing legitimacy to a party, but in contributing to the citizen-state linkage through interest articulation and aggregation. In this sense, political parties, through their internal policy development processes and the active involvement of their members and supporters, ascertain salient community concerns and combine the views and interests of individuals and groups in society into coherent policy documents and platforms to present to the electorate.

Nevertheless, despite its normative importance, actual participation within political parties remains something of a paradox. As previously noted, notwithstanding the increasing array of intra-party participatory opportunities on offer to citizens, there is continuing evidence of the public's growing disenchantment and continuing withdrawal from these institutions. The paradox also hints at some uneasy tensions that lie at the heart of party scholarship: tensions between the aspirations of participatory democratic theory, social expectations, party rhetoric and empirical analyses of the actual operation and organisation of political parties. If so few people participate, why do political parties still have members? Is meaningful participation actually possible? What does it mean to be a member of a political party today?

The literature on party system change and party adaptation goes some way to explaining these apparently contradictory trends. If we trace the development of political parties over the last century, it is evident that parties simply do not require members as a labour resource to the same extent that they did in the archetypal mass party phase that characterised party organisation in the mid-twentieth century. Technological developments such as the electronic media have restructured political campaigns as direct appeals from political leaders to citizens, privileging the personalities of party leaders over the presentation of ideology and policy and reducing the utility of the mass membership as a vehicle for electoral mobilisation (Gunther and Diamond, 2003, p. 168). Political campaigning is now undertaken by teams of professionals (Panebianco, 1988), their activities increasingly directed by the party in public office and resourced by the state and public funds (Katz and Mair, 1995; van Biezen, 2003). On the supply side, declining partisan attachments, lifestyle changes and alternative opportunities

for political participation are cited as explanations for the declining willingness of the public to participate in party politics (see Scarrow, 2000, p. 83), as well as the general reluctance of citizens to participate in politics unless their rights are threatened (see Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002). It may well be that the character of party membership today is more expressive than functional or instrumental, but the data is not yet available to test this proposition.

Nonetheless, as discussed further in Chapter 3, maintaining a membership base is crucial for the legitimacy of political parties as actors in the democratic process. In order to secure this base, parties typically offer their members a range of incentives including social benefits, a pathway to employment, access to officials and a role in party decision-making (Scarrow, 2000, p. 84). It is this role in party decision-making that I am particularly interested in analysing. In the literature of the 1950s and 1960s, the membership base attached to parties performed an integrating function, at least in a normative sense, ensuring a 'closer and more faithful contact between the mass of people and their ruling elites' (Duverger, 1963, p. 427). Does membership participation achieve the same objective today?

Advocates of the cartel party thesis would argue that it does not. The cartel party thesis, developed by Richard Katz and Peter Mair in the mid-1990s, suggests that political parties are moving further away from civil society and closer to the state. In terms of party organisation, the thesis predicts the hollowing out of parties and a corresponding increase in power of the party in public office, also termed the parliamentary party (Katz and Mair, 1995, 2009). A cartel party can appear to be internally democratic – individual members are offered greater participatory opportunities to influence policy and select candidates, typically through direct ballots. However, internal democracy is largely illusory, as the focus on largely inactive and moderate individual members privileges the parliamentary party by circumventing party activists and other centres of power within the party such as national conferences, regional and local branches (Blyth and Katz, 2005; see also Faucher-King and Le Galès, 2010, p. 95). Decision-making and influence within the party becomes ever more centralised in the party in public office and the leadership. As Katz (2001, p. 293) aptly describes, it is a strategy of 'empowering while decapitating the membership'.

This is not to say that there was ever a 'golden age' of mass parties and membership participation. Indeed, party scholars such as Wilson (1962, p. 347), Duverger (1963), Schumpeter (1942) and Michels (1962) [1915], have argued that whilst membership participation and

internally democratic party procedures are not necessarily undesirable, they are impossible to achieve in the pragmatic competition for votes. To the competitive theorist who values the primacy of party-based elections, the efficiency and degree of cohesion with which the party can recruit political elites and contest government is paramount. The quick release of policies and the selection and training of candidates who bring electoral success requires a hierarchical party organisation to maintain the unity of the party position so electors may have a clear choice between parties (Schumpeter, 1942).

Regardless of whether such hierarchies are desirable, their formation may be inevitable. In his famous pronouncement of the 'iron law of oligarchy', Michels (1962) argued that democracy within political parties is unsustainable: the division of labour required within a party produces an elite with superior political knowledge, skills and autonomous interests, which inevitably governs the party. Nevertheless, organisation can differ between parties, and will depend upon the rationale, aspirations and ideology of the party, its structure and the political system within which it exists. Consequently, there are differing degrees to which a party structure may be described as oligarchic (Koelble, 1989, p. 213), and these nuances need to be examined in any assessment of parties as participatory organisations. For example, parties display significant structural variations in their internal policy processes, from individual ballots to consensus decision-making forums, which often reflect party ideology and either facilitate or constrain membership participation.

Another recent trend has been the weakening of links to affiliate organisations, which historically constituted an important and influential segment of parties' memberships (particularly within parties of the labour movement). As Mair (2005, p. 19) notes, parties now exhibit an increasing tendency 'to think of themselves as self-sufficient and specialized political organizations, that are willing to heed any cues provided by any of the various social actors, but that prefer to remain unrestrained by close formalized links to those actors'. For example, since the implementation of *Partnership in Power*, the formal influence of UK Labour's affiliate unions at conference has been downgraded and replaced by a policy development process 'designed to involve all party stakeholders' (UK Labour Party, 2006). The overall number of union-affiliated members has declined from a high of 6.5 million in 1979 to 2.7 million in 2010 (UK Labour, 2011a, p. 12).

As Chapter 6 argues, the downgrading of ties to specific organisations has been substituted with an appeal to the broader community

for policy input. For example, the trend is readily apparent in the UK Labour Party, which has undertaken a series of community consultation programmes over the last decade, 'Fresh Ideas' (2011), 'Let's Talk' (2006) and the 'Big Conversation' (2003), designed to extend participation in policy deliberation beyond party members to private citizens. This could represent a positive attempt to facilitate greater participation in parties. However, the exact nature of these participatory opportunities needs to be analysed, not only for their meaningfulness, but also to determine whether such processes are predisposed to elite control and whether they have the potential to result in identifiable policy outcomes rather than operating to circumvent the views of party activists. This development also highlights several key questions inherent in the participatory linkage function of parties: Does the exact form of participation matter for the performance of this function? Who should be allowed to participate in the policy development processes of a party? Should this be restricted to members, to supporters, or opened to the general public? How might this opening up of party processes change how we think about party membership? The choice of whether to involve each of these participant groups has important consequences for the operation of the linkage function, not only because it impacts upon the range of interests to be aggregated and in turn represented, but because it challenges the traditional role of members in the party organisation. These developments are discussed in detail in Chapter 6, 'Opening up the Party'.

Finally, perhaps the most fundamental organisational shift parties have undergone, certainly from the standpoint of participatory democracy, is the reported 'ascendancy of the party in public office' (that is, the parliamentary party) over the other two faces of the party organisation, the party on the ground (the party's grassroots membership) and the party in central office (see Katz and Mair, 1993, 2002). Although a party may have two official sets of leaders: those within the party organisation and those within the parliamentary party – there is a general consensus in the contemporary party literature that political parties with parliamentary representation are now effectively led by the latter group. This dynamic in the relationship between the faces of the party stems from a combination of factors: the increasing financial resources associated with public office, the location of party staff and the centralisation and professionalisation of electoral campaigning, and therefore holds irrespective of how a party organisation is classified, whether it be a cartel party, an electoral-professional party or a modern-cadre party (Katz and Mair, 2002, p. 122; Koole, 1996; Panebianco, 1988).

Overall, given the significant systemic and organisational obstacles faced, an analysis of the literature suggests that the prognosis for parties as participatory institutions does not seem to be bright. Whilst participatory opportunities exist, they are controlled either directly or indirectly by party elites/leaders. Although it is premature to apply this diagnosis to all political parties, in terms of the power balance between the party and the parliamentary leadership, it appears that the party (conceptualised as grassroots members) is losing out.

Political parties as vehicles for representation

Following on from participation, the second element in the linkage chain is representation, which parties perform in two ways. First, it is the intended product of electoral competition as voters show their support for particular parties by electing their preferred candidate for public office. To the extent that parties hold an effective monopoly over candidate nomination (most voters will vote for a party rather than a specific candidate), the performance of the function in this sense is not really in doubt. Nonetheless, societal representation also occurs within the legislative arena in the course of drafting, deliberating and voting on parliamentary bills. Evaluating the extent to which groups and individuals are able to influence a party's internal policy and decision-making processes is a good indicator of the responsiveness and in turn representativeness of a political party, assuming one crucial factor: that the political direction and policy determined by the party is actually translated into legislative action. It is in this context that the role of the party in public office is paramount: what good is party policy that has been formulated with the maximum participation of party members and/or citizens if it is not applied within the parliamentary arena? This aspect of the function is crucial as it is the final phase parties play in linking society and the state, but it is often overlooked in the literature on party organisation (see Heidar and Koole, 2000).

Democratic linkage and party government

In what Judge (1999, p. 71) refers to as an 'idealised view of responsible government', membership participation should be translated into policy outcomes in the following sequence: first, a party formulates a manifesto and/or policies to present to voters at a general election with the maximum possible citizen/membership participation; second, voters choose between parties on the basis of their manifestos and policies;

and third, parties seek to translate their policies and platforms into legislative outcomes once they have gained parliamentary represent-ation. This sequence is similar to conceptions of the broader role of parties in a representative democracy, particularly the way in which elections connect voters to government:

> From the point of view both of describing and of justifying repre-sentative democracy, the relationship between party and govern-ment policy is absolutely crucial. If a party says one thing to the voters and then goes into a government which does something quite different, then its supporters have been disenfranchised (at least as far as getting their preferred policies enacted) just as effec-tively as if they never had a vote in the first place (Laver and Budge, 1992, p. xix).

Although it originated from the mass-party phase, this conception of representation (also referred to as party government and discussed further in Chapter 8) has remained influential throughout the twen-tieth century. As Samuels and Shugart (2010, p. 219) note, 'this view of the connection between parties, election, and representation permeates theoretical and empirical political science research'. In this model, political conflict occurs between distinct social groups, each repre-sented by a party with a clear and coherent ideological programme. Elected politicians are bound to adhere to the party's policies and pro-gramme. In contrast to the freedom granted to (and expected from) parliamentarians under a Burkean (trustee) model of representation, party discipline is regarded not only as legitimate, but essential (Judge, 1999, p. 71; Birch, 1971, p. 97). However, as Katz and Mair (1995, p. 7) note

> This legitimacy depends, in turn, on direct popular involvement in the formulation of the party programme and, from an organ-izational perspective, this implies the need for an extensive mem-bership organization of branches or cells in order to provide for mass input into the party's policy making process, as well as for the supremacy of the extra-parliamentary party, particularly as embodied in the party congress.

As previously argued, the transformation of party organisations from mass to catch-all (Kirchheimer, 1966), to electoral-professional to cartel parties has, in the theoretical literature, significantly altered this balance

of representation. With the rise of campaigning technologies and the decline of traditional social cleavages with their polarising effect, elections are now contests between party leaders seeking to appeal to mass audiences rather than between party programmes satisfying distinct social interests. Several questions arise from this organisational adaptation and changes in the nature of campaigning. How has this impacted upon policy formulation? Has it consequently become the task of the party leadership (centred in the parliamentary party) rather than that of the party's members? To whom should policy appeal or represent: a party's members, the general public, or both simultaneously?

Nonetheless, as Chapter 3 argues, regardless of this trajectory of party change and adaptation, many parties still claim to be organised in a manner consistent with the representative model of the mass party, in providing a voice to the membership and the opportunity to influence policy. This continues to be the case within the social democratic parties that originated from this era – see for example UK Labour's *Refounding Labour* (UK Labour Party, 2011a), *Making Policy – Partnership in Power* (UK Labour Party, 2006) and the ALP's *2010 National Review* (Bracks et al., 2011). It is also a basic feature of the organisation of green and liberal democratic parties which provide their members with formal opportunities to influence party policy, and to differing degrees, demand party discipline and adherence to policy from their elected representatives. It has not traditionally been a characteristic of the conservative parties, but interestingly there are suggestions that the UK Conservative Party may be moving closer to such a model (see for example Kavanagh, 1998).

Even if we find that participatory opportunities within parties are genuine and effective, the model of party representation outlined above is problematic. First, it assumes that informed voters elect parties on the basis of their policy differences, and that these differences are sufficiently distinct for a genuine choice to be made. However, the impact of policy voting remains weak in relation to other factors such as party performance and leadership image (Judge, 1999, p. 73; King, 1997; Sanders, 1997). Second, and perhaps more crucially for assessing the relationship between parties and parliamentarians in policy development, is the criticism that successive governments simply fail to implement their election policies and manifestos. This trend was noted by Birch (1971, p. 100) in British politics in the early 1970s and again by Klingemann et al. in the 1990s: 'in spite of institutional arrangements that should allow for a strong mandate in British policymaking,

there is considerable evidence of a politics of accommodation' (1994, p. 79). This possibility is made even more probable when parties are required to reach coalition agreements in order to participate in government – a circumstance encountered for the first time by the Liberal Democrats after the 2010 UK general election.

The book evaluates the extent of this policy disjoint and the reasons for its existence by undertaking an analysis of the legislative behaviour, attitudes to representation and decision-making processes of parties' elected MPs – ascertaining the extent to which party MPs (either as a group or individually) adhere to the principles of the party and the policies and manifestos it has previously formulated. By looking at elite responsiveness in this way, I aim to provide a more transparent and tangible analysis of the link between party members and parliamentarians in the policy-making process than has previously been attempted (see Carstensen, 2006, p. 152). Although existing analyses focus on the records of governments implementing the manifestos on which they were elected (Klingemann et al., 1994; Birch, 1971), I extend the basic tenet of this analysis to both opposition and crossbench parties to evaluate the degree to which their parliamentary actions and deliberations correspond with both the manifestos they have formulated and presented to the electorate, and the body of party policies formulated by the membership.

Even though theories of party organisation examine the power of the party in public office in controlling intra-party decision-making and policy development, the activities of the party in public office within the legislative arena are generally under-theorised and remain largely within the realm of legislative studies. There is also a tendency to emphasise institutional factors that have altered the relationship between the different faces of the party organisation (such as public subsidies) and conceptualise the party in an abstract sense, as having a motivation and a logic that drives it as a coherent entity. I depart from this focus by analysing the potential impact of individuals and key groups on the political direction and priorities of parties, and their role in transferring party policy to legislation. The parliamentary party is disaggregated to reveal the actions and motivations of its individual members and organised sub-groupings. This disaggregation is particularly important in governing parties where there is a clear distinction and power imbalance between the party leadership and backbenchers, which otherwise remains obscured by the broader label of the 'party in public office' (see also Bolleyer, 2009).

Examining internal party policy-making: The parties included as case studies

As previously noted, this book draws together literature from both comparative party and legislative studies to analyse intra-party policy-making. Evidence and illustrative examples are provided from a range of sources: the analysis of party rules and documents, media reports, existing survey data, and interviews. Case studies of eight political parties in three democracies allow for an examination of the trends that characterise party policy development and illustration of some of the key factors that might impact upon the process. As I will discuss in Chapter 3, each of the parties chosen claims to offer its members opportunities to participate in policy formulation and demand (albeit to different degrees) that their parliamentarians adhere to these policies, thus conforming (at least in party discourse) to the chain of linkage previously outlined.

Australian Labor Party   At its formation in 1891, the organisation of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) was novel in a political era characterised by individualism and attachment to local constituencies (Loveday et al., 1977). A typical example of the mass party model, the ALP developed from the labour movement and throughout its history has been closely affiliated with trade unions, which have traditionally occupied a privileged place in the party's decision-making processes. Along with the Liberal/National coalition, the ALP is the other major political grouping in Australia's historically strong two-party system. It has held government since 2007, however from the 2010 federal election – which produced a hung parliament – this has only been with the support of one Green MP and three Independents. The Party currently holds 71 of the 150 seats in the House of Representatives (July 2012). Party membership has declined steadily from a peak of 370,000 in 1939 (Ward, 1991, p. 156) to 45,000 today (Bracks et al., 2011).

New Zealand Labour Party   Established in 1916 from a base of industrial support, the Labour Party was essentially an amalgamation of the various disparate social democratic and independent labour parties in existence in New Zealand at the start of the twentieth century. Like the ALP, NZ Labour has been a party of opposition for most of its history (62 of 96 years). However, from 1999 to 2008, the Clarke Labour government governed in coalition with several minor parties, notably the

Alliance and the Progressive Party and during this period it held on average 50 of the 121 seats in the NZ Parliament. Labour lost government to the conservative party, National, in 2008 and currently holds 34 of the 121 seats in the House of Representatives. The party's membership is approximately 15,000.

UK Labour Party   The UK Labour Party was founded around 1906 from a group of MPs elected under various social democratic party labels, united by their claim to champion the cause of the working class. Throughout its history, the party has suffered a significant degree of internal turmoil and endured numerous splits and defections from key members over ideological debates on the future of socialism in the UK. Reflecting the proportionately larger size of the British electorate, the UK Labour Party is the largest party in this study, both in terms of membership numbers and the size of the parliamentary party. Although membership numbers have declined throughout the second half of the twentieth century, they currently stand at 193,961 (UK Labour Party, 2011b). This figure increased from 156,205 in 2009 (UK Labour Party, 2010a). Labour governed in its most recent guise as 'New Labour' with the election of the Blair government in 1997, succeeded by the Brown government in 2007. However, the party was defeated in the 2010 general election (losing 91 seats) and now holds 257 of the 650 seats in the Commons. One hundred and two Labour MPs retired at this election.

Australian Democrats   Established in 1977 by Liberal defector Don Chipp as a party of the 'new politics' movement, the Australian Democrats were lauded for their approach to politics – offering progressive policies to the electorate and presenting novel opportunities for political participation. The membership has always been regarded as the driving force behind the organisation: formulating policies, selecting office bearers, pre-selecting parliamentary candidates and determining the party leadership, all by postal ballot. Existing only as a Senate party in federal politics (the Senate is elected by a variant of proportional representation), the Australian Democrats have previously held the balance of power in this House from 1981 to 2004. However, the party's vote has declined markedly over the last decade to only 0.6 per cent in 2010 and it has now all but disappeared from Australian politics, having lost the parliamentary representation it previously held for 31 years. At its peak, the party had a membership of around 8,000, which has now dropped to less than 2,000.

Liberal Democrats (UK)   The Liberal Democrats were formed in 1988 as a fusion between the Liberal Party (which can be dated back to 1859) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) (formed by secession from the Labour Party). The party's organisation reflects a federal structure and consists of distinct state parties in England, Scotland and Wales, and a federal party for the whole of the UK. Aspiring to be the third force in what was traditionally a strong two-party system, like the Australian Democrats, the Liberal Democrats vowed to 'break the mould' of British two-party adversarial politics. Arguably, the party achieved this goal (although not without controversy) when it agreed to govern in coalition with the Conservative Party after the results of the 2010 general election produced a hung parliament. The party currently holds 57 of the 650 seats in the House of Commons and has a current membership of 65,038 – an increase of over 6,000 from 2009 (Liberal Democrats, 2011a).

Australian Greens   Emerging from the Australian environmental activist movement in the 1970s and 1980s, the Greens have always existed as a party with a strong federal structure and culture. Indeed, it was only in 1992 that the party gained a national presence and the Australian Greens were established with the agreement of the constituent State parties. Like the Australian Democrats, the Greens are a party that has benefited from the proportional representation voting system of the Senate to secure parliamentary representation. Since the late 1990s the party has been gaining both members and electoral popularity and is now dubbed the 'third force' in Australian politics, a label once held by the Democrats. The party holds nine of the 76 seats in the Australian Senate, and thus the balance of power in this House. Unlike all other Australian parties the Greens' membership has increased over the last decade, and now stands at 10,400 (Jackson, 2011).

Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand   The first 'green' party in the world, the Values Party, was formed in Wellington, New Zealand, in 1972. Although the Values Party contested elections during the 1970s (reaching a peak vote of 5.3 per cent in 1975), support declined during the 1980s and the organisation became dormant on the parliamentary front until 1990. In May 1990, the Values Party merged with new Green groups that had emerged during the previous decade and became the Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand. The party currently holds 14 seats (of 121) in the NZ Parliament and though it has never formally parti-

cipated in a coalition, the party has been classified by academic analysts as 'tolerating' minority government (Rihoux and Rüdig, 2006, p. S8; Bale and Dann, 2002) and claims to have had significant impact on the budget and to have established a 'stable', 'positive' and 'maturing' relationship with the previous Labour government (Green Party NZ, 2007). The party's membership is estimated to be around 4,000.

Green Party of England and Wales   The Green Party was first established as the 'People' Party in 1973, and renamed the 'Ecology Party' in 1975 before becoming the Green Party in 1985. Owing to poor electoral results, the history of the Green Party has been described as 'largely one of failure' (Dearlove and Saunders, 2004, p. 104), occupying the margins of the political system through a 'network of local groups more than a nationally coordinated political party' (Petithomme, 2007, p. 14). In the 2010 general election the Greens polled just 1.0 per cent of the vote, yet won their first seat in the House of Commons (with Caroline Lucas elected to the seat of Brighton Pavilion). Like the Liberal Democrats, the Green Party has experienced an increase in membership in the last year and the total now stands at 12,798 (from 9,600 in 2009) (Green Party England and Wales, 2011a).

What factors might influence policy development?

Using these political parties as case studies, throughout the book I explore the impact of three key factors, identified from the current and existing literature on party organisation, on the policy development process and in particular, on the link between membership participation in policy development and how policy is then interpreted and applied by legislators. These potential influences are:

- The national context (including, for example, the electoral system)
- The significance of party families with common ideologies and/or similar histories
- The legislative status and importance of parties

In addition, the book also discusses the impact of several additional factors (endogenous to the political party) such as size and formal structure (which dictate participatory opportunities, for example, postal ballots versus conference representation) and the extent to which party culture facilitates/inhibits individual influence and autonomy.

The national context

Given that existing studies of party-membership linkage have focused specifically on analyses of political parties within one country (Widfeldt, 1999; Pedersen, 2003; with the exception of Scarrow, 1996), the impact of the national context on membership participation in the development of party policy and elite responsiveness to this policy is under-researched. The 'national context' is taken to mean variations in the electoral and party systems between countries.

Australia, New Zealand and the UK have been chosen as the states for analysis due to the similarity of their political cultures and parliamentary traditions, yet the distinctive features of their respective electoral systems. As New Zealand and Australia adopted their parliamentary traditions from the UK, all three states function under the Westminster system of government and have developed from similar constitutional and legal frameworks governing the executive and representative duties of MPs. All three democracies have traditionally had very strong two-party systems, however, this dominance has been challenged to an extent by the results of the 2010 general elections in both Australia and the UK, which produced hung parliaments in both democracies. Significant electoral reforms undertaken throughout the 1990s saw New Zealand transform from a two-party to a multi-party system under mixed member proportional representation (MMP) with up to eight political parties now routinely present in parliament. As a bi-cameral parliament, parties in Australia are elected under two systems: preferential voting in the lower house (House of Representatives) and by proportional representation in the upper house (Senate). Whilst the former electoral system has maintained the strong two-party character of the House of Representatives, the quota system in the Senate has otherwise allowed minor parties (such as the Australian Democrats and the Australian Greens) to secure seats in the parliament. Members of the House of Commons (UK) are elected using a first-past-the post voting system.

Although it may not yield a direct effect, the design of the electoral system is important to consider in examining intra-party policy development. This is because the distinction between two-party and multi-party systems (facilitated by proportional representation) may influence the responsiveness of party MPs to party policy and their attitudes to representation, particularly when they have been elected by virtue of a party list, as occurs in New Zealand (see for example Thomassen and Esaiasson, 2006; Norris, 2004; Thomassen and Andeweg, 2004; Norton, 2002 and Klingemann and Wessels, 2000). This would, on first exam-

ination, eliminate the tension between representing one's party or a specific electorate. However, consensus democracies also introduce an element of compromise that must be reached for parties to form coalitions and govern effectively, which in certain circumstances may produce pressure on the parliamentary party to deviate from party policy in reaching agreement on legislation.

Furthermore, the design of electoral systems (for example proportional representation) may support the existence of a greater variety of minor parties that promote membership participation (such as the Australian Democrats and Greens in Australia, and the Greens in New Zealand) that may not have otherwise been able to secure parliamentary representation. For example, Pettitt (2006) has argued that by facilitating the emergence of minor parties as outlets for dissenting major party activists, proportional representation systems have indirectly quelled the instance of intra-party membership dissent in consensus democracies, and hence removed the need for 'controlling' organisational structures to maintain party discipline and unity.

Party families

Although no two parties are ever identical, the concept of 'party families' can be used to group parties operating within different states that share similar characteristics: for example, historical origin, representation of similar interests, transnational links with other parties, and policy similarities (Mair and Mudde, 1998). In this sense, it is a useful tool to analyse the extent to which parties with similar constituencies, traditions, ideologies and interests fulfil their representative and participatory functions in a similar manner, despite existing within different countries. For example, do all green parties formulate policy in the same manner? Or are there differences between the national groupings? The parties included in these 'families' are as their names would suggest: social democratic parties are those typically of the labour movement championing principles of social justice within a capitalist system; green parties typically advocate for post-materialist issues, first and foremost the environment; and liberal democratic parties advocate the principles of liberalism within modern day representative government.

Social democratic, green and liberal democratic parties have been chosen because the parties within each of these party families claim to be internally democratic and to actively facilitate the participation of its members in the policy development process. To this end, conservative parties have been excluded from the analysis, as I particularly want to analyse policy formulation and representation in parties that

prioritise the participation of the membership in policy development (at least in a formal sense) as a key organisational imperative. While it may be the case that conservative parties are gradually adopting more 'democratic' modes of policy development, for example, the specialist policy groups that were established in the UK Conservatives under David Cameron and the Conservative Policy Forum which allows members the opportunity to 'discuss' party policy (CPF, 2012), the inclusiveness of these measures has been questioned (see for example Driver, 2011, p. 82). Indeed, the UK Conservative Party has throughout most of its history maintained a formal separation between the parliamentary party and the membership organisation leaving the membership with no 'formal' role in policy-making (Scarrow, 1996, p. 72; Whiteley et al., 1994, pp. 9, 28–39).

The Liberal Party of Australia also maintains this organisational separation and although the membership has some opportunity to influence the broad direction of the party through the Advisory Committee on Federal Policy, policy development remains the responsibility of the parliamentary wing (Reith, 2011, p. 12; Liberal Party, 2008). As former Liberal minister Peter Reith noted in his internal report for the party, 'to introduce real reform of our Party we have to first accept the fact that the Federal Party has become principally a campaign unit' (2011, p. 23). Finally, while the NZ National Party constitution establishes a Consultation Committee and Advisory Groups, it provides no clear indication of the process and hierarchy of policy-making (see National Party Constitution 2007, ss. 44–6).

Analysing participation and representation in green and liberal democratic parties is interesting from a theoretical perspective given that such parties have been characterised as potential 'challengers' to political cartels (Koole, 1996) and as 'alternative organisations' providing a form of citizen-state linkage with a commitment to individual autonomy and popular participation (see Kitschelt, 1988, p. 195; Lawson, 1988). Nonetheless, Katz and Mair contend that even these parties are not immune to the political socialisation inherent when these parties gain parliamentary representation and learn to 'play the game according to the established rules' (Katz and Mair, 1996, p. 531).

My expectation is that within particular party families, parties will share similar attitudes to and provide similar opportunities for membership participation in policy formulation (at least in a formal sense). Parties that originate from movements (environmental or industrial) may also display common attitudes amongst their parliamentarians as to their role as party representatives. Nonetheless, the informal

development of policy and the attitudes of MPs towards applying it will vary with the extent to which parties have become institutionalised or socialised in parliamentary politics. An interesting point of analysis is whether some party families are/have been more immune to the organisational effects of 'institutionalisation' than others.

Legislative importance and status

The final key factor to be analysed in this study of policy development is the extent to which a party's importance in the legislative arena affects the participatory nature of policy-making within the broader organisation, and the extent to which parliamentarians adhere to the views of the membership, and/or consider the interests of the broader electorate and society 'at large'. In this context, I refer to 'importance' as not only the actual level of representation a party holds in parliament, but its ability to influence the legislative agenda. This ranges from parties that can form a government in their own right, to parties governing in coalition, to crossbench and opposition parties, and finally to parties that contest elections but have not achieved legislative representation. Is the process of policy-making any different or more inclusive/less inclusive in parties that are in opposition or government? Much of the comparative party organisation literature and previous case studies of particular parties (for example Frankland, 2008; Burchell, 2001; Koelble, 1989) suggest that as a party gains legislative importance, participation and inclusiveness in the policy process suffer as a result and a centralisation of power occurs within the parliamentary party.

This view, however, runs contrary to the findings obtained by Sundberg in his 1997 study of compulsory party democracy on political parties in Finland. When exogenous factors were held constant (that is, the study was conducted within one political system), Sundberg concluded that party organisation is affected to a greater extent by the age of the party and its ideology than by its size or importance in parliament (1997, p. 97). These findings are particularly interesting and are indeed contrary to the experience of the German Greens, in which the party's decision-making processes became more centralised as its power in parliament increased (Frankland, 2008). However, Sundberg's analysis is limited to the effect on formal party rules, and thus excludes any effect on informal decision-making, which as political realities usually dictate, has a significant influence on the day-to-day operation of political parties. Consequently, the necessity of evaluating both formal and informal procedures in order to gain a full appreciation of the internal workings of political parties is paramount.

Additional factors

Several other factors may have an influence on internal policy develop-
ment, particularly the relative level of influence accorded to party
members and legislators. As noted above, Sundberg (1997) has sug-
gested party size and ideology to be variables worthy of analysis (see
also Tan, 1998). In theory, it is easier to facilitate greater membership
participation in parties with fewer members (Barber, 1984, p. 151;
Sartori, 1987, p. 113; Olsen, 1965). One might expect a greater adher-
ence to the principle of participation if this was emphasised in a party's
ideology and clearly expressed in its constitution. Participation may
also be affected by specific organisational aspects of the party such
as the exact nature of the policy formulation processes on offer to
members (consultations, working groups, conferences etc.), some of
which may be more inclusive than others. Finally, the responsiveness
of the parliamentary party could be influenced by formal accountabil-
ity mechanisms within the party (for example, the power of the party
in central office to expel a parliamentarian from the party for behav-
iour detrimental to the party's interests); and to a large extent by the
attitudes of key individuals within the party, such as the leader, who
will have varying priorities in balancing the views of the membership
with those of the electorate and the party's voters.

3
The Rhetoric and Reality of Policy Development

One of the most interesting observations that can be made about modern political parties, regardless of the theoretical trajectory of party change and adaptation outlined in the previous chapter, is that many political parties (if not most) still claim to be organised in a manner consistent with the representative ideal of the mass party. That is, these parties purport to provide a 'voice' to their membership and the opportunity to influence the development of party policy. This continues to be the case within social democratic parties that originated from this era (the party documents *Refounding Labour* (UK Labour Party, 2011a) for the UK Labour Party and the ALP's *National Review* (Bracks et al., 2011) are excellent examples), but as will be discussed in this chapter it is also a basic feature of the post-materialist green and liberal democratic parties in Australia, New Zealand and the UK. Nevertheless, while these parties may claim that party policy is 'determined' or 'owned' by the membership, there are significant variations between individual parties as to how members can actually contribute to debate, highlighted in parties' diverse organisational arrangements. These structures are dynamic: reflecting not only a party's ideology, culture and its origins, but also its responses to political and organisational challenges such as fluctuating memberships, social norms and electoral and party competition.

This chapter examines the rhetoric surrounding parties' participatory practices, their decision-making institutions and the importance ascribed to membership involvement in policy formulation and internal party democracy as a product of these internal and external imperatives. The primary analysis here is of party constitutions, rules and regulations and the *formal* opportunities for participation that they create. Although it does not provide a complete picture of actual political practice, examining

participatory rhetoric is important because it is disseminated in public documents, which can be analysed as indirect indicators of public expectations and as a direct indicator of a party's conscious and calculated response to these social norms (Smith and Gauja, 2010; Kittilson and Scarrow, 2003, p. 65).

Comparing policy formulation across the eight case studies, we can identify four broad types of membership participation in intra-party policy processes, or perhaps more accurately, four distinct channels of participation through which it can be claimed that members 'own' party policy: direct, delegate, representative and consultative involvement. Although none of these channels of participation is mutually exclusive within a party organisation, there are a number of factors which influence the type of membership participation that a party is likely to emphasise, including: ideology, history, size and available resources. The typology of participatory opportunities constructed in this chapter is employed again in Chapters 4 to 6 in order to analyse and explain the evolution and efficacy of the different forums for participation (for example, conferences and local meetings) that exist between, and within, parties.

Comparative assessments of the rhetoric of policy formulation and participation: Limited existing studies

Does the extent to which members are able to formally participate in intra-party policy-making differ between parties, both within and across democracies? Although the intuitive answer to this question may be yes, there have been surprisingly few comparative analyses undertaken of policy-making processes within parties and even less attention paid to the role of members within them. Whilst broader contemporary studies of membership activity and influence within parties have been conducted in Germany and Britain (Scarrow, 1996), Britain and Denmark (Pettitt, 2006, 2007), and in Sweden (Loxbo, 2011; Widfeldt, 1999), the bulk of the existing literature on intra-party policy development consists of single party case studies and relatively brief assessments of party organisation in party system and general politics texts (see for example Marsh, 2006 on Australia; Miller, 2005 on New Zealand; Driver, 2011, Webb, 2000b on the UK). Specific analyses of policy development processes are even scarcer (an exception is Debnam, 1994).

Notwithstanding the very few existing comparative analyses of the formal provisions for membership participation in policy develop-

ment, there is some limited research on the adoption of democratic themes (more broadly) in party constitutions and manifestos. Assembled as part of the Comparative Manifestos Project (Budge et al., 2001), this research provides an interesting comparison of the saliency of democratic themes in party documents across two dimensions: party families and states. 'Democratic themes' are regarded as favourable mentions of democracy as a method or goal in national and other organisations. Although the data cannot be used to analyse membership influence over policy development, it presents a useful starting point for a comparative analysis because the importance ascribed to democratic themes and ideals in manifestos and constitutions is potentially closely linked to a party's own organisational structure. Previous research has suggested that a party's disposition towards democracy and participatory ideals will be strongly affected by its ideology, with green and left-libertarian parties most likely to emphasise democratic themes (Kittilson and Scarrow, 2003, p. 62; Kitschelt and McGann, 1997; Kitschelt, 1989b).

Viewing parties as essentially purposive organisations (Luther and Müller-Rommel, 2002, p. 6), the logic of this argument derives from the mantra that parties 'practice what they preach'. As Kittilson and Scarrow (2003, p. 65) argue, 'self-consciousness about organizational principles is perhaps most characteristic of parties that want to transform the political order: such parties often use their own charters to demonstrate how alternative models of political organization might work'. Therefore, we would expect parties that place greater emphasis on democracy in their constitutions and manifestos to also have in place greater opportunities for membership participation in intra-party processes, including policy-making. The data assembled from the Comparative Manifestos Project seem to confirm this hypothesis. In all 25 of the democracies surveyed, parties of the New Left were found to place the greatest emphasis on the rhetoric of democracy (6 per cent), followed by social democratic parties (4 per cent) (Budge et al., 2001; Kittilson and Scarrow, 2003). Examining only Australia, New Zealand and the UK, the salience of democratic themes in liberal democratic parties (the Australian Democrats and the Liberal Democrats (formerly the SDP)) was more than double that of the labour parties, particularly in the 1990s. Conservative political parties in the three democracies (the Liberal Party of Australia, the NZ Nationals, and the UK Conservatives) gave considerably less attention to democratic themes in their constitutions than their counterparts (Kittilson and Scarrow, 2003, pp. 76–9).

The rhetoric of participation and the impact of ideology and party history

Given that party ideology has been identified as the most salient factor affecting democratic themes in party manifestos, we might also expect a party's ideological position to influence the character of its policy development process and the opportunities for participation and influence allocated to members. The following section analyses policy development processes by party family, a categorisation grouping together political parties that share common ideologies and origins.

Social democratic parties

In contrast to their conservative counterparts, parties of the labour movement in the UK, Australia and New Zealand were founded on the basis that party policy was to be determined by the membership and approved at conference rather than being formulated by parliamentary elites. In this way, a party's grassroots provided the requisite connection between its elected representatives and civil society, thus translating 'mass preferences into public policy' (Key, 1961, p. 432). As exemplars of the mass party model, these parties emerged to represent a relatively distinct social base, the working class, in a politics that was about the 'competition, conflict and cooperation' of these well-defined groups (Katz and Mair, 1995, p. 6). For example, the ALP was created as a political vehicle of the labour movement during the industrial turmoil of the late nineteenth century, as a result of 'the recognition by the trade union movement of the necessity for a political voice to take forward the struggle of the working class against the excesses, injustices and inequalities of capitalism' (Parkin and Warhurst, 2000, p. 24). In organisational terms, the distinct interests of each group were articulated within the party programme: 'a coherent and logically connected whole' – implemented with strict discipline by the parliamentary party, yet formulated with the extensive involvement of the party's grassroots (Katz and Mair, 1995, p. 7). In this sense, social democratic parties in historical perspective can best be viewed as the 'parliamentary delegates' of the labour movement and the working class.

Regardless of whether or not labour parties in the UK, Australia and New Zealand can still be categorised as 'mass parties', or whether they have adapted to become catch-all or cartel organisations (see for example Miller, 2005, pp. 79–85; 2006; Jaensch, 2006; Parkin and Warhurst, 2000; Blyth and Katz, 2005; Detterbeck, 2005), the rhetoric

they ascribe to their formal policy-making processes still reflects the chain of command particular to the mass party organisation. Although it is without doubt that rhetoric does not necessarily reflect political practice, it is still highly significant. The fact that parties have not amended the formal degree of influence accorded to the membership or reduced their role in policy development may stem from their own inertia. However, it might also indicate that the normative expectations of society as to how parties *should* organise have not changed since the start of the twentieth century, and that party rhetoric is largely a reflection of these expectations.

For example, in the United Kingdom, the Labour Party has for the last 15 years been undertaking, and reaffirming, organisational reforms that seek to give greater voice to the grassroots of the party and its supporters. Since the implementation of the internal policy document *Partnership in Power* (1997), the influence of the party's constituent unions has been downgraded and replaced by a policy process 'designed to involve all party stakeholders (including members, local parties, trade unions, socialist societies and Labour representatives) as well as the wider community' (UK Labour Party, 2006; see also Russell, 2005). According to that document, members had unprecedented opportunities within this framework 'to get involved in the party processes and debates...through a more deliberative and extended procedure' (UK Labour Party, 1997). A decade later, Prime Minister Gordon Brown again emphasised Labour's commitment to membership participation: 'we need a 21st century party to meet 21st century challenges that requires us to involve and engage ourselves in all our communities and also to consult the membership and make them fully involved in the future' (*The Guardian*, 11 June 2007, p. 10). And again in 2011, the Labour Party (although in opposition) overwhelmingly endorsed these organising and participatory principles at its national conference by a majority vote of 96 per cent of delegates (UK Labour Party, 2011c):

> To build a vibrant movement capable of winning the next General Election, Labour also needs to transform our policy making...We want to open up our process of making policy, both to give party members a greater say and to enable supporters and voters to feed in their ideas... (Peter Hain, MP, speech to conference).

Membership involvement in the rhetoric of social democratic parties in New Zealand and Australia also remains strong. For example, in promoting itself to potential new members, the ability for individuals to

influence party policy through their local branch has been portrayed as a particular advantage of NZ Labour Party membership:

> Labour Party members have the opportunity to contribute directly to party policy, and help implement the commitments made in our manifesto. Your local Labour Party will hold regular policy forums which all members can take part in, which can feed into our Policy Committees. The resulting policies are then debated at our annual conference, and if passed, become party policy (NZ Labour, 2007a).

Similarly, the Australian Labor Party claims that its 'local level organisation provides us with the eyes and ears to listen to the concerns of everyday Australians' (Bracks et al., 2011, p. 9) and that it has a commitment to making the operation of the party 'as attractive, inclusive and participatory as possible' (Hawke and Wran, 2002, p. 5). Indeed, one of the clearest statements of social democratic party ideology and a 'bottom-up' policy structure can be found in the ALP's Constitution, which explicitly provides that policy 'is not made by directives from the leadership, but by resolutions originating from branches, affiliated unions and individual Party members' (Part A, Article 7).

The experience of UK Labour and the internal reforms undertaken by the party in the 1990s highlight a particular challenge faced by social democratic parties in aggregating the policy preferences of their members: whether this should be done through trade unions, local branches or by individual members. The trend in all three democracies has been a move to gradually restricting the formal influence of the unions and reallocating these policy decisions to constituency party members, although this has historically been and still remains a contentious topic of debate within the parties themselves (Aarons, 2008; Bramble and Kuhn, 2007, pp. 7–8; Button, 2002, pp. 34–41; Russell, 2005, pp. 191–8; Smith, 2002, pp. 29–30). This provides an interesting contrast: whilst social democratic parties have taken the step of amending official rules and procedures to downgrade the role of unions on the premise that they no longer are representative of the workforce, they remain reluctant to do so with respect to their members, despite falls in party membership numbers and union memberships almost mirroring one another. However, there has been a distinct shift in social democratic party rhetoric that suggests that both unions and members are now both part of a broader community of supporters and sources of policy influence (see further, Chapter 6).

Nevertheless, the formal approach to policy-making that continues to best characterise social democratic parties is the importance ascribed

to aggregating the interests of the membership in a 'bottom-up' manner, through discussion forums and local meetings which then elect delegates to party conference to approve or reject policy on the members' behalf.

Green parties

The aspirations of green parties to grassroots democracy and their emphasis on membership participation, power sharing and consensus decision-making are products of the green movement's broader ideology. In contrast to the organisational structures of mass and elite based parties, movement parties such as the Greens consist of 'coalitions of political activists who emanate from social movements and try to apply the organisational and strategic practices of social movements in the arena of party competition' (Kitschelt, 2006, p. 280). A strong commitment to direct participation is characteristic of these parties, and scholars have argued that their formal organisational structure tends to decentralisation and a rejection of party hierarchy in an attempt to 'preserve some of the spirit of movement politics from which they evolved' (Offe, 1985, p. 243; see also Poguntke, 1993, p. 387; Carter, 2001, pp. 108–10; Gunther and Diamond, 2001, p. 30; Kitschelt, 1989b, p. 62); and to create links between civil society and political parties through the practice of participatory democracy (Icke, 1990, p. 47; see also Petithomme, 2007, p. 13). Despite potential differences between formal rules and actual political practice, Rihoux (2000, pp. 10–11) argues that green parties are more likely than other party types to abide by constitutional rules and regulations. Rihoux's reasoning stems from what he sees as distinctive character traits of green party members, who 'are particularly touchy and well informed when it comes to the discussion and control of the *in concreto* implementation of the formal rules inside the parties' (2000, p. 11).

Direct participation through decentralisation and local autonomy is a key characteristic of the formal policy development processes of Green parties. In its Statement of Core Principles, the Green Party of England and Wales declares that the party emphasises 'democratic participation and accountability by ensuring that decisions are taken at the closest practical level to those affected by them' (Principle 6). Direct participation is regarded as 'the highest form of democracy…All the major political decisions which affect our lives should ideally be made with our active participation' (Principles of Government 102). Policy-making in the Greens 'should be democratic, consultative and, ideally, consensual. Anyone can make policy and a policy should only

be adopted if every member of the party has had the opportunity to know what is being proposed, and to intervene if they feel inclined' (Green Party, England and Wales, 2011b, p. 1). Further, the Greens claim that 'unlike in mainstream parties' all motions adopted at party conference with the direct participation of members become party policy (see Faucher-King, 2005, p. 20).

Similarly, policy decisions in the Australian Greens are arrived at through a process of 'grassroots democracy', one of the four pillars enshrined in the party's *Charter and Constitution* (2010). The policy process operates according to the principles of consensus decision-making and with the maximum possible participation of members (s 45.2). In practice, Jackson (2011, p. 19) notes that during meetings delegates sit in a large circle so they can face each other, take regular breaks for further discussion and use alternative dispute resolution mechanisms to break policy deadlocks and in order to arrive at a consensus decision. The party's federal structure comprising of local, State and national organisations (see Miragliotta, 2010) allows for membership participation and decision-making at several territorial levels. For example, policies that concern only one local group, electorate branch or State party may be decided by the relevant group (s 45.1) according to locally-determined decision-making procedures as long as they are consistent with consensus and participatory principles.

That the party's policy process is 'participatory and democratic' is one of the key elements stressed by the NZ Green Party in its *Green Policy Guidelines* document (2011a). However, perhaps reflecting the party's relatively greater involvement in the legislative arena and the imperative to work with governments and compromise in a multi-party system, the emphasis on direct democracy and intra-party consensus decision-making does not feature quite as prominently as in the rhetoric of the Australian and English Greens. Although the party conference is constitutionally the supreme body for setting the political direction of the organisation (s 8.1), the party places more importance on the need for the policy process to be 'clearly understood and trusted by the membership of the Green Party', and for the objectives of participation and democracy to be balanced with efficiency and effectiveness (NZ Green Party, 2011a). So even in the formal policy documents produced by the party, it is noticeable that the ideals of green organisational ideology have been tempered by the practical realities of institutional politics.

The structures of policy-making in Green parties are similar to those of the social democratic parties in that policy is formally decided at local level, where delegates are chosen to attend conference to vote on the members' behalf. However, what distinguishes Green parties is their

emphasis on discussion and deliberation (both elements of consensus democracy) and an associated aversion to formal voting in intra-party decisions unless absolutely necessary. Green parties also stress decentralisation and local autonomy to a much greater extent than do the social democratic parties.

Liberal democratic parties

Both the Liberal Democrats and the Australian Democrats share similar histories as splinter parties (or groups of individuals) that broke away from established major parties during conflicts over party organisation and ideological direction. The Liberal Democrats were formed in 1988 as a fusion between the Liberal Party (dating back to 1859) and the SDP. The SDP was formed by secession from the Labour Party in a debate over the influence of the party's left on organisation and policy. Those who left Labour to join the SDP advocated a greater say for individual members and a decentralisation of power within the party (Russell, 2005, pp. 37–8; Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005, pp. 30–4). The Australian Democrats were established in 1977 from a merger between the Australia Party, the Centre Line Party and the New Liberal movement – the latter created from a split within the South Australian branch of the Liberal Party over the issue of 'one vote, one value'. The Democrats inherited much of their character from the Australia Party, which championed new politics issues (nuclear disarmament and opposition to the Vietnam War) and strongly emphasised participatory democracy through discussion and debate in the party's newsletter, *Reform* (Australian Democrats, 2007, p. 6).

These histories have shaped the liberal democratic parties' organisation, with both parties vowing to 'break the mould' of two-party adversarial politics. The Australian Democrats were established as a party of the 'new politics' movement, embracing the ideals of consensus, rational debate and citizen participation in political decision-making. This organisation is typical of new politics parties, disillusioned with the lack of responsiveness and non-democratic structures of the traditional parties (Carty, 1997, p. 103; Sugita, 1995) and manifest in their origins as mergers of splinter parties that defected from the major parties. The party's commitment to internal democracy is codified within its *Constitution* (2006), where 'ownership' of the party is vested in its membership, which determines party policy, selects parliamentary candidates, office bearers and party leaders by plebiscites open to all financial members. The development of party policy takes place under the broad constitutional objective that 'policies shall be formulated with the maximum participation of members and shall finally be determined

by the direct and equal say of the membership by a voluntary postal vote' (s 9.1).

The Liberal Democrats have often been regarded by party analysts as the most 'democratic' of the mainstream UK parties – offering significant opportunities for membership participation when contrasted with Labour and the Conservatives (Bentham, 2007; Webb, 2000b, p. 209; Ingle, 1996, p. 130). Members are given the opportunity to develop party policy by participating in working groups and discussing policy papers and motions in local and regional meetings, which are then voted on by their representatives at conference (Liberal Democrats, 2011b). Formally, the party conference (and consequently the membership) is the sovereign policy-making body in the party (Driver, 2011, p. 126). The preamble to the party's constitution reaffirms this democratic commitment: 'we believe that people should be involved in running their communities. We are determined to strengthen the democratic process' (Liberal Democrats, 2010). As will be explored in later chapters, however, both parties have struggled to maintain a working balance between grassroots influence and the necessities and pre-eminence of parliamentary decision-making particularly when holding balance of power and coalition positions (see for example Driver, 2011, pp. 125–7; Evans and Sanderson-Nash, 2011; Gauja, 2005).

Although the Australian Democrats and the Liberal Democrats share many commonalities in their ideology and history, it is perhaps a reflection of their shared ideology of liberalism that the parties' policy processes differ quite considerably. The Liberal Democrats could be best described as an amalgam of the features that characterise the social democratic and green parties: a culture of discussion, debate and compromise and an emphasis on local autonomy, but within a more formalised structure, revolving around local meetings, policy committees and electing representatives to conferences to 'make' official party policy. The Australian Democrats are a unique case; their policy was formally decided upon by direct participation of the entire membership in a voluntary postal plebiscite after discussion in branch meetings and the party's *National Journal*.

Parties as participatory organisations: Why should members develop policy?

Parties' participatory rhetoric and policy processes are closely linked to their history (particularly the rationale for their formation) and their ideology, leading to distinct differences between party types (and in

some cases, such as liberal democratic parties, within them). However, despite their diverse histories and ideologies, all the parties examined are united by their common claim to foster membership participation in intra-party policy formulation. What is particularly interesting about the survey of parties' participatory rhetoric is that it stands in stark contrast with the majority of academic accounts of the actual influence of party members over policy. As previously noted, many scholars have claimed that providing a voice to the membership is at best a futile exercise and, at worst, a threat to the electoral success of a party (Downs, 1957; Michels, 1962; Schattschneider, 1942). Notwithstanding the normative desirability of membership influence over party policy, others such as McKenzie (1963) and Whiteley and Seyd (1998, p. 114) argue that it is simply contrary to parties' established practice: 'party leaderships will consult outside experts, think-tanks and research organizations when formulating policies, but they will rarely consult their own members, whose advice they may regard as amateurish or extremist'.

The difference between what the scholarly community suggests and parties' own rhetoric raises several questions. If membership participation is unachievable, undesirable or detrimental to electoral fortunes, why would a party want to offer its rank and file a say in policy? Or, at the very least, say they do? One solution might be to suggest that not enough empirical research has been undertaken on policy processes within parties and that the scholars have it wrong. This may be due to the inevitable difficulty of accurately measuring influence, or even because the democratic benchmarks by which policy influence and membership participation are judged are contested. Another option is to accept the arguments of party scholars – that parties do not practice what they preach. But if parties have no intention of listening to their members, why do they persist with such discourse? Is this intentional sabotage – a way of empowering while marginalising the membership as Katz (2001, p. 293) might suggest, savvy political marketing (Lees-Marshment and Quayle, 2001) or simply a failure of existing mechanisms?

Turning to the question as to why parties should espouse participatory rhetoric despite practical limitations, a significant amount of academic attention, particularly in the work of Susan Scarrow (1996), has been devoted to establishing a link between internally democratic structures that encourage participation and deliberation, and the *legitimacy* of political parties. The notion of legitimacy derives from the logical assumption that the internal organisation of parties should mirror the democratic organisation of the state (Blondel, 1978, p. 140).

Active and robust memberships assist the electoral fortunes of parties, enabling them to present themselves as organisations driven by members, rather than dictated by professional politicians (Scarrow, 1996, p. 42). In many countries, including Australia and New Zealand, the relationship between a membership base and party legitimacy is illustrated by the legal requirement that parties have a minimum number of members in order to register to contest elections and receive financial support from the state (Gauja, 2010, p. 77; 2008, pp. 250–1; Orr, 2010, pp. 130–3). However, it is important to acknowledge that legitimacy is not of itself an indicator of the quality of democracy within parties as members may provide electoral benefits even if membership control is more apparent than real (Scarrow, 1996, p. 42; see further Chapters 4 and 5).

The demand for legitimate internal processes is also, in part, the by-product of a post-materialist society. Social and political transformations such as increasing levels of education and the provision of information have heightened cognitive mobilisation and awareness (Dalton, 1984; Inglehart, 1990). Consequently, they have also 'significantly altered citizens' views about how political processes should operate' and increased their 'reluctance to merely choose among pre-packaged party platforms and party candidates, and citizens are now more interested in having opportunities to participate in political decision-making processes' (Kittilson and Scarrow, 2003, p. 59). Representative democracy appears to have become the 'organising principle' of the twentieth century, in associations and parties alike (Torpe and Ferrer-Fons, 2007, p. 116). Further, participatory democracy within parties is seen as conducive to personal self-development, as individuals 'learn to participate by participating and that feelings of political efficacy are most likely to be developed in a participatory environment' (Pateman, 1970, p. 105). By emphasising the participatory opportunities available to the membership, parties may simply be responding to community demand that still exists (and that may even have intensified) for such processes. As van Biezen and Saward (2008, p. 30) argue, 'there may be scope to increase party memberships…if genuine opportunities to deliberate over policy are seen to be available'. However, such demand would presumably exist only if participation is effective and meaningful.

Therefore, maintaining a membership base is crucial for the legitimacy of political parties as actors in the democratic process. However, participation in policy development can also be viewed as a reward for labour. Members are more likely to participate (contributing finances

and labour) if they are able to 'have a say' and influence the party's programme. Previous academic research on membership activity within parties has shown that perceived selective outcomes matter (for example see van Schuur, 2007; Whiteley and Seyd, 2002). Further, despite trends to more professional campaigning techniques, keeping members mobilised as a labour resource has been shown to be electorally beneficial. An active membership that is prepared to canvas for the party and deliver leaflets has been found to have 'highly significant effects on constituency outcomes in general elections' (UK Labour, 2011d, p. 12; Whiteley and Seyd, 2002, p. 17; see also Denver and Hands, 1997; Johnston and Pattie, 1997; Seyd and Whiteley, 1992; Whiteley et al., 1994).

Party members can also contribute to their party's electoral success by injecting new ideas into the organisation and maintaining links with the voters. It is a point that is often overlooked in comparative studies of modern political parties; but parties are still essentially constituted by their members. As noted, the membership base attached to parties has been regarded as performing an integrating and mobilising role, at least in a normative sense, ensuring closer contact between citizens and ruling elites – achieved in part through popular involvement in the creation of party policy. Although this strategy has undergone a resurgence numerous times in the decades since, it was especially popular within UK Labour in the mid-1970s and 1980s, with new members deemed to bring 'new blood' to the organisation and help it 'respond to new ideas and keep in touch with electoral opinion' (Scarrow, 1991, p. 130). The Liberal Democrats' head of Policy and Research, Greg Simpson, recognised a similar role of the party's activists in gathering valuable input 'as to what people respond to on the doorstep, the arguments they're being asked…what questions do we have to answer? How can we explain our policies better?' Furthermore, there is a perception amongst the party elites interviewed that in order for their ideas to be disseminated within the party, members must have some corresponding role in the policy process:

> I can't see why anyone would join a party where they can't have some say in policy, either through a convention or a conference or through a membership ballot. Members should be involved and must be involved. I think it gives you a far better tap into what the community is thinking as opposed to this isolated place on a hill in Canberra. It's a world unto its own sometimes and I think you tend to lose track of what people are getting at (former Australian Democrats leader, Meg Lees, Interview).

> We're okay to deliver pamphlets and go door-knocking but we're not okay to make policy? Most of us are in the party because we believe in stuff, not because we like fundraising (NZ Labour MP and former Party President, Ruth Dyson, Interview).

Yet the benefits of parties' espousing democratic principles also do not come without some drawbacks. The ideal of the mass membership model has been, and continues to be, applied to normative assessments of present-day practices with insufficient critical reflection. As Loxbo (2011, p. 4) argues, 'the mass party model is still viewed as significantly closer to the democratic ideal than present-day parties…Moreover, in spite of hierarchical structures and democratic flaws, mass parties are commonly described as avenues for mass input into politics…and important arenas for "real discussions" about policy alternatives'. The practical danger of this may be to create a false set of expectations about policy-making that parties cannot hope to meet, and which in turn, will only fuel citizens' dissatisfaction with these institutions.

Types of membership participation

Although political parties might regard themselves as participatory institutions, how does this rhetoric translate into actual opportunities for members to influence policy? Looking at the eight case studies, it is possible to identify a basic pattern, or a process, that provides the framework for policy development in each of the parties. Policy is typically developed over a period of between 6 to 36 months in two key stages: policy is discussed, developed and drafted by local branches, working groups or commissions with the input of members and interested parties before being voted on by the party membership (whether through a conference, representative body or by direct ballot) for inclusion as 'official' party policy. Hence membership participation can occur in two main arenas: during the development process by drafting policy proposals in a local branch, or being a member of or consulting with a working group; and second, by participating in (or being represented in) a vote to accept, reject or amend party policy. However, while the translation of members' views to 'official' party policy follows a distinct pattern there are significant variations between parties in the level of 'direct' involvement that party members can actually have in these processes.

Based on parties' formal opportunities for membership participation in policy development, as expressed in their rules and constitutions, it

is possible to identify four main 'types' of membership participation: direct, delegate, representative and consultative. Designed to highlight the different opportunities members are given to participate in intra-party policy processes, the typology reveals the structural constraints underpinning participatory choice (for example, the size of a party and its available resources) and some of the normative democratic aspirations that underlie each of the models (for example, the deliberative benefits of consensus decision-making, as practiced by green parties). Table 3.1 briefly summarises the types of participation, which party/party type they are favoured by and how they are manifest in policy formulation processes.

Table 3.1 A Typology of Formal Membership Participation in Policy Development

Participation	Party	Organisational Feature	Example
Direct	Australian Democrats; Australian Greens; Green Party of England and Wales; NZ Greens	Individuals have the ability to contribute directly to the making of a policy decision	Participation in working groups; policy ballots; autonomous local policy groups; consensus decision-making
Delegate	Labour Parties; Green Parties	Individual members' interests represented by delegates who must follow their wishes	Labour Party conferences; Green Party conferences
Representative	Liberal Democrats; UK Labour; Australian Labor Party	Individual members represented on policy-making bodies; representatives not mandated	Liberal Democrat Conference; UK Labour NPF; ALP NPF
Consultative	UK Labour; Australian Labor Party	Party relies on consultations with membership and policy submissions from individuals and groups	Policy consultations; forums/conventions

Direct participation

Direct participation in the policy process is perhaps the most difficult model to practically achieve, as members must 'have a voice in all key decisions' (Miller, 2005, p. 18) and be actively involved at the point of decision-making. Under this model, members represent themselves on policy-making bodies such as working groups and policy commissions, vote as individuals on matters of policy in membership-wide plebiscites, or make autonomous decisions in local groups. The implementation and success of this model of participation relies primarily on a party's size and is regarded as working most effectively in small parties (Miller, 2005, p. 16) such as the Australian Democrats and the Greens, although in two distinct ways. The green parties employ consensus decision-making principles, where policy decisions at all levels of the party are arrived at through a process of debate and deliberation where all participants finally reach agreement. The Australian Democrats, by contrast, subjected all policy proposals to a postal ballot of every individual member in order to achieve the principles of direct participation. Both modes, however, require a party to have substantial time and/or resources.

Despite the difficulty of practically applying this model of participation within political parties, from a normative perspective it offers the most meaningful and effective opportunities for membership involvement in two respects. First, it is a reliable way to aggregate citizens' preferences, as those who wish to be involved can be involved – participation is generally open to all. Second, as party members are active participants in this process, direct participation fulfills the goals of education and political self-development as outcomes of policy development (Pateman, 1970, p. 105).

Participation through representation and delegation

Both the representative and delegate models of participation create a link between members and policy without their direct involvement in decision-making. As the most common type of participation, members choose one or more of their number to represent their views and interests in policy decisions at a higher level of intra-party decision-making, such as a party conference or policy forum. The important difference between the two models is the degree of agency that the representative possesses in his/her policy decisions. Under the representative model, representatives should ideally take their members' interests into account, but ultimately decide according to their own judgement and conscience. On the other hand, delegates exercise no agency – they are chosen to

convey the wishes of their members rather than make individual political decisions (see Pitkin, 1967, p. 134).

The success of both models (although particularly the delegate model) relies not only on the representativeness of the selected few, but also on a strong connection between representatives and their local parties in the transmission of information and policy preferences, that is, the ability of delegates to be able to come to know the preferences of their party members. These modes of participation also call into question the issue of who ought to be represented by the delegates/representatives: should this be the local branch, the regional party, the party members, activists or voters more generally?

We most commonly see these types of participation manifest in the larger parties in the operation of party conferences, where conference attendees act either as delegates (social democratic parties) or representatives (Liberal Democrats) of some subsection of the wider membership in the decisions affecting the adoption of party policy. Those parties with a distinct federal structure, particularly in Australia (ALP and the Australian Greens) emphasise the delegate model of membership participation and representation as a means by which to ensure that constituent regional parties are given adequate voice in national decisions. Parties with links to organisations may also use the delegate system to ensure these groups are included in decision-making (for example, trade unions in social democratic parties).

Consultation

The final model of participation, consultation, involves the participation of members in the policy process through submissions to, and consultations with, party policy working groups or commissions. This participation can be distinguished from direct forms as members are not directly making policy decisions; rather they are feeding their views to intermediary bodies in the drafting process, such as working groups and staged policy forums. Although parties routinely consult with interest groups, think tanks and other interested parties when developing policies, only recently have policy consultations been used as a strategy to encourage membership participation (rather than seeking out expert opinion) in the policy process. Examples include 'Fresh Ideas', 'The Big Conversation' and 'Let's Talk' (undertaken by the UK Labour Party) and the 'Think Tanks' initiative conducted by the ALP in 2011. This form of participation has so far been implemented within the Australian and UK social democratic parties whilst they have been in government (with the exception of Fresh Ideas), and contains a significant online

element. I will return to policy consultations as a form of policy development in more detail in Chapter 6. By encouraging public discourse around salient issue areas, this type of participation appeals from a normative perspective as 'democracy should be concerned with the rational formation of preferences through public discussion and debate' (Teorell, 1999, p. 367). However, the effectiveness of consultation exercises hinges on the extent to which they operate as symbiotic, 'two-way' channels of communication between political leaders and the community, as preference formation should ideally be endogenous to the decision-making process (Teorell, 1999, p. 367).

What structures participatory choice?

There are a number of different reasons as to why a political party would adopt one type of participatory process over another. A party's ethos and ideology is important: as we see, the green parties emphasise consensus and deliberation through direct participation; the conference delegate at Labour Party conferences reflects the notion that the workers should decide party policy; and the importance accorded to individual participation and agency in the postal ballots administered by the Australian Democrats and the Liberal Democrat conference reflects these parties' liberal ideologies. However, structural constraints such as party size, a lack of resources and declining party membership also push political parties to adopt forms of participation that might more effectively manage larger memberships or provide greater opportunities for supporters and the general public to participate (representative and consultative involvement).

   Although some parties favour a certain type of participation over another, it is entirely possible for different models of participation to coexist within a single party at different stages of the policy process. As Bobbio (1987, p. 53) observes in the context of state-level democracies, representative governance and direct democracy 'are not two alternative systems, in the sense that where there is one there cannot be the other, but are two systems that can mutually complement each other'. For example, while there is a historical emphasis on delegation in the labour parties, they are now combining this processes with others that rely on representation (for example, policy commissions) and consultation. Similarly, green parties attempt to combine direct participation in the formulation of local policy with representative/delegate processes for national policy-making. Adopting Teorell's argument, 'the point is to make citizens more involved in solving community problems, even if this take[s] place within a larger framework of representative democracy' (2006, p. 790).

However, a possible difficulty may arise when considering the relationship between these different types of participation, particularly if they are implemented within one organisation. Tensions may be created when direct/deliberative processes are established alongside not only representation, but also broad consultation. In Dahl's words, representative democracy may only be 'a sorry substitute for the real thing' (direct democracy) (see Dahl, 1982, p. 13). In this situation, members accustomed to local groups may feel excluded from the political decision-making process by a shift to consultative forums. For example, the UK's Power Inquiry reported that 'asking people set questions in focus groups or polling is a poor substitute for real democratic processes' (Power Inquiry, 2006, p. 9). There is also a possibility that those expecting their views to be aggregated through direct ballots or large-scale consultations may become disenchanted in a shift to smaller deliberative groups.

Nonetheless, whether a particular type of participation is favourable or desirable is an inherently normative question that cannot be easily resolved. Different types of participation are intended to have different consequences and hence should be evaluated according to those consequences (Teorell, 2006). For example, deliberative models are concerned with the legitimacy of political decision-making, representative models of democracy emphasise responsiveness to citizens' preferences, whereas as participatory (direct) models emphasise self-development (Teorell, 2006, pp. 791–2). While parties may favour a certain model of participation (for example, representative forums such as conferences designed to aggregate the views of the membership), this may potentially diverge from the preferences of the party membership for policy involvement that, for example, facilitates political self-development and education. In this respect, the shortcomings of particular participatory models may not stem from the processes themselves, but from fundamental normative disagreements over the outcomes they are meant to achieve.

Putting participation into practice

The overarching aim of this chapter was to provide a more nuanced and critical account of what it means to 'have a say' in policy development. Although I have highlighted differences between the parties in the formal participatory opportunities available to members, there is nonetheless a 'typical' model of national policy development evident – comprising of a sequence that begins with the development of policy

by the local branch. Views of these branches and the membership filter up through the party organisation via policy commissions and workshops before being voted on at conference. The reason why policy development processes broadly tend to converge is an interesting question, and is probably due to a number of factors. First is the tendency of parties to copy previous models of organisation deemed to be successful – often termed the 'contagion effect'. Hence, we see that green and liberal democratic parties, formed since the establishment of the social democratic parties in the early twentieth century, still tend to replicate some of their structures and processes (albeit with various flourishes). Second, related to the observation that the organisation of parties should mirror that of the state, the idea of the party conference as the sovereign internal decision-making body and the way in which it is intended to operate probably most closely reflects the operation of parliaments in modern democracies. Finally, it may simply be a matter of practicality, whereby the branch/working group/conference model of policy development is the 'tried and tested' most efficient way of formulating policy within political parties, overshadowing a party's desire to be innovative or creative in policy-making in any significant respect.

As argued earlier, explaining the gap between academic analysis and party rhetoric depends on the crucial distinction between formal and informal political practices. Although it is valuable to look at the importance accorded to membership participation in policy development within party documents and constitutions as a measure of their ideological commitment to this cause and their response to what has now arguably become a social norm, *what parties do* is of equal (if not greater) importance to scholars than what they say. For example, Panebianco (1988, p. 35) argues 'a political party's statutes do not describe its organisation any more than a political system's written constitution does'. Although this perspective may downplay the importance of rhetoric to too great an extent, simply looking at party rules and constitutions does not provide an accurate picture of the actual working mode and culture of political parties. As such, we need to 'look at these constitutions from the perspective of political practice, asking whether parties' increased interest in the rhetoric of democracy translates into meaningful changes in how the parties run themselves' (Kittilson and Scarrow, 2003, p. 60).

4
Arenas for Policy Development

This chapter presents an analysis of how participatory opportunities are put into practice by parties, identifying and evaluating the most common ways in which members can formally participate in the policy-making process of their party. I focus on five key vehicles for policy development, each of which provides the practical means by which parties facilitate the different types of participation outlined in the previous chapter: local meetings, policy development and oversight groups, the party conference, direct ballots and consultations. The chapter concludes with an assessment of the observable trends in formal policy development processes, most notably the shift to consultation.

Local meetings

Regular meetings of local or constituency parties have been a significant element of the structure of most parties since the emergence of the mass electorate in the late nineteenth century (Seyd and Whiteley, 2002, p. 27), and have traditionally played a key role in policy development. In electoral systems with single member constituencies, the local branch is the base unit of party organisation for the purpose of fielding candidates and contesting elections, mirroring the geographic division of the electorate. A local party will also usually operate as a discrete entity for the purposes of contesting and coordinating local government. Although it is easy to overlook the policy activities of parties at the local level in a study of national policy development, they are important arenas for membership participation and do have a significant impact on the ability of local party activists to devote time to national policy development, a factor examined in greater detail in the following chapter.

If party conferences are regarded as the 'apex' of intra-party policy development, branch meetings can usefully be described as the foundations. Local party meetings are designed to provide members with the opportunity to discuss and debate policies in detail and to gather information and form opinions on policy issues with a view to feeding these deliberations into the policy development process. This can occur through sending a representative to approve or reject policy at a party conference, making a policy submission to a consultation or working group on behalf of the branch, submitting a policy motion or amendment to conference, or by educating individual members who then participate directly in policy ballots. For example, local meetings in the Australian Democrats were designed to fulfil both participatory and deliberative functions, with members gathering in small groups (five to ten people) in order to discuss policy and gather information to make an 'informed postal vote' (*National Journal*, January 1977, p. 4; February 1977, p. 8).

The larger parties (social democratic parties in particular) encourage local meetings as a forum by which members can participate in policy development through drafting submissions to policy committees and remits to conference. Within the ALP, the significance of local party branches as contributors to the policy process (along with the preferred model of participation) is illustrated in the following call to action:

> The NPC [National Policy Committee] would like to facilitate ALP members making a meaningful contribution to Labor's Platform development. The NPC recommends that branch members discuss the work of the NPC, and making a possible submission to the NPC, at a convenient meeting. Members should begin with familiarising themselves with Labor's Platform and Constitution. Branches may like to consider holding a forum on areas of interest. The outcomes from these discussions could be submitted as a written contribution to the NPC, and be considered as part of the review process (ALP, 2007).

Therefore, whilst party scholars have documented a greater move to individualisation in candidate and intra-party leadership elections associated with 'democratising' initiatives (see for example Cross and Blais, 2012; Hazan and Rahat, 2010; Young and Cross, 2002; Hopkin, 2001; Seyd, 1999), the local party remains the default unit for membership input into policy, and suggests a preference for collective rather than individual action. In the National Policy Dialogue initiated by the

ALP (referred to above), the preference for branches rather than individuals to submit motions is clear, reinforced by the fact that only submission templates for branches and affiliated organisations, not individual rank and file members, were available for download (ALP, 2007). Similarly, in instructing party members how to have their say, pamphlets issued by UK Labour as part of its *Refounding Labour to Win* initiative emphasised collective strategies (joining local networks and organising or attending local forums), with branches (or Constituency Labor Parties (CLPs)) the unit responsible for minimising bureaucracy, mobilising members and giving them 'a strong voice' (UK Labour Party, 2011d).

Although the trend to individualisation in seeking membership involvement has been interpreted as a mechanism by which the leadership can gain control of intra-party decisions (Seyd and Whiteley, 2002, p. 214; Katz, 2001), in the policy realm this strategy appears to be overshadowed by the sheer practicalities of finite resources. Particularly in parties with larger memberships, policy submissions from local branches are already an aggregation of some members' views and hence present a more manageable option for party staff to process. Interviewees involved in UK Labour's National Policy Forum expressed concern that despite encouraging individual submissions, the party was ill-equipped to adequately deal with the volumes of responses that were then received, and 'for those people who do take the time to get involved in the policy making process', issues of 'transparency and feedback' have been a major concern for members – a problem acknowledged by the party (UK Labour Party, 2011e, p. 11). In this sense, encouraging interest aggregation at the local level is a necessity for resource-stretched parties.

However, local branch meetings have also been identified as one of the major problems associated with intra-party policy development. Amongst the social democratic parties in this study, disillusionment with the processes of local meetings was common, being described as 'stultifying' experiences by the ALP National Review in 2002 (Hawke and Wran, 2002, p. 5) and again in 2010 as 'not the most exciting events' (Bracks et al., 2011, p. 7). Former UK Labour Party Chair, Hazel Blears, felt that many meetings in her own party were 'dull', arguing that 'the Labour Party at the grassroots needs to be more action, less meetings' (*The Guardian*, 11 June 2007, p. 10) and ALP frontbencher Anthony Albanese described local branch meetings in an interview with the author as 'dominated by one or two people and they tend to be dominated by local issues as well: roads and rubbish…That can be off-putting' (Interview).

Despite it being a more visible issue in the larger parties, the difficulty of maintaining interest in branch meetings is not exclusive to them. As former Green MP Nandor Tanczos described the New Zealand experience, this is not necessarily due to members' disillusionment with branches being dominated by a small number of individuals, but rather what is perceived to be the 'tedious' nature of policy-making:

> I think it's always a struggle to maintain levels of activity in branches. It's always particularly hard to interest people in policy-making, which I've always found curious because people join the Greens because they are excited by the ideas and the thing people love to do more than anything is talk about ideas. But to have a structured policy discussion seems to turn people off. I understand why because if I think about having policy discussions – it sounds tedious, particularly where there is too much detail. I think one of the problems with what we do is that our policy is far too long and far too detailed. It's really difficult for members to engage in – it's too detailed for some people's understanding of the issues. It's so detailed that it's really boring (Interview).

Although comparatively fewer complaints are heard about the 'boring' nature of party meetings in the Liberal Democrats and the Australian and English Greens, they face another dilemma. Although these parties grant their local branches a significant degree of autonomy, which may result in more relevant discussions, the agenda for local meetings is often overstretched. The problem is compounded by comparatively smaller memberships. Branch activities rarely centre upon the discussion of national policy and hence the connection between policy discussion in local parties and the ratification of policy (by ballot or at conference) is in reality quite tenuous. The frequency with which policy meetings are held leaves little opportunity for deliberation. In the Liberal Democrats, two party organisers revealed that meetings that centre on the discussion of policy are 'occasional' at best and that the subject of most local party meetings tended to be just that – local matters rather than national policy issues:

> When I was involved in the SDP 25 years ago there were discussions of policy. People would actually bring policy papers and so on. We don't seem to do that very often...I don't know how often people discuss policies now. There are certainly all sorts of fora for discussing policies online and so on, so I suspect that there are dis-

cussions on websites and so on, but in formal meetings we tend to discuss local business, particularly, how do we win the next set of elections? How do we retain our MP?

While there is absolutely nothing wrong with a local party discussing local issues, an active party at the local level could potentially lose or weaken its ability to contribute to national policy development. Whilst this is predominantly due to a lack of labour resources and active members within the grassroots party organisation, it does have significant implications for the representativeness of national policy formulation (discussed in greater detail in the next chapter), and the extent to which the views of the membership can be transmitted to the national conference through local party representatives or delegates.

Political parties are therefore left in a situation whereby branches are a necessity in terms of organising on a geographical basis for elections (UK Labour Party, 2011a, p. 14) and are a desirable way to aggregate policy interests with limited resources, but they face significant challenges. As ALP Senator John Faulkner (2011) has argued, parties' structures must reflect the ways in which citizens 'today engage with politics and community – not the way their great-grandparents did. Attendance of the local branch is no longer a key indicator of an individual's commitment or contribution'. But how might parties deal with this?

The ALP National Review process undertaken throughout 2010–11 produced a number of recommendations with respect to the operation of local branches, some of which were endorsed for implementation by the party's conference in December 2011. The first was the establishment of issue-based branches, termed PACs (policy action caucuses) that will receive financial support and resources from the party in the same way as a geographic local branch, and be entitled to convene meetings, policy forums and put policy motions to conference. PACs can be established by at least 30 financial members of the party and need to have the support of a parliamentary patron (ALP, 2011a, pp. 12–13).

The second was the endorsement and expansion of Labor Connect – the party's online campaigning and community organising tool – to provide further opportunities for members to contribute to policy development online. Although the ALP has not yet gone so far as to establish online branches, Internet forums are now common practice in parties and are favoured due to the speed of communication made possible and their ability to overcome geographic barriers (Bracks et al., 2011, p. 25). In 2010, the ALP enabled its online registered supporters

to participate in the party's policy review through online forums known as 'Think Tanks'. UK Labour launched its online platform, Membersnet, in 2006 and the party continues to laud the potential of such technologies: 'The extraordinary development of informal networks and campaigns opened up by technological advances may provide new ways of relating to people who prefer to engage by text, email and twitter rather than by routinely attending meetings' (UK Labour Party, 2011a, p. 16). The impact of online policy forums and their potential to provide for meaningful engagement in policy development is discussed further in Chapter 6.

Shifting the policy functions of local branches online is related to a third key issue in the evolving nature of these meetings as sites for citizen engagement: who should be able to participate? At present, these meetings remain the domain of parties' financial memberships. However, it has been suggested that party meetings be opened up to participation from the wider community; that the 'main agency for policy-making' be a 'regular meeting for all individual members and affiliated members – with the option of adding in registered supporters, maybe also with recognised consultee groups invited to take part where appropriate' (UK Labour Party, 2011a, p. 14). However, in the final *Refounding Labour to Win* document approved by Conference in September 2011, local parties were expected only to involve registered supporters in policy consultations, social and fund-raising events (UK Labour Party, 2011c, pp. 15–16). This indicates that although the party does maintain distinctions between its members and supporters for the purposes of 'selections' and the 'formal duties of CLPs' (p. 15), when it comes to policy development, the roles of a member and a supporter are becoming far more blurred.

Policy development and oversight groups

Another typical characteristic of intra-party policy formulation processes is the existence of one or more policy development or policy working groups, designed to coordinate policy-making within each party and ideally to aggregate the diverse array of members' interests into coherent documents or motions that can be ratified by the membership as a whole. As a typical example of such a group, the primary functions of the NZ Labour Policy Council are to 'prepare policies to be incorporated into the Labour Party's next manifesto, including revisions to existing policies [and] developing new policies' (NZ Labour Party, 2007b, s 146d). With the exception of the Australian Democrats, which initiated policy working groups on an *ad hoc* basis in response to topical

Table 4.1 Composition of Policy Committees/Oversight Groups

Policy Oversight Group	Party	Total no. of Members	Membership	Regions	Party Groups/ Associations	Executive	MPs
Policy Committee	English Greens	At least 5	At least 5				
Joint Policy Committee	UK Labour	30	9 (30%)		1 (3%)	8 (27%)	12 (40%)
National Policy Forum	UK Labour	194	55 (28%)	31 (16%)	41 (21%)	33 (17%)	34 (18%)
Federal Policy Committee	Lib Dems	32	15 (47%)	3 (9%)		3 (9%)	11 (34%)
Policy Committee	NZ Greens	28		20 (71%)	1 (4%)	4 (14%)	3 (11%)
Policy Council	NZ Labour	22	5 (23%)		10 (45%)	2 (9%)	5 (23%)
National Policy Committee*	ALP	9					
National Policy Forum**	ALP	69	20 (29%)		21 (30%)	7 (11%)	21 (30%)
Policy Coordinating Group	Australian Greens	15				11 (79%)	4 (21%)

Sources: Liberal Democrats (2007; 2010, Art. 7); UK Labour Party (2005, p. 48; 2006, 2010b, 2011f); Green Party of England and Wales (2011c); NZ Labour Party (2007a, 2007b); NZ Green Party (2011a, 2011b); ALP (2009); *The Australian Greens By-Laws, March 2006*; Jackson (Interview).
*While the ALP National Constitution makes provision for the appointment of a National Policy Committee, there is no set composition and the only requirement for appointment is that members have 'considerable experience in policy development' (Part B, Art. 13).
**The establishment of a National Policy Forum to replace the National Policy Committee was endorsed at the 2011 National Conference (Amendment 472A).

issues and areas of concern as determined by the Party's National Executive, all other parties have made constitutional provisions for at least one such committee, outlined in the table above. However, the constitutional detail ascribed to these groups (particularly their composition) varies significantly between parties.

In structuring and selecting the membership of these bodies, parties must balance the need to attain a representative sample of the party's rank and file with the necessities of leadership and coordination. Hence, the typical composition of a policy oversight group will include a quota for constituency representatives elected from and by the members, the appointment of several executive officers and the election and/or appointment of parliamentary representatives from amongst their colleagues. Some parties also allocate representation on their policy committees to sub-groups within the party, and to regions – aiming for geographic consistency in representation.

Given the small number of places allocated to membership representatives and the small size of oversight groups overall, it is difficult for individual members with an aspiration to influence party policy to become directly involved in this stage of the policy process. Thus the legitimacy of these bodies rests more on their responsive and representative nature than the opportunities they offer to members for direct involvement. Entities such as UK Labour's Joint Policy Committee, chaired by the Prime Minister or party leader (when the party is in opposition), comprise primarily party elites: the leadership, government representatives and members of the National Executive Committee (NEC). There are only limited places available to members (30 per cent), who are appointed only after being elected to the National Policy Forum (see below). The ALP's National Policy Committee (NPC) is entirely appointed by the National Executive and currently consists of union representatives, MPs and higher-ranking party officials (ALP, 2007). The role envisaged of party members is clearly more consultative:

> All Party members should be eligible to attend State Policy Committee meetings to contribute specialised knowledge and expertise on Federal policy issues. Final decisions on policy documents should continue to be taken by elected Committee members. Committees should, where feasible, conduct forums and consultations in provincial centres (Hawke and Wran, 2002, p. 21).

Indeed, Labor's *National Review* criticised the operation of the NPC for failing to provide an adequate link with the membership, and

recommended that it be reformed to a series of policy committees that actively co-opted party members who were not 'factional appointees' (Bracks et al., 2011, pp. 19–21). However, this recommendation was not adopted by the party conference, which chose instead to establish a National Policy Forum (NPF) – a proposal made by the party's dominant right faction. The concept of the ALP's NPF has been appropriated from the UK Labour Party (see below).

In addition to the Liberal Democrats' Federal Policy Committee (FPC), in which almost half the places are allocated to members elected by their peers at National Conference, the only other policy oversight groups that include directly elected members are the National Policy Forums established by the UK Labour Party, and more recently by the ALP. UK Labour's NPF was originally established in 1997 as part of the *Partnership in Power* reforms, and is 'made up of 194 representatives from all the major stakeholder groups in the party and is responsible for overseeing the policy development work in the party – drawing together the policy consultation documents and overseeing the consultation process to ensure maximum participation by all stakeholders' (UK Labour Party, 2011f). The ALP model was agreed to by conference in December 2011 as a means of creating a central forum with a 'direct link to grassroot policy development through directly elected members' (ALP, 2011a, p. 8). The composition of the two NPFs is compared in Table 4.2.

In both parties, rank and file members account for approximately 30 per cent of places and are elected by Conference (UK Labour) or, in the case of the ALP, by State and Territory branches (thus also assuring a degree of regional representation). The key difference between the two models is the degree of union and parliamentary party representation, which is far greater in the ALP and at the expense of issue/group based representation. Although it has been embraced by the Australian party as the 'model to follow' (Graham, 2011, pp. 16–17), the UK Labour NPF has not operated without its problems. Criticised by academic commentators and the party itself (UK Labour Party, 2011c, pp. 20–1; Faucher-King and Le Galès, 2010, p. 103) for operating with little transparency, with confusion as to the role and responsibilities of NPF representatives and with inadequate communication between them, the *Refounding Labour to Win* report adopted by the Conference recommended keeping the NPF, but also encouraged representatives to take greater responsibility in responding to, and providing feedback on, members' policy submissions.

Although one-third of the NPF may be 'ordinary members', two members of the NPF interviewed by the author (one former and one

Table 4.2   Composition of the UK Labour and ALP NPFs

UK Labour Party		Australian Labor Party	
Representative Body	**Representatives**	**Representative Body**	**Representatives**
Constituency Labour Parties	55 (28.4%)	Federal MPs (incl. leader)	21 (30%)
National Executive Committee	33 (17%)	Rank and File Members	20 (29%)
Trade Unions	30 (15.5%)	Affiliated Union Members	20 (29%)
Regions	22 (11.3%)	Regions	Subsumed under rank and file
MPs	9 (4.6%)	National Secretary and two Assistants	3 (4.3%)
Local Government	9 (4.6%)	Deputy Chairs elected by Conference	2 (2.9%)
Welsh, Scottish and Northern Ireland Policy Forums	9 (4.6%)	Secretary elected by Conference	1 (1.4%)
Government	8 (4.1%)	National President	1 (1.4%)
MEPs	6 (3.1%)	Young Labor President	1 (1.4%)
Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Labour	4 (2.1%)		
Socialist Societies	3 (1.5%)		
Cooperative Party	3 (1.5%)		
Peers	2 (1%)		
Labour Students	1 (0.5%)		
Total	**194**		**69**

Sources: UK Labour Party (2011f); ALP National Conference 2011 Resolution 472.

current) argued that before their election, NPF representatives are 'likely to have been in the kind of positions in the party that do not make them ordinary…It has been rightly commented that the NPF does seem like a kind of a conveyor belt into parliament'. It was suggested that there is a perception amongst those involved in the NPF and the individual Policy Commissions that the party staff are 'quite

active' in the elections for these bodies, managing 'to keep a fairly tight grip on the kind of people who were elected'. Further, the sheer size of the NPF would present a challenge to its ability to act as an effective coordinator of policy, reflected in the internal communications problems identified in *Refounding Labour*, and also highlighting some of the practical tensions faced by parties in trying to balance membership influence with the need for an effective, responsive and efficient policy development process.

Nonetheless, even in smaller parties such as the Australian and NZ Greens, policy committees usually fulfil coordination and leadership rather than representative roles, being predominantly composed of regional policy convenors. This composition reflects the decentralised nature of green party organisations and the assumption that policy decisions are made by the membership at a sub-national level, with the policy committee functioning to aggregate or reconcile these different regional views. For example, within the Australian Greens, the mediating role of the working groups in the process of policy review works in two directions: policy amendments suggested by members are coordinated by the working groups, then the draft policy is fed back into regional groups to be passed before the national ratification process commences (Jackson, 2011, p. 167).

Another avenue of direct participation open to members is to join what are commonly called 'policy working groups' or 'policy commissions' – usually established by the policy oversight committee to revise and develop policy in a particular issue area. In the UK Labour Party these groups are effectively closed, being composed of 16–20 people recruited from the government, the NEC and the NPF. A similar model of policy commissions has been endorsed for the ALP, which will comprise of nine members from the NPF. Similarly, policy sub-committees of the NZ Labour Party are appointed by the NPC from nominations made by the party's sector groups (Mike Smith, Interview); NZ Labour Party, 2007b, ss 146(b), 149(a)). However, within the Liberal Democrats, members with a particular interest in a specific area of policy may apply to join a Policy Working Group, a body that by remit of the FPC undertakes a consultative process and drafts a policy paper to be presented at conference. Membership of these working groups is approximately 10–12 people who are all appointed by the FPC. They will usually comprise members of the party, one FPC representative, two MPs and will occasionally include 'interested others' – those who are experts in a particular field but are not members of the Liberal Democrats or any other political party. Previously, positions on working groups were

advertised within the party and online as they arose and the FPC would select people to participate. In 2006 the process changed to an annual call for a pool of candidates who declare their interests and expertise and who are then allocated to working groups by the FPC. This change was designed to speed up policy formulation within the party.

There is the potential that selection to a working group could become an arbitrary process with the FPC or in the case of NZ Labour, the Policy Committee, exercising a significant amount of power by vetting the composition of these groups. Averting this potential influence can either be dealt with constitutionally – for example, by prescribing a certain composition based on gender, ethnicity etc. – as is the case in the NZ Labour Constitution (s 149(g)). It may also be done by establishing a particular cultural practice, as reportedly occurs within the Liberal Democrats by 'just trying to balance' the inclusion of a range of groups when selecting the membership of policy working groups, which are chosen from a list of members who put themselves forward for consideration:

> What you do is you fill in a form saying 'here's my party experience, here are my areas of policy interest', so if somebody says I'm interested in health and education, the next time one of those groups is coming up we would look and say this person's expressed an interest, they haven't been on a policy group before, it looks like they've got relevant interests – we might then want them to be on the working group (Liberal Democrats 2, Staffer, Interview).

Competition for places on working groups is not as fierce as one might expect, reflecting the generally low rates of participation that plague parties across the board (see Chapter 5). Within the smallest parties (the NZ Greens, the English Greens and the Australian Democrats) policy working groups are entirely self-selecting and depend on the commitment of individuals to invest their time in the process. However, in a climate of low membership participation, this open process creates its own problems:

> Anyone who really wants to influence policy development in our [NZ] Green Party has a very good chance for doing so, unless they're really loose or right out on a wing where they can't get the support…Obviously they have to get the support of other party members, which some people don't understand (former MP Sue Bradford, Interview).

> Any policy working group has to be composed of at least four members and is not open to people outside the party. That is not to say that we might not talk to people outside the party – but it is a group of party members that is completely self-selecting. That can be a problem sometimes – sometimes you get people that have a particular angle on the subject that might not be representative of the party as a whole…If you have a group on animal rights, they are inclined to be more enthusiastic about animal rights than perhaps the majority of people in the party and you do have difficulties trying to keep that kind of group representative of a broad spectrum of people (former Green Party Policy Coordinator, Interview).

Consequently, many parties need to engage in recruitment strategies to entice membership participation in policy groups. For example, the Liberal Democrats have had difficulty in sourcing members to participate. In a 2007 call for working group participants, the Liberal Democrats only received approximately 300 responses (Simpson, Interview), or less than half a per cent of the membership. Before this, former leader Charles Kennedy was forced to use his Conference report to urge members to get involved in the party's policy process: 'Working group members can only be selected from those who allow their names to be put forward. We therefore wish to use this report to again encourage party members to volunteer for working groups' (Liberal Democrats, 2001, pp. 4–5).

Given their size, policy oversight and working groups cannot function as open forums for membership involvement – rather they perform representative and coordination functions. Nonetheless, as mechanisms for direct participation policy working groups are generally viewed positively by those who have served on them. Their small size allows for worthwhile debate and often privileged access to senior parliamentarians (Zeichner, Interview). However, for the larger parties (the social democratic parties and to an extent the Liberal Democrats), gaining a place on these groups is not easy and the ordinary member must overcome the hurdles of election/selection. Therefore the legitimacy of these groups in the policy process depends not only on their representativeness, but also their willingness to engage with the views of party members as criticisms of UK Labour's NPF have shown. In smaller parties such as the English Greens, working groups must rely more on the initiative of active individuals for their existence, which also create challenges for the operation of these groups as mechanisms for representative policy input.

The party conference

For activists and leaders alike, party conferences have always been significant gatherings forming the centrepiece of many party calendars. However, they are now events where public exposure and press coverage have become just as, if not more, important than policy debate (Faucher-King, 2005; Button, 2002, p. 42; Shaw, 2002). Interestingly, conferences in the UK are also substantial income earners for their parties. In 2010, for example, the Liberal Democrats earned £1,563,160 from staging two conferences, totalling 16 per cent of their annual income (Liberal Democrats, 2011a, p. 9). Nonetheless, parties continue to place a great deal of emphasis on the 'sovereignty' of conference as the 'owner' of policy. For all parties in this study, with the exception of the Australian Democrats and the New Zealand Greens, the party conference stands at the apex of intra-party policy development as the only body that can adopt 'official' party policy (ALP, 2009, Part B Art. 6; NZ Labour Party, 2007b, s 4; UK Labour Party, 2010b, Clause V(1); Green Party of England and Wales, 2011c, s 10(i); Green Party Australia, 2010, s 23.7.1; Green Party NZ, 2011b, s 8.8; Liberal Democrats, 2010, s 5.8). For the Australian Democrats, whose members vote on party policy by direct postal ballot (see next section), the National Conference is redundant as a policy ratification mechanism and is viewed more as an annual opportunity to hold forums, for MPs and party officials to communicate their work to the broader party, and as an important chance for self-promotion in the media. Similarly, in the NZ Greens the annual conference is a forum for discussion and setting broad policy agendas (Tanczos, Interview). Policy is approved not by the conference, but by an elected policy committee.

The representative 'link'

Within the context of policy development, the primary purpose of a party conference is to establish a representative democratic link between the final policy adopted by the party and its grassroots membership through a process of discussion, deliberation and finally voting on policy positions and amendments or reaching a decision by consensus. Subdivisions of the party (local groups, regions and affiliated organisations) will typically elect representatives to attend the party conference on their behalf, with the exception of the Greens in England and Wales, where participation in conference votes is open to any member who simply shows up (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3 Representation at Party Conferences

Party	Overall Size/ Attendance	Basis of Representation	Formula for Membership Representation	Other Bodies Represented
UK Labour	11,000	Size of local party membership	One delegate for first 749 members; one extra for every 250 members thereafter	Trade unions and other affiliated organisations (One delegate for each 5,000 members)
ALP	2,000	Size of State electorate/ population	13 delegates per State, additional places for States with a larger number of electors (to a total of 400)	Parliamentarians, Unions, Young Labor
NZ Labour	3,000	Size of local party membership	Min. 4; extra one delegate per 50 members	Affiliated organisations (one delegate per 500 members)
UK Greens	300	Individual	Until membership exceeds 10,000 for two consecutive years all financial members may attend and vote	
Australian Greens	80–120	Size of State membership	Four delegates for first 400 members; one extra delegate per 100 members thereafter to maximum of ten	Parliamentarians
NZ Greens	'Several hundred'	Size of local membership	One delegate per 19 members; two for electorates with 20–99 or more members; three for 100–199 members and four for 200 and over	
Liberal Democrats	5,000	Size of local membership	Four delegates for first 100 members; one extra per 50 members thereafter	Parliamentarians

Sources: UK Labour (2010b); *BBC News Online* 23 September, 2011; ALP (2009); NZ Labour (2007b); Green Party of England and Wales (2011c); Australian Greens (2010); NZ Greens (2011b); Liberal Democrats (2010); Faucher-King (2005, p. 249); Jaensch et al. (2004, p. 14); Michael Smith (Interview); Jackson (Interview).

The allocation of delegate places by the other parties in the UK and New Zealand is decided according to a local party's size. Reflecting the federal nature of Australia's political system, for both the ALP and the Australian Greens, delegates to the national conference are selected by the constituent State party conferences and representation is allocated along State lines and heavily controlled by factional groupings (see Parkin and Warhurst, 2000, pp. 44–6; Lloyd, 2000, p. 66). The fact that rank-and-file delegates are not directly elected by the membership has been a considerable source of tension within the party and the operation of the National Conference has been described as a compromise between 'a streamlined supra-national committee' and a 'mass political convention' (Lloyd, 2000, p. 68). The debate over the direct election of delegates most recently surfaced at the Party's 2011 National Conference, where a proposal to directly elect a proportion of delegates (recommended by the National Review, Bracks et al., 2011, p. 17; see also Graham, 2011, p. 11) was proposed by the Left faction of the party, but opposed by the Right. After intervention from the party leader, Julia Gillard, it was decided that the principle of direct election be referred to a committee within the ALP National Executive for consideration. This outcome was criticised by activists campaigning for greater grassroots involvement in the conference and labelled 'a victory for the faceless men of the ALP' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 December, 2011, p. 4).

The parties vary enormously in the number of delegate places available as a proportion of the size of the membership. For example, until the party's membership reaches 10,000 for two consecutive years, all members of the UK Greens may vote at conferences, whereas UK Labour allows only one delegate per 749 members, the ALP 400 delegates in total, and the Australian Greens a maximum of ten delegates per State, irrespective of the size of the State party's membership. Social democratic parties also provide for union representation, which varies amongst the three countries examined. Affiliated unions hold approximately 25 per cent of the votes at the NZ Labour Conference (Michael Smith, Interview). Both the ALP and UK Labour set their voting ratios of union to rank-and-file delegates at 50:50, lowered from 60:40 by the ALP in 2002 and from 70:30 by UK Labour in 1996. Although their influence at the conference has been reduced, the continued dominance of representation at the conference by the unions is still a contentious topic of debate within the Australian and UK social democratic parties, and has been criticised as 'undemocratic' given the decline in union membership (see for example UK Labour Party, 2011a, p. 18; Cavalier,

2010, pp. 31–7; Faucher-King and Le Galès, 2010, pp. 90–4; Aarons, 2008; Jaensch et al., 2004, p. 23).

Looking at the formal rules that govern conference participation therefore enables us to determine which interests political parties prioritise in policy participation. Specifying who is able to be selected as a conference delegate, who they represent, and in what numbers, is a mechanism by which parties attempt to reconcile a diverse range of interests (for example, individual members, affiliated organisations, regional interests) into the policy-making process. However, this alone is not indicative of the responsiveness and inclusiveness of conference as a policy-making forum: it is also necessary to consider the role perceptions of the representatives/delegates, how they relate to their local groups, how one can achieve election to conference, and the quality of discussion and debate.

Delegate versus representative roles

In the previous chapter a distinction was drawn between the delegate and representative models of membership participation. Looking at the ways in which conference attendees perceive their roles (that is, whether or not they see themselves as delegates or representatives) is theoretically important as it goes to the fundamental question of whose interests are represented in this forum. Empirically, it emerged as a topical issue in interviews conducted with party members and activists. Comments from Liberal Democrat, Australian Green and NZ Labour interviewees illustrate the range of possible consequences that differing role perceptions can have for policy-making within a party.

For example, within the Liberal Democrats there is a strongly held belief among conference goers that they are representatives in a 'Burkean' sense: while a local party unhappy with its representatives can refuse to elect them to the next conference – they are not delegates of their local parties and cannot be mandated to vote in any particular way.

> The idea of telling the representatives how to vote, 'mandation', is specifically outlawed in the party's constitution. That's not to say that you couldn't have a meeting in advance so that representatives have a better sense of what the party view was. I can't think of a time that we've done that. In a sense, we tended to rely on ten sensible people – they all have their views but let them go off and let them do it (Lib Dem staffer, Interview).

Interviewees in the NZ Labour Party and the Greens in Australia (NSW) presented a contrary view, emphasising the key link that delegate democracy provides between local discussion and policy outcomes: 'The policy issues, in fact the entire agenda, goes out to the local groups in advance of the [conference], so there's an opportunity for the groups to discuss the issues and to form a position, and they may tell their delegates how they wish them to vote' (Sylvia Hale, former NSW Greens' MP, Interview). A Sydney Greens' activist described the Greens' model of delegate democracy at conferences, but in doing so also suggested that there is a blurring in practice between the two models:

> …Proposals need to be in a month before the State meeting so that local groups have a chance to consider them, come to a position and then instruct their delegates or delegate accordingly. That's one of the key differences – we don't elect a delegate and then they get to go off and do what they like at a State meeting – we instruct the delegate how to vote so they're representing the group at that meeting and they're not empowered to…make any significant decisions without bringing it back to the group…Occasionally some groups may not have been organised enough, may not have met to discuss, or may not have thought enough about a particular proposal – then they might give that power to the delegate, but that's not the normal way…Often we won't just give a clear position to a delegate, we might say we're thinking along these lines, but you go and listen to the debate and…it depends on the issue. If it's a clear issue like whether we should spend $10,000 on some particular campaign and the group's got all the information and decided not to support that, then we tell them to vote no. Other issues, we might give them a broad direction and might suggest some amendments. It's not just 'yes we support it' or 'no we don't support it' – it's often more complicated than that.

The main difference between the two positions is the agency that the conference attendee is able to exercise. The delegate model (practiced by Labour and the Greens) arguably provides a stronger and more accountable link between the preferences being represented and conference outcomes. However, there is room in the representative model for a more considered policy decision that could take into account broader notions of the interests that should be represented at conference – not just the local party, but the wider party membership, and even the party's support/voter base.

Attending party conferences

Attendance at party conference is one example where the practical realities of everyday politics complicate the theoretical ideal model of representation. Although in most parties representatives are formally accountable to their local parties through having to be endorsed to attend conference, in reality very few members actually want to take on the responsibility of being a conference representative and in relatively few local parties are these positions seriously contested. The *Refounding Labour* document suggested that the UK Labour Party's conference had been 'undermined by the smaller number of constituency parties sending delegates', which had fallen from 527 in 2002 to 412 in 2010 – less than two-thirds the total entitled to attend (UK Labour Party, 2011a, pp. 18–19). While attendance at Liberal Democrat conferences is about 5,000, only 1,600–1,900 of these places are filled by voting delegates (a large number of registrations are accounted for by media organisations and external observers). On average, there are about 900 voting representative places that are not filled. Given the formal importance of the party conference as the pre-eminent policy-making body within most political parties, one might expect to find some competition for places to attend. However, this does not appear to be the case. Of the 400 to 700 places at the NZ Labour Annual Conference allocated to local party members, 'delegates are often simply activists who have volunteered to meet the necessary travel expenses in order to be at the conference' (Miller, 2005, p. 92). As a NZ Labour MP explained:

> Because the paid party membership is small, if you want to be involved you're never going to have a difficulty. You say 'who wants to go to the conference?' and everybody who puts their hand up goes. We find a way of doing that one way or another. And sometimes you're struggling to get people to go – because if it's out of Auckland and you've got to travel, there's time off work and you've got to find the money to do it (NZ Labour MP 2, Interview).

Responding to the problem of limited membership representation, the NZ Greens removed the formal policy-making power from their annual conference, which now functions only as an advisory body and a forum for discussion and deliberation. The conference, however, maintains its constitutional status as the 'supreme body' and sets 'the political direction of the party' (NZ Green Party, 2011b, s. 8).

Deliberation and debate at party conferences

It is usual practice for policy papers to be circulated to local groups and members in advance of a party conference. As Jeremy Hargreaves (Vice Chair of the Liberal Democrats' FPC) notes, in theory conference delegates are then supposed to 'debate the issues coming up on the conference agenda within their local parties over the months running up to the conference'. However, 'delegates actively holding discussion meetings with others in their local party to discuss the agenda…is also something which does not happen in practice as often as in principle it might…Reading policy papers properly is, shall we say, a practice honoured more in the breach than in the observance' (Hargreaves, 2004, pp. 26–8).

The dearth of debate and preparation for conference has the potential to undermine the event as the supreme forum for policy-making, particularly if conference representatives lack the necessary information for making an informed choice. In this case, much rests on the quality of conference debates and speakers, which varies from topic to topic and conference to conference. However, given that the average debate at the conference lasts 2–3 hours (Liberal Democrats) and 1–2 hours (UK Labour and the ALP), it would be difficult to imagine that the conference could achieve anything more substantial than a ratification or rejection of a policy motion or amendment. As one Liberal Democrat party staffer explained, 'you only really have time for one big row'. Both the ALP National Review and the *Refounding Labour* Report identified the party conference as a policy-making institution that urgently required reform; as in both cases members 'felt they had no influence on policy outcomes' (UK Labour Party, 2011a, p. 18) or felt as though they were 'expected to be a mere rubber stamp' and were 'not valued as informed voices' (Bracks et al., 2011, p. 8). These sentiments could reflect a shortcoming of the delegate model of representation – particularly in the ALP, where conference delegates and votes are tightly controlled by factional groupings. They may also reflect the tendency of the media to look for instances of intra-party conflict as particularly newsworthy (Stayner, 2003) which has, in part, driven the agenda of party leaders to 'manage' debate and present a unified party image rather than realise the full potential of conference as a forum for open discussion and the presentation of dissenting views. Nonetheless, this may also have contributed to the relative vibrancy of conference 'fringe' events – pushing debate and discussion beyond official party mechanisms.

As a response to some of these difficulties, delegates at the 2011 Australian Greens national conference voted for several sessions of the conference to be closed to the public and the scrutiny of the media.

Party leader, Senator Bob Brown justified the move on the ground that it was the 'democratic right of members to have closed sessions, on the basis that members could be daunted by the media and be restrained in bringing their views forward when cameras and microphones were aimed at them' (*Sun Herald*, 6 November 2010, p. 24).

A more common reaction, however, has been for parties to alter their conference proceedings from a remit-driven agenda to a broader consultative and discussion-based programme. Supplemented by postal voting the annual conference of the Australian Democrats has always operated this way, and the NZ Greens' conference now functions as an 'advisory body' rather than a supreme decision-making forum [see p. 71]. In attempting to overcome a decline in motions submitted to the conference and accusations of tedious debate, the Liberal Democrats' Federal Conference Committee (FCC) now aims to create 'a much more diverse and varied agenda' (Duncan Brack, former Chair of the FCC, Interview). However, as Dorey and Denham (2007, p. 75) argue, policies such as *Trust in People* (2006) that are 'resoundingly endorsed' at the conference owe something to their 'relatively uncontroversial content and general lack of specificity'. The NZ Labour Party has begun inviting speakers from outside the party to address the conference, with delegates discussing 'position papers' comprised of general principles rather than specific remits and having 'much more robust debate at our conference (without any specific resolutions) on big ideas for the future' (Dyson, Interview).

What these changes signify is a distinct shift in the role of conference as a policy-making forum from a delegate/representative to a more consultative mode of intra-party participation. However, in the two parties in which the operation of conference has been criticised the most, we have witnessed no organisational change: ALP conference delegates in December 2011 voted only to refer a proposal for the direct election of delegates to an executive committee for consideration; and the *Refounding Labour to Win* document endorsed at the party's September 2011 conference simply suggested that 'the role of Conference in our policy making process needs to be enhanced so that delegates feel that they can genuinely influence policy by attending' (UK Labour Party, 2011c, p. 21) without making any further substantive recommendations as to how this could be done.

Direct ballot

Although the use of direct ballots within UK Labour to select leaders and enable constitutional change has attracted a great deal of academic

attention and speculation as to the possible effects of this practice on membership influence (see for example Seyd, 1999; Hopkin, 2001), the Australian Democrats used membership ballots as the basis of their intra-party decision-making since their formation in the late 1970s. Consequently, they represent an unusual example of a party that has sought to promote direct participation in policy development according to some of the most democratic means (at least formally) in existence in advanced industrial democracies. As discussed below, the Democrats' model has suffered from a number of irresolvable problems and has not been emulated by other parties. However, occasional policy ballots are not uncommon (they have been used for example, by the UK Conservatives, D66 in the Netherlands and Belgian parties) and it has been suggested that the direct ballot model be adopted by the ALP as a way of strengthening engagement and participation within the party (Graham, 2011, p. 5). The Democrats' experience can therefore provide some valuable lessons for parties wishing to adopt this mode of policy development.

The formation of Australian Democrats' policy during the time the party was active (1977–2007) took place under the broad constitutional objective that 'policies shall be formulated with the maximum participation of members and shall finally be determined by the direct and equal say of the membership by a voluntary postal vote' (s 9.1). In this sense, policy development in the party was quite extraordinary as *every* policy proposal (in relative detail) was ratified by the membership. In accordance with the party's liberal philosophy, the individualism of these ballots was heavily emphasised (*Australian Democrats National Journal*, February 1977). The process aimed to fulfill three main objectives: to develop and communicate a range of policies to the electorate that reflected the objectives of the party; to provide a 'policy umbrella' to Democrat MPs as an indication of the views of the membership; and to enable members to actively participate in the creation of party policy through a process that emphasised debate and the dissemination of information (Australian Democrats, 2003, p. 73). Ballots to adopt or change policy could be initiated in one of three ways: either by decision of the National Executive, one State Division, or petition by five branches or 50 members. Policy drafts and suggestions could come from any member, but were more commonly formulated by working groups and national conference workshops, led by a handful of dedicated members, and influenced quite heavily by parliamentarians (former Democrats' Senator John Cherry, Interview). Each draft policy was published in the *National Journal* – circulated to all members and

accompanied by supporting statements. The draft was then debated in subsequent issues of the journal until a ballot was held for members to choose their preferred policy.

However, voting in policy ballots was optional, and it is in this particular area that the party experienced its lowest rates of membership participation. The threshold for policy ballots was originally set at 10 per cent of the membership and was first questioned in 1984 after several ballots (including science and technology and health policies) failed to reach the minimum vote and were thus declared void (*National Journal*, September 1984, March–June 1985). It was argued that many members responsibly refrained from voting due to a lack of knowledge of the subject matter, and that such a high threshold quashed the efforts of those establishing policy on specialised topics (*National Journal*, September 1984). The 10 per cent threshold was subsequently upheld in a ballot in July 1985. In September 1989, following continued low participation; the question was revisited and a ballot to change the minimum threshold to 3 per cent was narrowly accepted by the membership (*National Journal*, March 1990). Following the party's poor electoral performance and steady decline in membership numbers, the provision for a minimum threshold was, in practice, removed completely – the outcome of a policy ballot being determined by a simple majority of those voting. Structural reasons for low rates of participation in policy development, despite the opportunities the Australian Democrats offered, are discussed in the next chapter.

Consultation

In formulating policy, active consultation with members is something that all parties emphasise. However, for larger parties where direct participation is not feasible, representations to policy committees and working groups and attending policy forums have become two of the only channels of participation available to many rank-and-file members. For example, policy oversight bodies, such as the ALP's National Policy Committee, have a constitutional responsibility to conduct 'regular policy forums in which rank and file participation is encouraged' (ALP, 2009, Art. 13). It is also one of the key ways in which MPs maintain links with party members and constituents:

> I've done policy consultations with interested branch members in every State over the last few years, most of them several times in different portfolio areas. You get invited to speak at branch meetings and public forums that other MPs put on, so there's a chance to

> have that interaction that's not at a conference (ALP MP Tanya
> Plibersek, Interview).

General membership participation in the formal policy process of
the UK Labour Party is restricted mainly to policy consultations. Since
2003, the party has held three such large-scale events: the Big Con-
versation (2003), Let's Talk (2006) and Fresh Ideas (2011). These con-
sultations typically consist of disseminating policy documents to
members and the wider community, holding phone conferences with
members of the policy commissions and those party units making
policy submissions, sending regular email updates and hosting web
chats (UK Labour Party, 2006, p. 3). The party also stages local and
regional policy forums, which members are invited to attend and con-
tribute to the discussion with a view to making a policy submission to
one of the policy commissions. The Labour leadership believes that, on
the whole, consultations have been well received by its members: in
the Let's Talk consultation 'nearly 4,000 submissions from local parties
(including two-thirds of all constituency parties), affiliates and com-
munity groups were made in the last round of policy-making with many
thousands of party members taking part' (UK Labour Party, 2006, p. 2).
Labour parliamentarians have generally looked upon the policy process
as 'encouraging participation, high-quality discussion and robust
policy' (Robin Cook, 2001, cited in Shaw, 2004, p. 54). Lords' Peer
John Evans lauded New Labour's organisational reforms, arguing that
'the key to the success of these forums and events is that they have
been based on small workshops or study groups, where everyone
attending gets the chance to participate, unlike the annual conference
where only a tiny minority gets the opportunity to speak' (quoted in
Faucher-King, 2006, p. 9).

   However, while these forums and groups may allow more oppor-
tunities for those who wish to participate, their legitimacy as a means
by which to aggregate members' views and the range of opinions within
the party is also undercut by low rates of participation (discussed in the
next chapter). There has also been a substantial amount of academic
analysis questioning the true inclusiveness of New Labour's policy
processes and their contribution to the centralisation of the party
organisation (Russell, 2005; Shaw, 2004, p. 58; Webb, 2000b, p. 201).
Nevertheless, consultation as the dominant form of participation is
becoming more common within all political parties (further examples
include the ALP's *Think Tanks* initiative and the Lib Dems' *Meeting
the Challenge* policy review). Furthermore, as party conferences are

becoming increasingly stage-managed and are being re-organised to accommodate a more entertaining agenda to replace voting on policy motions, they appear to be evolving into a form of consultation. Furthermore, not only is consultation used to ascertain the views of party members, it has also been used by political parties (particularly when in government) to go beyond the party membership for policy input and tap into the views of the community – a significant development that is explored in greater detail in Chapter 6.

The 'black hole' of policy consultations

The main criticism of consultative processes from social democratic party members in Australia and the UK has been the lack of acknowledgement (or even certainty) that their views have been heard and taken into account. The lack of feedback on the outcome of consultations and policy motions is a problem that has plagued UK Labour's Policy Forum process for the last decade (see for example Campbell and Zeichner, 2001, p. 17). An essay on the future of the Labour Party published in 2004 by Peter Hain MP reported one member as commenting that the policy process 'is not particularly transparent from a member's point of view. It would be nice to say that this particular element of the final document is a result of something which we said at this policy forum. That would actually do an awful lot to build confidence in the whole process' (quoted in Hain, 2004, p. 31). However, it took until 2011 for this to be publicly acknowledged by the party, and suggestions in the most recent review document, *Refounding Labour*, have called for an 'audit trail' from local to national so the outcomes of policy recommendations are known, to enable the presentation of minority positions at conference, improved horizontal communications between members, and a reduction in the detail of policy documents (UK Labour Party, 2011a, p. 19).

In similarity to the lack of accountability felt by party members in New Labour, the failure of ALP MPs and State executives to reply to policy correspondence from individual branches has also been flagged by the party as a cause for concern. This first occurred in 2002 during a review of the party's organisation undertaken by former Prime Minister Bob Hawke and former NSW premier Neville Wran (see Hawke and Wran, 2002, p. 21), but took until December 2011 for a constitutional amendment to be passed at conference asking the National Executive to 'introduce new mechanisms for member feedback' (Amendment 472). The detail of these 'mechanisms' is not yet known.

The problem is due, in part, to a lack of resources – parties simply do not have enough staff to monitor the progress of each individual submission. Even if it is with good intentions, aiming high without being able to realistically implement the consultation programme is bound to cause disillusionment with the process:

> We don't have the army of people to respond to this. No political party's got the research resources to respond on that kind of scale, so what people tended to get was an acknowledgment, which they generally found insulting: thank you for your interesting contribution, which has been duly noted. What it meant was quite quickly members became disenchanted with it as a process (Zeichner, Interview).

A response that the party has taken to deal with this reality has been to subtly alter its rhetoric with regard to membership expectations of the policy process. For example, the *Refounding Labour to Win: Summary Report* noted that a 'reformed Partnership in Power Process should be accompanied by clear structures and information, with clarity about how party members can engage with the policy making bodies and what they can expect when they do so' (UK Labour Party, 2011e, p. 11).

Beyond limited resources, it is also a question of how to decide and who should decide which submissions and comments should be included in consultation documents and debates. Currently this task is undertaken by Policy Unit staff. Individual members of policy commissions have admitted that it is a problem with no easy answer; there is a real danger that the process of selection can fall under the control of ministerial members of the commissions who have the staff and resources to draft policy papers, with the task of non-government members 'just to comment on and approve these drafts' (Russell, 2005, p. 148).

The problem is intensified within UK Labour by the lack of open channels of communication between groups such as the Policy Unit, the NPF and the Joint Policy Committee (JPC) when deliberating policy documents. For example, although members of the NPF are responsible for considering the policy documents drawn up by the various policy committees and are theoretically meant to represent the grassroots membership, they are only given access to these documents; not to any submissions received by the policy committees (former NPF member, Interview). This raises significant questions of accountability

that are explored further in Chapter 7. Finally, the efficacy (and even the existence of) policy consultations relies heavily on the initiative of the party officials and parliamentarians responsible for a particular issue area and their commitment to formal policy channels within the party (Albanese, Interview). As ALP parliamentarian Tanya Plibersek commented, although it is difficult for Labor MPs to get away with doing no policy work, many MPs tend to only undertake the 'bare minimum' and doing more than this depends heavily on the individual personality concerned (Interview; see further pp. 134–9).

Trends in formal participation

The significant factor guiding the pattern of formal participation in these parties is the size of the membership that must be accommodated. In theory, it is far easier to facilitate greater membership participation in parties with fewer members (Barber, 1984, p. 151; Sartori, 1987, p. 113). This assumption has been supported by a number of empirical studies within both political parties and voluntary associations, which indicate that intra-party participation suffers in large organisations (Tan, 1998; Torpe and Ferrer-Fons, 2007). The parties investigated here also provide evidence for such a correlation: the possibilities for individual involvement in policy working groups and conferences are far greater in small parties such as the Greens and more remote within the social democratic parties.

Olsen (1965) has argued that 'individuals may have greater incentives to participate and volunteer in small associations because they perceive greater opportunities to interact among members, to influence the everyday operations in their association, and to overcome the cost of organizing actions than is the case in large bureaucratic organizations' (see Torpe and Ferrer-Fons, 2007, p. 110). However, despite the correlation between party size and the opportunities for meaningful participation, as the next chapter will argue, there is no discernable connection between these two factors (size and formal opportunities) and the level of participation that actually occurs.

In terms of the typology of participation outlined in Chapter 3, the difficulty political parties now face in organising and sustaining vibrant local meetings presents a significant challenge to the implementation of direct forms of participation. To the extent that these forums also feed into representative and delegate modes of participation through working groups and party conferences, the problem is compounded. Consequently, we see that many parties are bestowing

a greater formal role upon representative committees and working groups in policy development (for example New Labour's NPF and the NZ Greens' Policy Council), facilitated by the use of consultations as the primary means of engaging with the party membership through events such as policy forums, and increasingly, party conferences.

5
Do Members Participate in Policy Development?

While party size and type may have an impact on the extent of formal participatory opportunities available to members, there is less difference amongst parties in the degree of participation that actually occurs. The general trend is that no matter how accessible opportunities for policy participation are, only a fraction of the membership become actively involved. In order to examine why this might be the case, the chapter presents the available existing data as to the extent of membership involvement in policy formulation within parties. Data is drawn from a variety of sources, including a number of surveys of party memberships conducted between 1993 and 2003. While these surveys were conducted some time ago, few such surveys exist and none have been conducted in these democracies since, as obtaining the agreement of parties to survey memberships is generally very difficult. For this reason, the data is presented in a comparative historical context in this chapter, and is intended to illustrate broad trends amongst the parties and across time, and to provide a basis on which to explore and understand the current causes and implications of declining engagement for the future of parties as policy-making forums. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the multi-levelled nature of membership participation; in particular, engagement in local politics and the repercussions this carries for policy development at the national level.

Where existing large-scale independent survey data are unavailable, other sources of data such as party surveys and internal reports, in addition to qualitative evidence of membership participation obtained through interviews of party members and elites, newspaper reports and memoirs, has been used. This method could be criticised on the ground that 'personal' opinions of membership figures and participation are subjective, inaccurate and unreliable. However, the use of qualitative data can be

defended on two grounds. First, such data are no more subjective than the large-scale surveys, in which participants are asked to judge their level of political participation according to often vaguely defined categories. Second, as argued further later in the chapter, while they may be anecdotal, personal accounts of participation have more power in their *effect* rather than their *accuracy*. This is particularly the case for party elites who oversee policy development, and who rely on their own observations and those of others within the party when determining *how* policy should be made, *who* should make it, and the structures and processes by which membership participation occurs.

Actual levels of membership participation in the policy process: The United Kingdom

The table below (Table 5.1) presents an amalgam of the published findings of several surveys of party members in the UK conducted between 1990 and 2003 on levels of membership activity and attendance at party meetings. Even though slightly different measures of party activity were used in the survey of Green Party members (and consequently there is not an exact correspondence in the data) the table nonetheless reveals several distinct trends. First, those members who are active within their parties (with the exception of the Greens and the Liberal Democrats in 1993) constitute a minority. In particular, those who are very active and are therefore most likely to have the greatest direct input into policy only constitute on average about 14 per cent of the membership, or 9 per cent when the Liberal Democrats' figure for 1993 is excluded. The fact that there is a 'core' group of activists in each party who run the party organisation on an everyday basis is also supported by comments from interviewees, although there was a general consensus that the figure may even be lower (5–7 per cent). As a Liberal Democrats campaigner and party staffer commented, a 'large inactive membership' within the party is compounded by a 'very large inactive membership in policy terms'.

Participation rates in the English Greens exceed those of Labour Party and the later Liberal Democrat figures, with 43 per cent of members regarding themselves as either 'somewhat' or 'very' active in the party. If we include the Greens' members who hold a function within the party (18 per cent), the rate of active participation rises significantly. These figures may, in part, be explained by green ideology and the participatory culture of the party, which encourages power-sharing within the membership. However, it may also be due to the party's relatively

Table 5.1 Comparative Membership Participation by Percentage in UK Parties, 1990–2003

Party Activity	Greens 2002–03	Lib Dems 1993	Lib Dems 1999	Labour 1990	Labour 1997	Labour 1999
Members hold function	18					
Very active	9	26	10		8	8
Fairly active		29	20		19	17
Somewhat active	34					
Not very active		32	41		42	35
Not active	40					
Not at all active		13	29		31	40
Frequently attend party meetings	19	37	20	30	19	18
Occasionally attend party meetings		11	11	20	10	12
Rarely attend party meetings		24	17	14	16	9
Do not attend party meetings		29	53	36	54	61

Sources: European Green Parties Membership Survey 2002–03 (coordinated by Wolfgang Rüdig); van Schuur (2005, p. 12); Vromen (2005, 2006); Bennie et al. (1996); Whiteley et al. (2006, p. 44); Seyd and Whiteley (2002, pp. 79, 88).

small size and lack of financial resources, which means that direct participation is not only easier, but that members continue to be employed as a labour resource more so than in Labour and the Liberal Democrats. Care needs to be taken when interpreting the results of the Greens cross-national survey with the Seyd and Whiteley data, as the ambiguous category 'slightly active' may serve to artificially inflate rates of participation.

The number of members attending party meetings dropped for both the Liberal Democrats and Labour over time and frequent attendance in 1999/2002 was roughly the same for all three parties (19 per cent), even after Labour modernised and 'democratised' its intra-party processes in 1997. What is the implication of this trend? Unless members are now electing to participate individually rather than through their constituency party, their contribution to and engagement with the policy-making process will also have declined. This is because in both the Liberal Democrats and Labour the constituency branch is still

formally a key organisational unit in policy development: submissions to working groups come from branches, and it is this unit of organisation that elects representatives to party conference. Therefore, the fundamental problem posed by low attendance and rates of participation, from a democratic perspective, is that only a very small pool of interests are actually heard and taken into account in the policy development process. As a consequence of this decline, both parties have turned to online technologies to encourage participation from members, in addition to opening up policy development to input from the broader public (see Chapter 6).

This pattern of inactivity was also reiterated in a survey of party members conducted in 2006 as part of an internal commission on Labour democracy. It revealed that despite the opportunities available to them, almost half the current members at that time had never participated in the party's policy-making forums (see Table 5.2). When ordinary members did participate, it tended to take place at the local level. Whilst 44 per cent of members had attended a local policy forum at some point, only 4 per cent had attended a meeting of the NPF. The absence of members from this forum would probably have contributed to Labour members' perception that policy is formulated behind 'closed doors', as articulated in the *Refounding Labour* document (UK Labour Party, 2011d). Whether or not it is a reflection of the shortcomings of parties' policy processes or a broader social trend, diminished participation creates opportunities for policy formulation to be dominated by a small, active section of each party – a cohort Gordon Brown termed the 'select few' (Brown, 2007).

Underpinning members' actual patterns of involvement, their attitudes towards inclusiveness in Labour policy-making indicated a strong

Table 5.2   UK Labour Party Members' Participation in Policy-making Forums, 2006

Policy forum	Members that have participated (%)
Local policy forum	44
Annual, national or regional party conference	28
Regional policy forum	20
National policy forum	4
None of these	47

N = 670. *Source*: YouGov (2006).

belief that the process had become more centralised, and that the 'real' power lay with the party in government. Fifty-six per cent of current members felt that Labour's election manifesto policies were essentially decided by the Prime Minister and his allies, with some input from policy committees. Most alarmingly, whilst 96 per cent of current members felt that local party members should have either some or a great deal of influence over policy, 64 per cent of current members and 81 per cent of former members surveyed believed that the party leadership did not trust members sufficiently to involve them fully in party decisions and policy-making (YouGov, 2006).

Australia

Australian Labor Party

As there have been no external surveys of membership activity within the ALP it is necessary to rely on evidence collected from within the party to gauge the level of membership participation that occurs, and how this has changed over time. Given that much of this evidence is anecdotal, it must be interpreted with a considerable degree of caution. Nonetheless, the consistency of opinion within the party (documentary evidence testifying to the party's buoyant organisational strength could not be found and no interviewees expressed a view to the contrary) confirms a general trend of decline and an overall low rate of membership engagement.

Local meetings, once considered to be 'thriving in branches and provincial towns all across Australia' and drawing at least 40–50 people per branch in the cities, are now 'reduced to a mere handful of members' (Ray, 2006) and attended mostly by MPs and party staffers (Button, 2002). In NSW, former Minister Rodney Cavalier estimates that this State branch has only 1,000 active members 'outside the apparatus' (2010, p. 47) and that the 'Labor Party has ceased to exist below…The nurturing of new members, once so vital in our growth, even more vital in passing on traditions of honour and service, is less likely than at any time in our history' (Cavalier, 2005). Although official estimates have placed the party's individual national membership base at around 45,000 (Bracks et al., 2011, p. 13), former West Australian Premier Carmen Lawrence places this figure closer to 30,000 (Interview). In 2003, only 18,867 members voted in a ballot to elect the National President (Ward and Stewart, 2006, p. 155). Former Leader of the Party, Mark Latham, suggested that what he termed the 'real members' of the ALP numbered only 7,500 nation-wide (Latham,

2005). If this figure is interpreted as very or fairly active members, the proportion is similar to that within the UK Labour Party at 25 per cent (7,500 of a total membership of 30,000). However, the level of activity is not necessarily consistent throughout the party, and depends in part on the culture of the local area branch and the attitude of the MP. An example of a more active local party is the Sydney branch of the ALP, which has about 1,000 members and approximately 300 will attend branch meetings in any given month (Plibersek, Interview).

Australian Democrats

Members of the Australian Democrats enjoyed a level of formal power and individual participation far greater than the members of any other party in Australian politics. These opportunities for participation were facilitated by the small size of the party, which stood at a peak of around 8,000 in the 1980s and 1990s, before falling to under 2,000 in the past decade. However, despite its small size, these opportunities were never reflected in the level of participation that actually occurred within the party (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3   Average Percentage of Australian Democrats' Members Voting in Ballots, 1990–2002

Ballot type	Percentage of members participating
Leadership ballots	46
National Executive ballots	21
Constitutional ballots	13
Policy ballots	12

Source: Australian Democrats (2003, p. 21).

Low levels of participation were always a significant problem from the party's inception, even amongst seemingly high levels of enthusiasm. For example, in 1977 at the very outset of the party and the height of interest, in a landmark ballot to decide the official name of the party, only 1,072 votes were cast, representing less than 20 per cent of the eligible membership. Voting in policy ballots is a particular area in which the party experienced its lowest rates of participation.

Given that direct democracy held such a prominent place in the Democrats' ethos, it is somewhat perplexing that participation levels were so low. The most common reasons given by members as to why they didn't participate in ballots included: 'forgot, too busy, didn't

understand the issues, and didn't know the candidates' (Australian Democrats, 2003, p. 22). This perhaps reflected a lack of knowledge amongst members, or a disjoint between members' interests and capabilities and those areas of policy that were being balloted. Structural barriers to participation included the way in which policy and political decisions were made – through a postal ballot, which was time consuming and potentially confusing. As one former Senator explained,

> You have 30 questions on a single policy. No information on what those options are about, and you're expected to vote on it. The republic policy was spectacular – that actually had a flow chart that went with it…it was the most convoluted policy ever produced in the party's history in terms of a ballot paper (Cherry, Interview).

Often policies put to the membership were an accurate reflection of the members' views and hence many members did not feel the need to vote for policies they believed were correct, as the ratification of these policy drafts, like their formulation, was left to 'someone else' (Stott-Despoja, Interview). However, a more fundamental problem with the Democrats' model concerned the meaningfulness of membership participation. Postal ballots, whilst emphasising individual and direct participation, may also have isolated members as the process of democratic decision-making was essentially reduced to ticking boxes in a constant barrage of referenda.

The Greens

Data collected on the activities of Green party members in Australia have shown that levels of intra-party participation are generally higher than in other Australian parties. In 2003, a survey of NSW members conducted by Ariadne Vromen (2005, 2006) found that 37 per cent of members were either 'very' (13 per cent) or 'fairly' (24 per cent) active within the party. Sixteen per cent of members regarded themselves as 'not at all' active; however, this compared favourably to the UK parties. This pattern of activity is also supported by a survey conducted more recently of Green Party staff and activists by Stewart Jackson, which reported that 85 per cent of Green activists described themselves as very or fairly active and 99 per cent had attended a local meeting in the last 12 months (Jackson, 2011, pp. 100, 102). Although we might expect respondents who are selected or identify as 'activists' to be more involved in their parties, the salient finding in this case is that those who are most active continue to express their activity in 'traditional'

ways – that is, by attending party meetings. The 2003 survey revealed that 28 per cent of all members frequently attended local group meetings, which rose to 35 per cent in the cohort of established members. Participation in local forums decreased amongst new members, with 62 per cent not having attended or rarely attending local group meetings (Vromen, 2006). What these surveys suggest, therefore, is that those who are most likely to engage with the formal policy-making process through local meeting attendance are those who are the most active within the party, and who have been members for the longest time.

While survey data produce relatively 'objective' accounts and trends of membership participation, it is also interesting to document and examine more subjective and anecdotal accounts of participation from key actors within the party. The party leadership and those responsible for coordinating policy development do not often have the benefit of membership surveys to assist them in making intra-party decisions and structuring the policy process. Rather, they rely on individual accounts and observations. For example, whilst the survey data referred to above showed that a comparatively high percentage of members attended party meetings, former NSW Greens' MP Ian Cohen estimated the figure at substantially less:

> …A very small proportion. You're talking dozens out of thousands really, who are going to their local group meetings and participating. I mean, it's a fairly good core of people who participate regularly but it's still fairly small, which is the nature of political parties. But those people who…take the time out to actually go to meetings on a regular basis – I wouldn't know the numbers (Interview).

This discrepancy is important to acknowledge because if MPs and party officeholders are unaware of the level of participation that occurs, or if they underestimate it, they are more likely to assume the membership is apathetic – potentially taking matters into their own hands and formulating party policy independently. The quote below from former NZ Greens' MP, Sue Bradford, also illustrates this possibility:

> Just at the beginning of this year I had the pleasure of writing a full draft of a community and voluntary sector policy because no one else was doing it. I was in an issue group developing it, and nothing was happening for about eight months and I really wanted to have a

policy up for the election. So I asked them – MPs aren't supposed to do this – can I have a go at the first draft of this policy? And they said yes because otherwise it wasn't going to happen.

Although examples from Green parties are provided here, the problem of subjective/personal accounts of membership participation in policy development is one that could equally apply to other political parties, potentially contributing (albeit in an unintended way) to the centralisation of the policy process.

New Zealand

NZ Labour Party

Like social democratic parties in Australia and the UK, the active membership in NZ Labour comprises only a small part of the total party membership and has been estimated to be around 2,000 members (Miller, 2005, p. 92) or 15–20 per cent (Barnett, Interview). Although overall membership figures were relatively stable in the decade the party was in government, attendance at party meetings during this period declined (Mike Smith, Interview). The consequence has been that local branches have met less frequently and in some areas have been replaced by Local Electorate Council (LEC) meetings – an amalgamation of several local branches (former NZ Labour MP, Interview).

   Although branches have been in decline, interviewees emphasised the vibrancy and renewal of the annual party conference. According to the party's former Secretary-General, Mike Smith, attendance numbers over the last two or three years have been at 20-year highs. The increased attendance is attributed to a more entertaining and varied agenda (for example, inviting New Zealander of the Year, physicist Paul Callaghan, to deliver the keynote address at the 2011 conference) with fewer remits and more broadly-based discussion, and practical initiatives such as fee equalisation – where fees are set to ensure that delegates travelling from different areas of the country will end up paying the same amount (Dyson, Interview). While increased attendance at the party's conference could be viewed as a positive development in facilitating participation in policy development, it is occurring at the same time as a shift in the nature of this participation – away from the delegate model, which has been central to the party's history, to more generalised, consultative membership involvement.

The Greens

A survey of NZ Green Party members conducted by Tim Bale contemporaneously with similar surveys in Australia and the UK highlighted that membership participation with the NZ party was lower than within both the Australian and English Greens. Whereas the number of (somewhat) active members in the Green Party of England and Wales was 34 per cent, and active members in Australia stood at 36.9 per cent, in New Zealand this figure was only 21.8 per cent. A more striking contrast could be observed with respect to attendance at party meetings: while 27.8 per cent of Australian and 19 per cent of English Greens' members claimed to frequently attend, only 3.4 per cent of the NZ Greens did so.

Hence the NZ Greens appear to have been an exception to the general trend that green parties have enabled, and achieved, greater rates of intra-party participation amongst their memberships. This could be explained by a number of factors. First, within the party's formal structure, local groups are not given as much autonomy in their decision-making as those in Australia and England and Wales, and consequently members might not see the same value of attending meetings. Local groups may develop local policies, but they must be approved by the national organisation (Bradford, Interview). The party's focus has historically been on the national parliament (Tanczos, Interview) and while this has assisted the party in securing parliamentary representation, local politics and decentralised membership engagement around local and regional issues (a potential source of participation) have not been a central priority.

Second, throughout the last decade the NZ Greens have achieved the highest level of electoral success (in terms of parliamentary representation) of the three green parties analysed here. As the party has gained electoral success in New Zealand, it has undergone a transformation to a more professional organisation, thereby reducing the need to employ members as a source of labour and shifting the impetus for policy development to the party in public office: 'I think the way it's felt most is the sucking of activists to Wellington, where the money and power is. Wellington is like the centre because the parliamentary wing has all this funding and resources and the rest of the party is really under-resourced' (Bradford, Interview). For others in the party, professionalisation is not only inevitable, but desirable:

> Sometimes, especially around key times like elections, you need to step up and use your volunteers to raise funds to purchase profes-

sional skills. I think there is a point at which you don't rely on volunteers: when you're wanting critical, high-level input, whether it be media or design or whatever. So sometimes I think that we don't always use our volunteer capacity in a way that I think we should. Although that's a personal view, there's support for it. There would be no value in projecting as a 'do-it-yourself' party. I think we need to present a very professional face to be taken seriously and maintain credibility (Clendon, Interview).

If lower levels of membership participation in policy development can be explained as the product of the increasing professionalisation of a political party as it achieves parliamentary representation, then the NZ Greens' data is reflective of the party's relatively advanced stage in this process. It also suggests that green parties experiencing a similar rise, for example the Australian Greens (see Jackson, 2011) might still experience a decline in decline in membership participation and policy activity, as the experience of European Green parties also indicates (Frankland, 2008, p. 36).

Third, the NZ Greens have been noted in the past for their innovative use of new information communication technologies (ICTs) in reaching out to voters and members (Bale and Wilson, 2006, pp. 397–8). Email has been an important communication tool within the party for some time and has used to bring together policy working groups, overcoming geographic constraints (Bradford, Interview). As Chapter 4 illustrated, these technologies are replacing traditional forms of intra-party participation, such as attendance at party meetings, and this shift is not accurately reflected in current membership survey data, which focus on older participatory techniques. The danger is that membership participation might be underestimated as a consequence. While low levels of attendance at branch meeting might signal a decline in this activity, it may not be representative of participation overall, which could have shifted to other arenas.

The locus of policy participation: Parties as 'stratarchic' organisations

While this chapter has so far looked at broad trends in extent of membership activity, it is important to keep in mind that political parties are multi-level organisations, and therefore participation will occur at a number of different sites: local, regional and national. Current studies of party organisations are typically characterised by their attention to

the relationship between the 'three faces' of a party: the party in central office, the party in public office and the party on the ground. Previous models of party organisation also emphasise the hierarchical nature of political parties as entities within which individuals or groups compete for power (Carty, 2004, p. 6). However, an interesting insight into the structure and behaviour of parties (especially in federalist political systems) can be gained from the US literature, in particular Eldersveld's *Political Parties* (1964). Political parties are multi-level organisations with distinct spheres of autonomy, and in contrast to the hierarchical structure proposed by Michels, Eldersveld (1964, p. 10) proposes one of stratarchy:

> Contrary to the bureaucratic and authoritarian models of social organization, the party is not a precisely ordered system of authority and influence from the top down, though as a 'paper' structure it may give this appearance. The organization does not function through the issuance of directives from the top which are obeyed without question. Rather, there is a tolerance of autonomy, local initiative, local inertia.

Several scholars have since adopted this argument, suggesting that the autonomous operation of different units of party organisation should be recognised and incorporated into party models (Katz and Mair, 2009, p. 761; Carty, 2004; Mair, 1994, p. 17; Koole, 1996, p. 518). For example, Bolleyer (2011, p. 5) has suggested that party stratarchies 'establish a division of labour between two mutually dependent yet distinguishable levels to which functionally different competences are assigned, none of which is able to fully dominate the other'. But how does this relate to policy development?

Local autonomy and political engagement

Eldersveld's schema is useful in understanding the patterns of membership participation in policy development that occur in countries such as Australia, New Zealand and the UK, where there are numerous 'layers' of government. One of the key characteristics of membership participation in political parties is that it tends to take place at the local level. Whilst very few members are able to participate in high-level policy groups, thousands of party members will door-knock in their local area, deliver leaflets and attend local party meetings. A drawback of undertaking party research at the national level is that it can paint an unduly pessimistic picture of intra-party participation, and obscure this comparatively vibrant layer of political activity. For

example, Australian political scientists have observed that operating within the federation, 'most of the "life" of the party as an active organisation – local branch meetings, local faction meetings, the socialisation of rank and file members…occurs within State and Territory branches' (Parkin and Warhurst, 2000, p. 45; see also Jackson, 2011; Miragliotta, 2010).

Although Seyd and Whiteley (2002, pp. 27–9) argue that 'the power of the parties at the centre is increasing relative to the locality' owing to national systems of membership recruitment, central interference in by-elections, constituency targeting, and central interference in councils – concentrating on policy development suggests otherwise. Local party units often operate in practice as autonomous organisations, with the central party leadership prepared to grant significant degrees of independence to these groups to set policy directions in their own discrete spheres of influence (local councils, State and Territory governments). This is particularly the case in the Australian and English Greens, and also the Liberal Democrats, in which decentralised decision-making and local autonomy comprises a major part of the ethos of these parties, despite occasionally presenting difficulties from the perspective of party management. As Ian Cohen (Australian Greens, NSW) explained:

> I think that there is local group autonomy…sometimes local groups can overstep the mark and need to be impacted upon, but generally speaking, there's not much that head office can really do if a local group decides to make a stand on a particular issue – so local groups feel that they are the commanders of their own destiny.

Liberal Democrat local parties were described by one party staffer as 'extremely autonomous', to the extent that inconsistencies between geographic areas had become a point of criticism levelled at the party by Labour and the Tories. However, instances where an 'inconsistent' local Liberal Democrat party threatened to bring the entire party into disrepute have been 'few and far between' (Howarth, Interview).

The primary positive outcome of local group autonomy is that it enhances the opportunities for members to directly participate in policy development. The outcomes of local policy-making are often tangible and more immediately visible to local party members, hence producing greater perceptions of efficacy and meaning:

> Local groups are a strong feature of the party. I believe because they are autonomous in their local decision-making they feel a greater

sense of commitment because they can make decisions which affect the immediate way in which the party is organised. So I think that's a very strong feature of the party (Australian Greens MP, Lee Rhiannon, Interview).

This observation is supported by Jackson's (2011) survey of Australian Greens activists, in which he finds that 'most organisational activists appear to be active at their local level, and consider this to be their prime form of activity' (p. 103). The federal organisation of the Liberal Democrats was also perceived to produce a similar outcome: 'the discussion of policy in the Lib Dems, because of this structure, is much more robust because people feel as though they can make decisions' (Simpson, Interview).

The 'gap' in national policy-making

Despite the positive impact of the localisation of political activity, Peter Mair (1994, p. 17) has warned of the potential danger of creating a 'mutual autonomy…in which the local party will become essentially unconcerned about any real input into the national party (and vice versa), and will devote itself primarily to politics at the local level'. In the context of policy-making this suggests that there is a significant (albeit inverse) relationship between policy-making at the local and national levels. Given the limited resources with which local parties must operate, the focus of branch meetings will always be, first and foremost, the local. As Brian Heatley (former Policy Co-ordinator of the English Greens) commented, at local party meetings

> We would spend most time discussing local organisational issues. Are we going to contest the next local council elections? Who is going to stand? Where are we going to get the money from? You tend to focus on local policy issues because they are the things you've got to do yourself locally. The national party can't do that for you.

Liberal Democrat members report a similar experience: 'do we very often sit and talk about policy? No, we talk about very practical issues: finances, campaigning' (Julie Smith, Interview). Within the ALP, Parkin and Warhurst (2000, p. 28) have noted that in a traditional blue-collar branch, '[e]ven a "true believer"…places little stress on participation in higher-level policy-making, but rather emphasises local social, intellectual, canvassing and support functions'. Many committed party

members will choose to specialise in one field or the other, and in the bulk of instances the choice is local. Consequently, party members who would otherwise participate in national policy development have already committed their service to their local areas. As Sydney Greens activist and local Mayor Sam Byrne explained, his election to local Council 'limited my roles in the party a bit because I had a public representative role for the Greens. I'm very interested in party processes and party things but the council role obviously takes quite a lot of my time'. In other cases limited resources and active members mean that those who do participate take on multiple roles. For example, it is not uncommon in the Liberal Democrats to find that a local councillor is also a constituency group's conference representative, placing significant pressure on an individual's time.

The broad trend here is that effective participation and engagement with national party policy is 'squeezed out' by more immediate local imperatives. This is not a criticism of the locus of membership participation – nationally focused policy is not more important than local initiatives – although the latter are certainly not as visible when it comes to media reporting of party activities. However, lower levels of local party participation in national policy formulation create a greater opportunity for the process to be controlled by the groups constitutionally responsible for its oversight, and a greater gulf between individual members, local parties and the national party organisation's elites. As Katz and Mair (2009, p. 761) have noted, stratarchy can be viewed as an adaptive strategy that 'might be pursued by national party leaders seeking to maintain local organizations, both for their utility in campaigns and to avoid the public perception of decay, but at the same time to free themselves of constraints imposed by those local organizations'. Decentralisation of a party's organisation is not necessarily synonymous with democratisation.

General trends in participation

A historical comparison of the overall level of membership participation within policy development, local meetings and other decision-making forums within political parties in Australia, New Zealand and the UK suggests that membership inactivity is a pervasive problem, across both democracies and party types. Some variation exists between the parties: social democrats tend to suffer from the lowest rates of participation, whereas the Greens in Australia and the UK exhibit the

highest. This might suggest that as parties become more established and professional, rates of active membership participation decline as members are no longer required, or desired, as volunteer labour. While it is important to acknowledge that meaningful participation still occurs in many parties at the local level (often obscured in macro-level analyses), this participation is often over-stretched to the detriment of policy formulation at the national level.

Membership inactivity appears to be a problem in parties with significant participatory opportunities on offer, which indicates that the internal organisational structure of political parties might not be solely to blame for this trend. Rather, it may provide support for the hypothesis that political participation in society is gradually shifting away from traditional venues such as political parties (see for example Mair, 2005), or even shifting to different arenas within the party (such as ICTs) that are not captured by existing membership survey instruments. Indeed, internal party surveys conducted as part of the *Refounding Labour* report suggest that to the extent that members participate within the party, the nature of that activity is changing. The proportion of members who donate money and who canvass voters by phone has risen, while the percentage canvassing on doorsteps, leafleting, attending meetings, signing petitions and displaying election posters has declined (UK Labour Party, 2011a, p. 11).

Conversely, it may indicate party members' preference for what Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002) term 'stealth democracy'; a situation in which members would like to see participatory and democratic structures in place within parties, but are reluctant to actually utilise them until their rights are threatened. This is reflected in the comparatively higher rates of membership participation in higher-profile party decisions that are perceived to have more at stake (such as leadership elections) rather than the more mundane policy discussions, particularly if these are overly detailed and specific. Owing to the pressures of time, busy lifestyles and a lack of information or interest in particular topic areas, members are content with more generalised forms of participation (for example, setting the overall political direction of a party through broader debates at party conferences rather than voting on specific motions), or simply to be led:

> Our [policy] is too detailed for people to be interested in it, and I think what most members would like is to talk about general principles and the overall direction of things (former NZ Greens' MP, Nandor Tanczos, Interview).

In the main I think people want to be led. The reason I say this is because for many of them life is a test. It's a trial. They struggle. They have other commitments…They've got other things they have to worry about without worrying about who's running the country (NZ Labour MP, Interview).

These attitudes do not necessarily indicate disaffection with party processes on the part of the general membership, but a greater willingness to defer to party elites. This also appears to be consistent with the findings that actual levels of membership participation do not correlate with the participatory opportunities on offer – internally democratic parties have just as much difficulty maintaining active memberships as those parties whose processes are more centralised. In consequence of the low rates of membership participation, political parties are looking more and more beyond their own organisations for policy input. The implication of this dilemma for political parties as participatory policy-making arenas is discussed in the following chapter.

6
Opening Up the Party and Creating Supporters' Networks

Given the low rates of participation in traditional avenues for policy debate, political parties have turned to engaging their members through alternate means, for example by using the Internet to create members-only forums and discussion boards (Gibson et al., forthcoming; Chen et al., 2006; Lusoli and Ward, 2003, 2004). However, there has also been a trend to expanding a party's base by establishing supporters' networks and opening up policy consultations to the public, thereby removing (in part) what was once the privilege of party members, and which signals a key tension inherent in parties between balancing the views of members with those of party voters and the wider community.

Although they are not given full rights of membership (for example, the opportunity to stand as a delegate to conference), supporters receive information about party activities, are commonly invited to participate in the development of party policy and to contribute campaign funds and labour resources to the party's cause. Nevertheless, these networks and policy processes have been criticised as creating a two-tiered system of party membership and watering down the rights of existing members. This chapter investigates the motivation behind the creation of these networks, the extent of the privileges and participatory opportunities they offer, their relationship to 'standard' party membership, the general consequences of supporters' networks and wider public consultations for the future development of parties as participatory policy-making organisations, and the role of party memberships as aggregators of public opinion and partisan interests. The chapter concludes with a consideration of how members' and activists' strategies of attaining influence over policy have changed, or might change, as a result.

Looking beyond the membership to the general electorate

In launching his party's citizen consultation exercise, former Liberal Democrats leader, Menzies Campbell, illustrated the sentiment behind 'opening up' policy as an initiative designed to demonstrate the Liberal Democrats' commitment to, and regard for, the broader British public:

> Politics in Britain has got to change. We've got to get rid of this feeling that somehow politicians and the public are miles apart. And one of the best ways of doing that is by allowing the public, who may not necessarily be members of our party, to take part in a policy consultation, to express their views, to disagree with the views of others so that we can demonstrate that as a party we are open-minded and we're accessible (Liberal Democrats, 2006, online video stream).

Similarly, in seeking to 'refound' his party's policies and institutions, UK Labour leader Ed Miliband has written of the need to incorporate members of the public into the party's decision-making processes:

> We must look to our own traditions as a community-based grass-roots party where the voices of individual members [and] trade unionists were always valued. But we must also widen our horizons to our supporters and the wider public. They must have their say in the future of our party too (UK Labour Party, 2011a, p. 4).

Both of these quotes highlight one of the key changes currently taking place within political parties: the opening up of party organisations and processes to greater input from the general public (what I term 'outsourcing') and the creation of supporters' networks – a more fluid categorisation of engagement with, and commitment to, the party organisation. The key motivation behind these initiatives is declining levels of party membership and activity, and a desire to replace once active members with a more fluid base of supporters in order to once again provide resources and legitimacy to the party. The range of out-sourcing activities, and the extent to which the parties have embraced them, is illustrated in Table 6.1. As the table shows, there is significant variation amongst the parties in the extent to which outsourcing has, or is, occurring.

The trend is most prominent amongst the social democratic parties, but is also occurring within the Liberal Democrats, indicating that it is

Table 6.1   Outsourcing Policy Development in Political Parties

Party	Extent of Outsourcing	Examples	Formal supporters' network
UK Labour	Substantial	Big Conversation Let's Talk Fresh Ideas Citizens' Juries	Yes
ALP	High	Policy Think Tanks Community Cabinet 20-20 Forum	Yes
NZ Labour	Limited	Grassroots Labour	Yes
Liberal Democrats	High	Online Policy Consultation Policy Conference	Yes
Australian Democrats	None	–	No
UK Greens	None	–	No
Australian Greens	None	–	No
NZ Greens	None	–	No

happening within the larger parties, those with significant parliamentary representation, and the parties that are generally losing members at the fastest rate. By contrast, opportunities for policy development within the green parties remain comparatively in-house. This may be because green parties, who apart from exhibiting higher levels of membership participation and are not losing members, advocate a political agenda focusing on environmental concerns, and maintain close links to progressive social movements (Turnbull and Vromen, 2006, pp. 457–8). However, as these parties gain legislative prominence and power, and are forced to address wider issues beyond their environmental niche, outsourcing may also become an option for Green parties to increase their public profile and look beyond the expertise of their existing membership base.

Types of outsourcing activities range from online initiatives, to programmes of public meetings, to specialist deliberative forums. For example, in 2006 the Liberal Democrats introduced an online forum through their website to encourage greater community participation in the policy process (http://consult.libdems.org.uk). Members of the public have the opportunity to comment on the party's policies on consumers, international development, localism and decentralisation,

quality of life, and globalisation (July 2012), which feed through into policy working groups. The rationale for the site is as follows: 'the Liberal Democrats want to modernise the way the British political system works, and we're keen that we use new technology to modernise how our own political party works. Politicians often talk too much and listen too little. The purpose of this site is to change that' (Liberal Democrats, 2012). In January 2009 the party also held a 'one day policy conference', open to the public and billed as 'an exciting opportunity to get involved in Liberal Democrat thinking and policy development', bringing together 'party members and outside groups' (Liberal Democrats, 2008a).

Learning from the experience of the UK Labour Party (discussed in greater detail below), both NZ Labour and the ALP have also begun opening up their policy development process to greater input from the general public through a range of consultation initiatives. The NZ Labour Party's 'Grassroots Labour' network is coordinated through a dedicated website (http://grassroots.labour.org.nz) accessible to all members of the public, which hosts an online forum for policy and political discussion, and an events calendar where groups can post events and advertise fundraising activities. Party and public activities are staged side by side: the site also hosts pages for groups associated with the NZ Labour party (including local groups) and facilitates separate forums to discuss their activities, including local meetings and campaigning activities. Supporters can also communicate directly with Labour parliamentarians via the parliamentary party's dedicated blog, 'Red Alert' (http://blog.labour.org.nz).

In February 2010 the Australian Labor Party (ALP) launched its website and online social hub 'Labor Connect', with the aim of creating a 'new place for Labor supporters and the wider community to connect with each other and participate in current progressive policy debates' (http://connect.alp.org.au). This initiative followed a 2009 Conference resolution by the Party to establish a new category of 'online supporter', who was not to be granted candidate selection rights, 'but will be fully involved in ALP policy deliberations' (ALP, 2009, p. 23). Most recently, in 2011 party supporters had the opportunity to contribute their ideas to the triennial policy review through a number of online forums called 'Think Tanks' addressing each Chapter of the Party's National Platform. During the policy review period (June–November 2011) 125 ideas were posted by Labor Supporters across the 12 Chapters of the Platform (ALP, 2011b). Since in government the ALP has also embarked upon a number of consultation exercises,

including 'community cabinets' and the 20-20 forum (see Fawcett et al., 2011; Rudd, 2008; Davis, 2001). While these consultations have taken place under the guise of *governmental* rather than *party* policy development, as I will argue, the distinction is in practice quite blurred. For example, although government initiatives, both exercises have been advertised on the party's national website.

Case studies of policy outsourcing

In order to demonstrate the way in which political parties have begun to open up their policy processes to input from beyond their financial membership base, and to illustrate the ways in which the differentiation between party members and supporters is becoming less distinct, in this section I provide several case studies of 'outsourcing' initiatives undertaken by the UK Labour Party: community consultations, citizens' juries and supporters' networks.

Community consultations: 'The Big Conversation', 'Let's Talk' and 'Fresh Ideas'

Although the trend to outsourcing policy development is not exclusive to New Labour, the shift to community consultation has definitely been led by it, beginning with the launch of 'The Big Conversation' in November 2003. This initiative asked members of the public to comment on the policy document 'A Future Fair for All?' through the organisation of forums to discuss the issues contained within. It also embraced newer technologies for feedback such as mobile phone text messaging and email. The questions asked were extremely wide ranging, for example: How do we build on economic stability? How do we tackle poverty and inequality? How do we safeguard the environment? The Labour Party evaluated the 'Big Conversation' as being 'hugely successful in enabling local parties, affiliates and Labour representatives to engage the wider community on the policy choices and priorities facing the government' (UK Labour Party, 2006, p. 5). However, no academic attention was given to the exercise, and it was dismissed by the media and political commentators as a publicity stunt (*BBC News Online*, 28 November 2003; *The Daily Telegraph Online*, 29 November 2003).

   Nevertheless, the consultation exercise as a mode of policy review was repeated under the slightly different guise of 'Let's Talk' in May 2006. Launching the revamped initiative, Prime Minister Tony Blair called for policy debate to be 'open, frank and engage public as well as

party. The most effective politics today is not tribal. It is issues based' (*The Guardian*, 15 May 2006, p. 1). Blair called on the party 'to accept new forms of delivery, and to embrace and harness ideas from… opinion-formers and "stakeholders"' outside the party (*The Guardian*, 15 May 2006, p. 1). Moving away from interests traditionally associated with the party, the 'stakeholders' consulted in the first round of the 'Let's Talk' policy discussions included Microsoft, the Red Cross, the National Consumer Council and the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Associations.

Like its predecessor the 'Big Conversation', 'Let's Talk' invited members of the general public to contribute to policy discussions in an online forum on the party's website. However, opportunities for participation were limited as the comments citizens could make were restricted to answering set questions on pre-defined policy areas. The site's effectiveness was arguably compromised by the fact that discussion was initiated and controlled by the party organisation. For example, during the lifetime of 'The Big Conversation' website, no comments appeared on the government's involvement in the Iraq War, despite numerous attempts by citizens to post them online or text message them for inclusion (*The Guardian Online*, 18 November 2006).

Outsourcing through public consultations is a move that has widely been supported by the Parliamentary Labour Party as an 'opportunity not just of addressing the party – important though that is – but of engaging with the wider public' (MPs Alan Milburn and Charles Clarke; *The Guardian*, Wednesday 28 February 2007, p. 2). However, it is less certain whether the move to open up policy consultation is supported by Labour's grassroots. Party activists have argued that the measures are a further attempt to marginalise the views of the membership and reduce the power of the party conference, for example:

> The problem is that often you'll get a very progressive notion like debating with the broader public, which then gets hijacked so it actually becomes a control mechanism rather than a democratic mechanism. Of itself, one would think that consulting with the public was a great idea, but if by doing that what you're essentially doing is bypassing the party, then it becomes a control mechanism (Robinson, Interview).

Faucher-King and Le Galès have described Labour's consultation initiatives as a perfect example of the individualisation of political relationships, in place of what would have once been a collective process of

decision-making, and also question the effectiveness of the process: 'How could anyone think that a juxtaposition of monologues and text-messages, which received a stock letter by way of response, constitutes an effective consultation process capable of influencing government policies? (2010, p. 121). Nevertheless, despite criticism, the party has employed these techniques once again in its most recent large-scale consultation, 'Fresh Ideas' (2011). Indeed, the party's own published statistics highlight the 'unprecedented' level of activity and demonstrate just how extensive this individualisation has become. Once policy positions would have been the product of the party conference; now they have become the product of '4 million contacts with the public', 6,000 people attending public consultation events, 2,000 written responses to the policy review, and 16,000 people taking part in online activities via the consultation website (http://www.fresh-ideas.org.uk) contributing 'thousands of ideas electronically' (UK Labour Party, 2011g, p. 5).

Citizens' juries

As part of its broader consultation programme, in March 2007 the UK Labour government also initiated a focus group of around 60 citizens to elicit community opinion on the provision of public services. Former advisor to Tony Blair, Mathew Taylor, described the consultative processes as 'at the cutting edge of genuine public engagement'. In a statement emphasising the transparency of the focus groups, Taylor argued that the participants were not 'a hand-picked group of cheerleaders for New Labour reform but a genuine cross-section of the population...If the participants disagree with public policy, it will happen in public' (*The Guardian*, 3 March 2007, p. 32). To this end, much like the broader community consultations, these initiatives may contribute positively to democratic debate. The process was also designed to be reciprocal: rather than ministers simply listening to (or being seen to listen to) the views of citizens, the consultation is intended to give the public an idea of the difficulties and complexities faced by government decision-makers. The initiative continued into the Brown premiership with the creation of a sustained programme of citizens' juries across several policy areas, 'reaching out so that voices outside my party are heard'. Employing the rhetoric of the 'new politics', Brown justified this example of outsourcing on the ground that 'once political parties aggregated views from millions. Now they need to broaden their appeal to articulate the views of more than the few' (Brown, 2007).

   While the motivation may be to overcome the problem or per-
ception that party memberships are no longer representative of society,
the move to policy-making through citizens' juries has the potential
to reduce the influence of the membership and may act to concen-
trate power in the hands of the party in public office as opinions and
decisions reached in this forum (taken to be representative of public
opinion) are fed straight through to the party leadership. Consult-
ations such as this also tend to blur the distinction in policy-making
between parties and governments and highlight the impact of a party's
legislative status on its formal policy-making processes. Labour's experi-
ence suggests that once a party assumes a position of government, it
is easier for the leadership to argue that policies are formulated and
executed for the population as a whole, rather than as a function
of partisan representation or membership voice. For example, the
citizen's juries were funded from the resources of Downing Street, not
the party's coffers, and in the above quote Matthew Taylor refers quite
noticeably to 'public' rather than 'party' policy.

   Indeed, signalling the potential for policy disagreement, the *Partner-
ship in Power* process established by New Labour upon entering gov-
ernment in 1997 drew a specific distinction between the activities
of Labour as a political party, and Labour as a party of government.
Debate within the party needed 'to rest on a clear understanding, and
acceptance, of the respective roles and responsibilities of the party on
one hand and of the government on the other' (UK Labour Party,
1997). This distinction is important as it carries a strong implication
that the objectives and priorities of the Labour Party and the govern-
ment could, and would, diverge and should be kept separate. At the
same time, however, parties such as UK Labour have always benefitted
from the use of government resources – for example, in the lead up to
the 2010 general election, the Labour Party was accused of 'hijacking'
government policy to promote the party (*The Guardian*, 16 February
2009, p. 11). This is a practice that further blurs the distinction
between parties and governments in policy-making, and challenges
the somewhat artificial distinction created by the *Partnership in Power*
process.

Supporters' networks

A trend occurring simultaneously with the increasing use of consulta-
tions and online initiatives as mechanisms for policy development is
the development of official supporters' networks, which 'offer people a

means of formalising their support for the party without going so far as becoming full members' (Hain, 2004, p. 16, see also UK Labour Party, 2011a, p. 10). The prevalence of these networks is noted in Table 6.1, and so far they have been created in the ALP, New Zealand and UK Labour, and the Liberal Democrats.

By joining as supporters, the Liberal Democrats promise members of the public 'not ready to join the [party] for any reason' updates on party policies and activities, and the opportunity to contribute to party's cause: 'we'll ask for your views and invite you to take part in our campaigns' (Liberal Democrats, 2008b). Like consultations, the primary motivation for the establishment of these networks is to 'reach out' beyond the core membership, to create a wider base of people willing to mobilise and campaign for the party, and to 'draw from experiences within the wider community when making local policy decisions' (UK Labour Party, 2011h). Analysing ALP party rhetoric there is a clear sense of urgency in needing to replacing what was once the mass membership of the party with a mass network of supporters in order to sustain the party both organisationally, and maintain its legitimacy in the eyes of the public: 'Without them, Labor has no future…We must include them in the development of our Party and encourage their more active involvement in the Party. We should broaden our policy processes to allow more voices to be heard' (Faulkner, 2011). But what does the creation of these supporters' networks mean for political parties as membership organisations? Or as vehicles for policy development?

What is the difference between a supporter and a member?

When the idea of a formal supporters' network was first floated in the UK Labour Party, it was pitched to the public as a way of 'dipping their toe in the water without committing themselves fully', and the distinction between member and supporter was made clear:

> The purpose of establishing a national Labour Supporters' Network would be to broaden the party's base of supporters by providing people with a new way to get involved. *It would not be to create a two-tier system of membership or to water down the rights of existing members*. Certain important entitlements would be reserved exclusively for party members – the right to vote in selection meetings; the right to vote for the NEC, the party leader and in other national party elections; the right to participate in votes at constituency meetings; the right to attend party conference as delegates and the

right to stand as a Labour candidate. The existence of these members-only entitlements would act as incentive for members of the supporters' network who want to become more involved to apply for membership of the party' (Hain, 2004, p. 18). [Emphasis added].

The Registered Supporters Network that was recently re-established as part of the *Refounding Labour* reforms also maintains these broad distinctions, stating that 'there should be no formal rights for supporters in Branches or CLPs' (UK Labour Party, 2011c, p. 15). However, the *Refounding Labour* reforms also stipulate that if the party can recruit more than 50,000 supporters, this will trigger these supporters being given 3 per cent of the electoral college in the vote for the party's leader, which could rise to 10 per cent depending on the number of supporters' recruited (*The Guardian online*, 25 September 2011). In Australia, the Labor Party has also involved its registered supporters in candidate selections through the trial of open primaries for the selection of parliamentary candidates in its State branches, a move that has been endorsed by many within the party, including the powerful Right faction (see ALP, 2011a, p. 17; Bracks et al., 2011, pp. 22–3). These developments suggest that if supporters are also gradually given rights in leadership and candidate selections, then the distinction may not be as clear-cut as previously anticipated. Furthermore, if we consider the patterns of membership activity as outlined in Chapter 5, there seems to be very little difference in how a typical (inactive) member and a party supporter would engage with the party. As supporters are actively encouraged to contribute to policy debates, and as parties move to more consultative forms of policy development, the difference between members and supporters in this area of party activity seems even smaller still.

What do members' think of supporters' networks?

In documents prepared for public dissemination, the UK Labour Party claims 'widespread support for involving supporters more formally and consistently within the party' (2011c, p. 15; 2011e, p. 5). The weight of the vote in favour of the initiative at the Conference in September 2011 also provides evidence of support for such a scheme: of all delegates, 94 per cent were in favour, and 6 per cent against. Amongst constituency party representatives 88 per cent were in favour and 12 per cent against (*BBC News Online*, 26 September 2011). However, the Registered Supporters' Network was voted on as part of the *Refounding Labour* package as a whole, not as an individual initiative. It is also not the first time a supporters' network has been established in the party

– it was first implemented in early 2006 – quietly and without endorsement from the broader party. At this time, the polling organisation YouGov undertook a survey of members to ascertain their perceptions of the supporters' network and the rights of participation that supporters should be accorded. The results are presented in Tables 6.2 and 6.3, below.

Table 6.2   Members' Perceptions of the Supporters' Network (%)

Effect of Supporters Network	All Members	Very/Fairly Left of Centre	Slightly Left of Centre	Centre/Right of Centre
Good way of drawing people into the party	51	43	56	60
A precedent that might undermine the point of membership	32	42	30	19
Not sure	17	15	15	21

Source: LabOur Commission (2007a). N = 670.

Of the majority of members who had an opinion on the issue, most thought of the network in positive terms, as a good way of recruiting people to the party. However, almost a third of the party's rank and file were more sceptical, viewing the initiative as a move that threatened their rights and a precedent that could potentially undermine the point of full party membership. Interestingly, there is a clear correlation between the ideological position of a party member on the left/right scale and their attitudes towards the Supporters' Network. Those members who regarded themselves as left of centre were more likely to feel hesitant towards the network and suspicious of the party's motives, revealing the distinct perception of a threat to the influence of the party's traditionally more activist left.

Labour members felt particularly uncomfortable about granting participatory rights to those in the network. Just over half the membership surveyed thought that they should effectively have no rights at all, which rose to 63 per cent amongst those members who identified themselves as strongly left of centre. However, supporters' involvement in making party policy was seen as preferable to either having a say in choosing candidates or party leaders. While one quarter of members thought that supporters should be able to participate in policy-making, the figure dropped to 11 per cent when it actually came to *deciding* policy.

Table 6.3 Members' Attitudes as to the Level of Participation that Should be Granted to Supporters (%)

Supporters' Participation	All Members	Very/Fairly Left of Centre	Slightly Left of Centre	Centre/Right of Centre
Participate in policy-making	25	19	31	22
Share in deciding policy	11	11	11	13
Choose candidates	9	6	9	16
Vote in leadership elections	9	7	7	17
None of these	54	63	50	46
Don't know	10	8	9	9

Source: LabOur Commission (2007a). N = 670.

Above all, the survey revealed a clear sensitivity amongst the party's rank and file that outsourcing participation to stakeholders, supporters and the general community had the potential to remove one of the key incentives to join political parties: the right to (or perceived right to) develop party policy.

The implications for policy development

Whether or not members have actually been sidelined by public consultations is an unresolved question. It is also a question with a strong normative element – should members be privileged over the public in policy development? When we compare the rhetoric of these consultation initiatives with parties' rhetoric of policy development presented in Chapter 3, it is clear that there has been a considerable shift in emphasis away from the membership. Whether this is a positive or negative development for citizen engagement in representative politics will remain to be seen. However, the trend has significant implications for the internal organisation of parties and the role of the membership.

Whether it is true or not, the perception amongst a proportion of the membership that they are being marginalised by the leadership through opening up the party and creating supporters' networks is significant in itself. A considerable problem has been the way in which these new modes of consultation relate (or fail to relate) to existing processes for policy development:

> …After some frantic back-covering by party leaders, they had to create this notion that it [the 'Big Conversation'] was all going to

> feed into *Partnership in Power*. Well, nonsense – it hasn't done
> that at all. To my mind…the party has failed to reach out to the
> community…Government ministers thought they desperately needed
> to find ways of connecting back and if you couldn't do it through
> the party – you'd go direct (Zeichner, Interview).

For the most part, these initiatives are developed when a party is in
government, and those such as consultations and citizens' juries have
been seen as the products of the Labour government, as distinct from
the broader party organisation. Consequently, some members felt as
though they were bypassed: 'these things that Tony Blair's been doing
from the Number 10 Policy Unit – it's a completely separate process
independent of the party' (Black, Interview). Hence within the UK
Labour Party there has been a disconnection in practice between the
formal policy-making process and the community consultation init-
iatives, creating two separate streams of policy-making. Whilst this
may simply be an organisational response to the problem of curvi-
linear disparity between leaders, voters and party activists (May, 1973,
pp. 148–9), it significantly alters the model of policy development
that has been in place within parties originating from the mass party
paradigm.

    Traditionally, members of political parties have fulfilled an impor-
tant function as a source of policy ideas. However, moves to open-up
policy development through greater community consultation not only
downgrade what was once a privilege of party membership, but also
fundamentally alter the chain of policy transmission and the role
of party members within it. Figure 6.1 illustrates the change in this
process. In the original mass party model of transmission, policies
filtered up to the party leadership *through* the membership (see for
example Poguntke, 1998, p. 156). This partisan connection occurred
by virtue of party members consulting with their communities, and
belonging to various organisations (such as unions, environmental
movements etc.) – giving members a sense of pertinent policy issues
and also serving as a wellspring of ideas. In turn, these ideas were
crystallised into party policy through internal party processes such as
annual conferences.

    The new model of policy development dispenses with the mediating
role of the party membership, instead placing it and the community as
two alternative sources of policy input. The leadership (in this case the
government) is able to by-pass the membership by consulting directly
with the community. Although members are still able to influence

Original Mass Party Model   'Outsourcing' Model
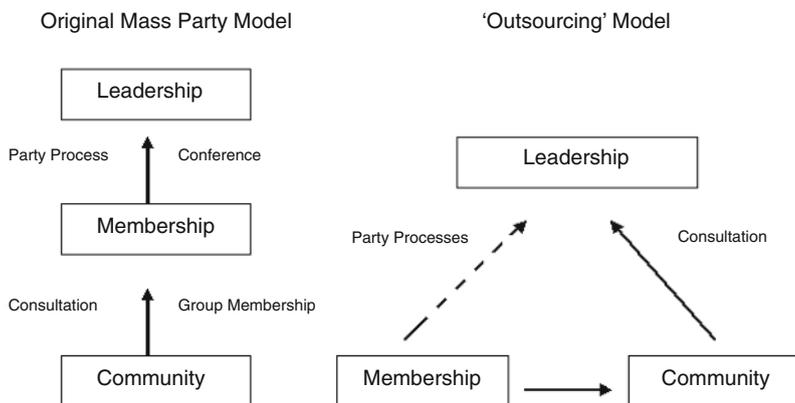
Figure 6.1   The Changing Nature of Policy Development

party policy through formal internal mechanisms, as I argued in Chapter 4 these processes are nonetheless criticised as offering few opportunities for direct involvement, being unrepresentative and hence quite weak (indicated by the broken line). Therefore members must relinquish their privileged policy status and participate in consultations with the 'rest of the community' (as they have been encouraged to do so – see Chapter 4, 'Consultations'). This could change how we need to think about political parties as vehicles for policy development: as Katz and Mair suggest (2009, pp. 761–2): 'If nothing much remains to mediate relations between the voter and the voted, should we continue to think of the party as an organization at all? Might it be more useful to think of the party as a network?' Indeed, in functional terms, the 'real party on the ground' as van Biezen et al. (2012, p. 39) argue, now stands outside the formal party organisation. Registered supporters, those participating in policy consultations, primaries, those who donate to the party and those who mobilise to campaign for the party, whether online or offline, now represent those who sustain the party organisationally and give it legitimacy in the eyes of the public.

The activists' response: New strategies for influence?

Seyd and Whiteley (2002, p. 2) have noted that active participation and engagement is impossible without institutions, and that political parties provide the institutional framework 'within which collective action can be organized'. However, the previous two chapters have

highlighted the frustration that many members in the parties studied in this volume feel when trying to engage with their party through its formal mechanisms, particularly when they believe their policy input is being marginalised and replaced by broader public consultations. Responding to the changing nature of the formal opportunities for participation within political parties, party activists have found it necessary to develop new strategies for achieving influence. Some of the most successful instances of membership involvement and input into party policy have utilised means of engagement that cut across, and in some instances work outside the framework of the formal policy-making process. As examples of activists' responses to breakdowns in the formal policy process, or attempts to circumvent 'official' channels of policy communication, they can be considered a consequence of the broader trend to opening up policy development.

One such example is the use of issue-based collective action strategies such as the establishment of intra-party pressure groups and by undertaking protest action. As an illustration, the pressure group Labor for Refugees was established in 2001 as a way to advocate for the rights of asylum seekers within the ALP. The group has been regarded as successful in achieving policy change by operating around ALP conferences and having highly organised, professional and creative policy campaigns:

> Groups have been particularly effective in setting up forums or vehicles outside of the formal structures of the party. I think Labor for Refugees has been incredibly effective. They set themselves the target of getting rid of temporary protection visas in the Platform, and they achieved that at the conference with resolutions from different branches. They offered speakers to go along to different branches. They produced t-shirts and had a website (Albanese, Interview).

> …The party, in the eyes of its members, had fallen well short of the basic principles of protecting human rights and they worked across factions, which is a very unusual thing. In the end, the changes that they wanted didn't all happen at the first conference at which they were raised, but by the second they had pretty much all been incorporated into the Platform. Even those that weren't explicitly incorporated were allowed…Over a period of four years that organisation within the Labor Party had a big effect, but there's really been nothing else like that that I've seen… So it can happen if

members move across those boundaries and make enough public fuss (Lawrence, Interview).

The success of issue-based groupings in the ALP has led to calls for issue-based branches, centred on particular policy debates such as the environment, civil rights and refugee policy, to be established to combat dwindling participation in traditional geographically-based branch meetings (Hawke and Wran, 2002, p. 11) and the official recognition of groups such as Rainbow Labor and Labor for Refugees in the party's formal decision-making process (Graham, 2011, p. 10). Whilst this did not occur at the Party's 2011 National Conference, the establishment of Political Action Caucuses (see p. 57) may well facilitate this process.

In contrast, sector groupings have operated effectively in the NZ Labour Party for several decades, with Sector Councils typically working across regions and branches in drafting and submitting policy documents. For example, one NZ Labour Minister emphasised the contact she had with both the Women's Council and Young Labour in receiving and developing policy ideas, and the role they play at conference:

> One day before our conference is [set aside for] sector groups and it's the sector groups that work out the key remits that they want carried forward…That's the one day that you can have everyone together, so we throw up all the remits and we go through those as a sector group and then we agree, as a sector group, we think we want these four or these six to go forward (NZ Labour MP 1, Interview).

As another NZ Labour MP explained, in addition to being an effective means of organising opinion, issue or sector groupings provide multiple 'entry points' for citizens to participate in politics (NZ Labour MP 2, Interview). Their strength within the party has gradually conferred them a formal status, as the party's 'organisational structure has evolved to cater for a pluralistic membership' (Aimer, 2006, p. 358; Curtin, 2008). Sector Councils for Maori, women, rural affairs, gay and lesbian, local government, seniors and Pacific Islanders have been recognised in the Party's Constitution (s 150).

Although Labor for Refugees was able to generate a significant level of grassroots support that has enabled it to influence the agenda at State and national conferences, this has only been achieved through a sophisticated organisational strategy and the generation

of a substantial amount of publicity. The need for such publicity high-lights the potential of the media as a tool through which to achieve awareness and shape policy debate, creating external pressures to influence internal processes.

The media and protest were used as effective tools by the Liberal Democrats party organisation to influence the party's policy position on the Iraq War. In February 2003, a march to protest against Britain's involvement in the war had been scheduled to take place in London. Unsure of the exact position the party was going to take on the issue, the Liberal Democrats' leadership had been ambivalent on the party's official attendance at the march. A group within the party's grassroots, led by Federal Executive member Martin Tod (a marketing director by profession), saw the protest as a high-profile opportunity to pressure the party's leadership into joining the demonstration and publicly advocating its opposition to the war. As a Liberal Democrats' staffer explained:

> A member of the Federal Executive, who I think would have been elected by the conference reps, just made a great fuss and said 'you've got to show up and you've got to make a speech'. He organ-ised placards and things for Liberal Democrats to carry...possibly to overstate it, and embarrassed the leadership into taking a stronger position than some of the Leader's advisers would have wanted (Liberal Democrats 2, Staffer, Interview).

Sections of party memberships with the requisite financial resources, such as affiliated unions, have also used the media as a critical tool to launch campaigns against the party leadership. For example, in January 2008 sections of the NSW Labor Party mobilised in conjunc-tion with unions in NSW to oppose electricity privatisation in that State by launching a broad political and industrial campaign, employ-ing protest activity to generate media attention, launching a dedicated campaign website and commissioning a series of television commer-cials. Interestingly, protest as a strategy has also been embraced by party elites. In 2006 three members of the UK Labour Parliamentary Party marched against their own government's decision to close hos-pital services in several constituencies, justifying their decisions to do so on the ground that it was reflective of what their constituency wanted (Faucher-King and Le Galès, 2010, p. 122).

A final strategy to attain policy influence that has previously been used by Swedish social democratic activists (Loxbo, 2011, p. 9) and

that was mentioned by several interviewees is to circumvent formal policy-making mechanisms entirely within the party, and to go straight to the party's MPs. This course of action closely resembles that of professional lobbyists, and in part arises from the frustration that being a member of a political party no longer carries a privilege in developing party policy or influencing the political agenda of the government. As former ALP frontbencher Carmen Lawrence commented, 'I suspect more people do that now, especially those who've got strong policy background'. It also occurs within the UK Labour Party:

> Somebody from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds come to a meeting and said the first time they went through all the processes and sent in submissions and documents trying to change things, but they found it was much more effective just to ring up somebody they knew in the Ministry to try and have a word with the Minister or the Special Advisers (Black, Interview).

Directly lobbying MPs can be a particularly successful strategy as it acknowledges the reality that MPs possess a great deal of discretion in interpreting, implementing and formulating policy. It also plays to the information 'gap' and need for advice and research that many MPs inevitably encounter, particularly in smaller parties and those in opposition that do not have unfettered access to government departments. Faced with limited resources, MPs will often seek to consult members who they see as experts or who are interested in a particular policy area as a way of obtaining information when making legislative decisions. For example, former NZ Greens MP Sue Bradford invited interested members to contact her directly: 'I am the MP responsible for housing so what I will do with people like that is say "if you're really interested in housing policy, just communicate with me about it"' (Interview). If members can make themselves known to party MPs as an expert or an individual interested in a particular area, there is a greater likelihood they will be consulted or at least acknowledged at this stage of the legislative process.

Membership participation in policy development

So far this book has done little to paint an optimistic picture of the participation of the membership in the development of party policy. Although parties claim to offer their activists and members significant influence in policy decisions (and this is to some extent reflected in the

formal opportunities they provide), for the most part, members do not take up these opportunities – even in the most internally democratic of parties. Consequently, policy development is left to a small committed core of party activists and policy enthusiasts.

Owing to low levels of membership participation and a perception amongst party leaders that those activists who do engage in party processes are unrepresentative, political parties have sought to alter the way in which they develop policy – shifting towards consultation mechanisms and attempting to engage the wider public in generating policy ideas. By creating networks of supporters to comment and consult on policy, political parties can claim to have the backing of a group in society that confers a similar democratic legitimacy to the decisions of the party to that once conferred by a mass membership. Activists have likewise adapted to this development by looking beyond a party's formal policy process to achieve influence over policy direction and content. Strategies such as collective action, media influence and direct lobbying have achieved some success; however, this does indicate a general 'hollowing out' of official party processes whereby formal members no longer perform a linkage role in grounding the party in the electorate through their active participation. Rather, decision-making potentially becomes concentrated in the party's leadership and its elected representatives, who communicate directly with the electorate to disseminate policy ideas.

7
Do Party Leaders and Elites Control the Policy Agenda?

The first part of this book, Chapters 3 to 6, examined the opportunities members have to participate in the development of policy within their respective political parties, and the extent to which they engage in these processes. Before turning to an analysis of how party policy is translated into legislative actions in the parliamentary arena, this chapter explores the role and influence of party elites (office holders, parliamentarians) and paid staff in the formal process of formulating and adopting 'official' party policy. As illustrated in Chapter 3, insofar as parties claim to be vehicles for political participation, the creation of party policy is an activity that is notionally supposed to be the domain of the membership, and the formal policy processes parties have in place are designed to aggregate their views, whether this be by direct, representative, delegate or consultative involvement. Nonetheless, this aggregation does not occur without assistance (or intervention) from the party machine – by leaders, MPs and party staffers. This chapter analyses the involvement of these groups and individuals, identifying the constraints and pressures they face in decision-making, and their motivations, in order to provide a more nuanced account of the role they play in the policy-making process beyond the simple 'members versus leaders' dichotomy, which has characterised much of the analysis of internal party politics.

Has the policy process been hijacked? Claims that the party leadership controls the policy-making process

I feel that the party I joined has been totally hijacked. (LabOur Commission Focus Group Participant, LabOur Commission, 2007b, p. 5).

In the course of writing this book and conducting interviews, reading party reports and visiting websites, it became apparent that one of the claims made by party members with staggering regularity was the extent to which they felt disenfranchised by their party's policy-making process, and believed it to be controlled by party elites. Although the allegation has been raised with respect to all the parties covered in this book, the sentiment is at its most acute within the social democratic parties analysed – particularly in Australia and the UK. Survey findings presented in Chapter 5 showed that within the UK Labour Party, a majority of party members felt that policies were essentially decided by the party leader and his allies, and that the membership was not trusted enough to be actively involved in policy-making (see p. 85). Across continents, both the 2011 and 2002 *National Reviews* reported a similar perception:

> …branches are now treated as irrelevant by head office…Many branches feel frustrated and ignored these days (Bracks et al., 2011, p. 7).

> Currently, many feel detached from decision-making and are disillusioned with what they believe is the marginalisation of the membership through the dominance of the factions, party officials and parliamentary representatives (Hawke and Wran, 2002, p. 8).

Previous academic studies have corroborated members' suspicions, especially in the cases of UK Labour and the ALP where it is commonly claimed that the leadership has assumed dominance of the policy process (see for example Seyd and Whiteley, 2002, pp. 24–5; Parkin and Warhurst, 2000, pp. 28–9). However, the perception of detachment from decision-making is not limited to the rank and file membership, but extends well into the party hierarchy. For example, former member of New Labour's NEC (the governing body of the party), Tony Robinson, explained that his time serving in the executive significantly changed his opinions of the party:

> I now believe that…there had been (and still is) a deliberate, concerted attempt to prevent any alternative opinions to those which are formulated by this small coterie of professional politicians and their advisers, and that actually there is no formal room within the Labour Party for any alternative opinions.

During her time as Party President of NZ Labour, Ruth Dyson similarly described the experience of leading the party's executive as being 'in

armed combat with our own government'. Although these are only the views of two political actors, albeit two who have been in what could be regarded as influential positions in central office, they illustrate that the sense of disenfranchisement extends beyond the rank-and-file – and suggests that the parliamentary party is where the real locus of policy power and influence lies.

However, it does not end there: members of the parliamentary wing also express similar sentiments. Instances of discontent amongst back-benchers within the UK Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) have been well documented by Philip Cowley, who quotes one Labour MP as complaining that 'people are fed up with proposals being produced by kids in Number 10 and that MPs are not involved earlier' (2005, p. 140). A NZ Labour MP suggested that when a party is elected to government the focus of debate within both the parliamentary party and the broader party organisation shifts 'from policy to strategies and tactics of survival' and policies become in reality 'more the product of ministers, departments and political advisers' than they otherwise would when in opposition (Barnett, Interview). Similarly, an ALP back-bencher claimed that 'more and more, the leadership is taking over the development of policy. There are opportunities to have an input into policy...but I think there is developing, more and more, a presidential approach' (Hall, Interview). This is evident in the leadership style of former Prime Minister and ALP leader, Kevin Rudd, who commented of his *modus operandi*:

> If I stick to the traditional way of doing things, if I stick to how the caucus works...we'd be in opposition for a long, long time...The ultimate audience is the great Australian public. You go straight to them rather than through some perverse intermediary called a faction or a caucus committee (quoted in Jackman, 2008, p. 92).

Hence we see that according to the perceptions of some members of the party rank-and-file, the executive and the broader parliamentary party, the locus of policy power resides in only the most senior parliamentarians. On one hand, this could be interpreted as a symptom of the increasing 'presidentialisation' of politics across many Western democracies (Poguntke and Webb, 2005). On the other, feelings of disenfranchisement could be seen as an unavoidable element of organised politics.

Nevertheless, one fundamentally unhelpful aspect of the assertions that a party's policy-making process has been hijacked is the frequent use of broad groupings and indistinct entities to which to apportion

blame. Speaking of the control of party 'elites', 'officials' and even the 'leadership' does not really assist in investigating policy influence within a party given the broad, abstract nature of these groupings and the difficulty in identifying and defining them. In this sense, it is necessary to investigate more closely the operation of the party 'machine' (Parkin and Warhurst, 1983, p. 17), which may shed some light on the perception of disenfranchisement shared by many in political parties – from ordinary members, to executive members, to parliamentarians – who believe they are marginalised by the policy process. Although convenient, the use of such terms obscures the organisational complexity of a political party.

Therefore, party scholars need to analyse the claim that policy is controlled by the party 'elite' or the party 'machine', but must do so by disaggregating the behaviour of these groups and looking at their exact function in the policy process, and how this function is performed by certain individuals. Presented here as examples and case studies that could be expanded upon in further research, such individuals include policy and conference coordinators and policy unit staff (both parliamentary and party appointments) – who must also work within institutional constraints (such as set patterns of resource allocation and limited funding). Whilst the particular stages of the policy development process and the institutional pressures present often combine to give the appearance of a concerted conspiracy by an organised group of people within the party to exert control and influence over policy, there is little actual evidence to support this. Whilst influence and the exercise of discretion undoubtedly occur, this is not always pursued in furtherance of some broader agenda dictated by the party's senior leaders. Rather, the largest problem lies in a lack of transparency and a reluctance to acknowledge and appreciate the significance accorded to the role of individuals in specific positions and the difficult policy decisions they need to make on a daily basis.

Key positions and individuals within parties: Gatekeepers

If we simply look at the formal structure of parties, the presence and potential influence of individuals and positions is usually obscured through a myriad of elected bodies that formally operate in a relatively benign way. A good illustration of this is the work of policy coordination committees and their support staff. For example, at face value, the task of UK Labour's NPF involves 'drawing together the policy

consultation documents and overseeing the consultation process' (UK Labour Party, 2006, p. 4). However, what do the acts of 'overseeing' and 'drawing together' actually mean and what do they involve? Looking beyond the rhetoric of the party to the actual workings of the process uncovers a select group of individuals in key positions who could potentially influence the content of policy.

In his analysis of the internal politics and processes of New Labour, Eric Shaw termed such individuals/positions as 'gatekeepers' (2004, pp. 55–6). By Shaw's definition, gatekeepers are those within the party who essentially set the agenda for debate, and

> Who sift through the mass of 'raw material' and decide what will be processed, organise and monitor policy forums and convey them to head office, and scrutinise and compile reports from constituency and other submissions to the Policy Commissions...Provisions in the policy development process equip party 'gatekeepers' with many managerial tools to control the flow of demands, smothering or deflecting, if they so choose, items that might cause embarrassment if allowed to intrude on the conference agenda.

The Australian literature on party organisation has developed similar concepts to the 'gatekeeper': for example, 'machine politics' and 'faceless men' (Parkin and Warhurst, 1983; Whitington, 1975), emphasising the importance of internal power structures and signifying the capacity of non-elected individuals and committees/groups to exert significant influence over party policy and political decisions, whilst escaping accountability by operating behind closed doors. More recently, Jackson (2011) has explored the influence of party staffers as interlocutors between the party membership, party activists and parliamentarians in the Australian Greens, acknowledging the importance and complexity of this relationship.

While these concepts are extremely useful in drawing attention to the potential agency of individuals that usually remains obscured by organisational processes, they are often used with highly negative connotations and in such a way that assumes this agency is exercised dubiously with the ultimate aim of gaining control over the policy process, particularly for or on behalf of the party's leaders. In the following section I provide examples of 'gatekeepers' across the different parties, but attempt an analysis of their role and function that does not, *a priori*, assume that they are puppets of the leadership.

Table 7.1 Examples of 'Gatekeeper' Positions and Institutions

Party	Position/Institution	Task(s)
UK Labour	NEC	'Contribute to policy development'; 'Maintain a balanced partnership between all party stakeholders'
	JPC	'Strategic oversight of policy development'
	NPF	'Drawing together policy consultation documents' and 'overseeing the policy process'
	Policy Commissions	'Draw up policy reports for discussion by the JPC and the NPF'
	Conference Arrangements Committee	To 'arrange the order and agenda of party conference'
Liberal Democrats	FPC	'Undertake the commissioning, preparation, publication, circulation and submission to conference of policy papers'
	FCC	'Organising the party conference'
UK Greens	Policy Development Committee	'Enabling, coordinating and promoting policy formulation'
	Conferences Committee	'Responsible for Party conferences'
ALP	NPC	'Coordinating development' and 'conducting ongoing reviews' of the party's platform
	NPF	'Facilitate policy debate and development'
	National Executive	Convenes national conferences and appoints the NPC
	National Secretary	Determines the conference agenda
Australian Greens	National Council	'Coordinating and organising' the policies of the Greens; appoints standing PCG; convenes annual conference
	Policy Coordinator	'Facilitates the PCG'; 'directs the work of the PCG on quality control and compatibility checks of policy drafts'; 'edits the final drafts'

Table 7.1 Examples of 'Gatekeeper' Positions and Institutions – *continued*

Party	Position/Institution	Task(s)
Australian Democrats	National Executive	'To direct, organise and coordinate' the policies of the party
	National Policy Committee (convened by National Policy Coordinator)	'*Creation* of national policies'; '*Implementation* of an inclusive, democratic and consultative policy formulation process'; '*Oversight* of policy balloting process
	National Communications Committee and Journal Editor	'*Creation and implementation* of a national communication strategy that maximises member participation and input'; '*Creation* of the National Journal'
NZ Labour	Policy Council	'*Prepare policies* to be incorporated into the Labour Party's next manifesto'
	Policy Committees	'*Consolidate*' remits passed at Regional Conferences for Annual Conferences; '*Prepare* policy discussion papers for the Annual Conference'
NZ Greens	Policy Committee	'Responsible for the *development and ratification* of party policy'
	Policy Co-Convenors	'*Developing* the policy programme, *managing* the policy process, *administering* the Policy Committee and *organising* the Annual Summer Policy Conference'
	Policy Networkers	'Responsible for *encouraging participation* of the provincial membership in the policy process and *representing the views* of these members on the Policy Committee'

Sources: UK Labour Party (1997; 2010b); Liberal Democrats (2010), Green Party England and Wales (2011c); ALP (2009); Australian Greens (2010); Australian Democrats (2006); NZ Labour Party (2007b); Green Party (NZ) (2011a, 2011b).

Examples of gatekeepers

Gatekeepers are common to all political parties as they are inevitably the product of organisational structures, processes and finite resources. Table 7.1, illustrates the range of gatekeeper positions and institutions within the parties in this study, and the functions they perform that might predispose them to accusations of managerial control. While their number may increase in larger organisations with more elaborate systems for policy-making, they still feature within the smaller parties. For example, within the Australian Democrats, all policy drafts were to be submitted to the National Policy Coordinator (appointed by the National Executive) in order to be formatted for balloting. This process included changing the wording, structure and incorporating divergent views into the draft policy. Consistent with an anti-hierarchical ethos, the formal role of the Coordinator was intended to be benign: 'his task is to make sure the format and presentation are right (and that the paper is not wildly off the mark) and that it is at once published in the journal' (*National Journal*, March 1977). Yet, there was some controversy as to the role of the Policy Coordinator: the role was viewed by some members as far more influential, with the capacity to become anti-democratic or at the very least arbitrary, making subjective decisions as to the content and format of ballots. For example, it was alleged that a comprehensive policy on South Africa supported by the Australian Capital Territory Division submitted for ballot was ignored by the Policy Coordinator (*National Journal*, February 1986). Following member complaints that draft policies submitted to the Coordinator disappeared into 'black holes' (*National Journal*, February 1986), suggestion was made that policy initiated by branches or divisions 'go forward for proper consideration at a national level, and not as so frequently happens now, be mislaid, totally altered, or rejected by an unrepresentative policy committee' (Walsh, 1985, p. 15).

Decisions made by the Policy Development Coordinator in the English Greens have a similar potential to become arbitrary or subjective, at least in theory. The Coordinator has the power to suggest amendments to member-developed policies before they are presented to conference, and to submit alternate motions to conference alongside the originals. Looking at the exercise of this power in abstract, one may conclude that it could be utilised by the party's leaders to suppress unwanted policies. However, when interviewed, former Policy Coordinator, Brian Heatley, explained

that his main concern in filtering policy submissions was simply consistency:

> I worry about the good order of the process. For example, if some-one puts a motion to conference – it may be that I don't take any particular view on the substance of the motion, but I worry that if the motion is passed, is it consistent with other policy or do we have to think about if the other policy needs changing? I might suggest an amendment which will say that if this motion is passed and becomes our policy, we really need to make consequent changes somewhere else. So I spend a lot of time worrying about what I call the 'good order' of our policies – trying to keep it consistent.

Another example of a party institution that could theoretically serve as a 'gatekeeper', is the Liberal Democrats' Federal Conference Committee (FCC). Like conference organising bodies in other parties (see Table 7.1), the FCC is responsible for determining what is to appear on the Liberal Democrats' conference agenda and therefore what officially ends up as party policy. The brief of this body renders it benign – primarily a facilitator – that does not make decisions on whether policy would be 'good or bad', but rather on whether the policy amendments and motions presented would produce a 'viable policy outcome…They [the FCC] are concerned with whether motions are technically in order, whether they make for good debate and whether they would result in policy that hangs together' (Simpson, Interview). However, former Chair of the FCC, Duncan Brack, was aware of the influence of this body, which he argued was increasing as the nature of party conferences shifted from arenas purely for policy debate to more varied, promotional and informational events:

> Although I say we're really a facilitator, obviously when we're starting to do things like fix presentations, arrange Q & A sessions, clearly we are actually fixing the agenda and we are determining a lot of the topics that people are going to talk about. So the old model of us purely as a facilitator, allowing conference reps to do what they want, is not really totally accurate now – we arrange conference, and I suspect we're going to do that more and more (Interview).

As acknowledged in the *Refounding Labour* reports, perhaps the greatest deal of 'suspicion' has arisen with regard to the operation of the NPF

and its constituent committees in the UK Labour Party, particularly in dealing with policy submissions from members and the public (UK Labour Party, 2011a, p. 19; 2011c, pp. 20–1; 2011e, p. 11). Already mentioned, there is criticism that submissions regularly disappear into 'black holes' and that there is little transparency attached to how they are processed (see pp. 77–9). Interviews with participants in the NPF suggested there is a lack of transparency and accountability, not only to the membership and public, but also to the NPF itself. As Ann Black explained, 'when members, branches and constituencies are encouraged to send submissions to the NPF, those that go to the policy commissions – you can see them if you want, but they get skimmed through by a member of the Policy Unit staff and put in a file'. Tony Robinson noted a similar experience during his time serving on a Labour policy commission:

> As policy commissioners, a number of us wanted to have the right to simply answer those submissions when they came in. This was constantly fought against. We were allowed to see the submissions...and I was Co-Chair of one of these policy commissions...so as these things go, I was quite a heavyweight. Even I wasn't allowed to take them away. The only time I could see them was in a red box sitting round a table, which meant I had to take my own time out. Neither I nor the other members could make a response. The only response came from the paid Labour Party organiser, and that would be a standard response.

These accounts of the process illustrate the potential gatekeepers have to control the flow of 'inputs' into policy-making, 'smothering or deflecting...those items which might pose "problems" or cause "embarrassment" to the leadership' (Shaw, 2002, p. 153; see also Seyd, 1999). However, the Labour Party has now sought to address some of these concerns by reforming the NPF in order that representatives 'play a greater role in dealing with the submissions which come in from party members' and has pledged to introduce measures to increase transparency, such as the introduction of an online audit trail for submissions, and by providing policy submissions, papers and reports to all representatives electronically (UK Labour Party, 2011c, pp. 20–1).

However, even with greater degrees of transparency and accountability, it is important to recognise the difficult decisions that gatekeepers and others on policy committees need to make in collating submissions and selecting those to appear in draft documents. This is

something that institutional reform cannot really address. Even if we eliminate the possibility of a covert elite agenda,

> You're left with the point…you sit in London, you've got a couple of box files full of worthy discussions that people have had around the country: how do you weigh it? How do you judge an informed comment on say science and research policy which has been produced by some academics in Cambridge, against three people sitting in a Labour Party branch meeting that know next to nothing about it (Zeichner, Interview).

A similar concern was expressed by Senator Christine Milne in the context of policy development in the Australian Greens, in particular the respective weight that should be given to parliamentary opinion considering information asymmetry: 'so you get this tension: is everybody's view on a particular issue equal in terms of the level of thought, input and consideration that's gone on?' (Interview). Given the unique circumstances surrounding each policy issue, it is impossible to formulate a coherent and systematic process by which views and submissions could be collated and aggregated.

Although it was very difficult to get interviewees to explicitly and critically reflect on these decision-making processes, a number of factors for consideration were emphasised by party staffers and office-holders. Beyond the vetting that occurs on what might be deemed technical grounds (form of submission, overlap with current policy etc.), policy groups will tend to take careful account of the opinions of the parliamentary party and/or lead spokespeople, but do not necessarily feel bound by them. The quality of the submission and the viability of the proposals presented will also act as a filter. It takes a lot for party officials to admit it, but many submissions from members are simply, in their eyes, terrible. Referring to policy ideas posted via the *Partnership in Power* website, a UK Labour Party interviewee commented: 'anyone who reads through all those contributions would convince themselves that thank God no one's taking any notice'. However, there was no suggestion in this instance that 'terrible' equated with expressing an opinion that was contrary to the agenda of the parliamentary leadership.

Individuals or a coordinated effort?

The analytical utility of the concept of the gatekeeper lies in highlighting the capacity for certain groups or individuals to make key decisions

and shape the agenda of the party in undertaking what would usually be considered (in the absence of closer examination) purely facilitative or administrative tasks. However, often the use of the term suggests that this influence is, and has been, appropriated by the party leadership to further its own objectives. Whilst the greatest suspicion of this occurring does arise over the activities of the UK Labour Party, it is very difficult to find conclusive evidence that this is the case with 'gatekeeper' positions in other parties. Although the individuals occupying these positions are faced with difficult decisions, which are highly political and contentious, interviews with decision-makers indicate they undertake these tasks with reasonable diligence and perhaps it is simply a greater degree of transparency that is required to eliminate suspicions that they are somehow in cahoots with the party's leaders. Nonetheless, this is an area of party organisation and governance that requires further in-depth study, particularly as consultative mechanisms become more commonplace within political parties.

The distribution of resources

In addition to the role that 'gatekeepers' potentially play in influencing the development of party policy and mediating the link between members, official policy and its transferral to the parliament, there are several pressures external to the policy process but within the institutional structure of the party that may also have an effect. This section of the chapter examines the impact of funding and the distribution of a party's resources on its policy process.

The cartel party thesis described in Chapter 2 has prompted comparative party scholars to re-examine the relationship between political parties and the state. In organisational terms, the evolution of the cartel party has been characterised by an increasing dependence on the state to provide material resources and legitimacy in lieu of those once provided by mass memberships and civil society. This change has suitably been described as the transformation of political parties from private voluntary associations to 'public utilities' (van Biezen, 2004, p. 705; Epstein, 1986, p. 157).

There is a substantial body of literature on the consequences of funding regimes for the internal financial organisation and management of parties, and their relationship to the state (see for example Koβ, 2011; van Biezen, 2004, 2008; Austin and Tjernström, 2003; Pinto-Duschinsky, 2002; Koole, 2001; Katz, 1996; Mair, 1994; Ewing, 1987, 2007; Epstein, 1986). A common theme is that whilst public

funding was introduced to encourage equality amongst parties in electoral competition given the high financial cost of representative democracy, it also marks a shift in the resources that political parties are dependent on. This changing reliance on different resource patterns has significant implications for the organisation of political parties, not only in their internal financial management, but also in their policy activities and their character as participatory institutions.

In the UK, Seyd and Whiteley (2002, pp. 29–30) have reported an overall decline in the number of paid staff employed by the main parties and their increasing concentration in head office rather than in the constituencies. The relative strength of resources located within the party in public office and the ability of this arm of the organisation to employ full-time researchers has also affected both the locus of policy development and the way in which it is developed. As the sources of funding to political parties have gradually shifted, so too have the ways in which parties are able to spend this money. Table 7.2, illustrates sources of funding for parties and the arm of the party that is now the primary beneficiary of these income streams.

If we examine the sources of funding that political parties now rely on, it is clear that the income derived from parliamentary duties (which includes MPs' allowances to employ personal office staff) clearly outweighs that received from donations and reimbursements for election expenses – averaging approximately 65 per cent of income for all parties with parliamentary representation and greatly privileging the party in public office. Opposition parties in the UK are entitled to an allocation of 'Short money', designed to enable them to 'more effectively…fulfil their Parliamentary functions' (see Gay et al., 2007, pp. 10–12; Kelly, 2006), whereas the governing party receives additional remuneration for ministerial duties and to employ Special Advisers. In New Zealand, parliamentary services income (derived from the Parliamentary Service Commission's formula on Ministers', Leaders' and MPs' expenses, party leaders' funding, and funding for party groups and MPs) for both the Greens and the Labour Party constitutes approximately 80 per cent of party income. Australian federal MPs are entitled to generous phone, travel and photocopy allowances in addition to annual subsidies for printing, postal and electorate costs. They can employ four to five staffers (depending on the size of the electorate they represent), with a greater staff allocation available for the Ministry/Shadow Ministry (Horne, 2009). Estimates of the total value of parliamentary benefits to Australian party MPs are around $890,000 per annum (Young and Tham, 2006, p. 58). The asymmetry that this

Table 7.2 Sources of Party Funding and Their Beneficiaries, 2005–2006

State	Party	Funding Source				Primary Beneficiary
		Donations	Election Funding	Parliamentary Duties	Policy Fund	
Australia	Democrats	3,017,909 (45.9%)	8,491 (0.1%)	3,548,096 (54.0%)		Party in Public Office
	Greens	2,276,284 (24.9%)	3,316,702 (36.3%)	3,548,096 (38.8%)		Extra-Parliamentary Organisation
	Labor Party	44,953,523 (32.1%)	16,710,000 (12.0%)	78,058,112 (55.9%)		Party in Public Office
New Zealand	Greens	86,000 (6.4%)	166,930 (12.3%)	1,100,000 (81.3%)		Party in Public Office
	Labour Party	671,719 (9.0%)	617,331 (8.2%)	6,200,000 (82.8%)		Party in Public Office
United Kingdom	Greens	236,549 (100%)				Extra-Parliamentary Organisation
	Labour Party	17,758,000 (26.3%)		49,355,807 (73.0%)	420,000 (0.7%)	Party in Public Office
	Liberal Democrats	3,348,966 (25.0%)		9,616,349 (71.8%)	420,000 (3.2%)	Party in Public Office

Sources: UK Labour Party (2007); Liberal Democrats (2007); Green Party England and Wales (2007); Miller (2005, p. 96); Young and Tham (2006, p. 140); Gay et al. (2007); UK Parliament (House of Commons) (2007, p. 3). The data refers to income obtained in 2005 for the NZ Parties and 2006 for parties in the UK and Australia. This is the most recent data available with which cross-national comparisons can be made.

creates is clearly evident in the Australian Greens: the total number of party staff employed by Greens' State and federal MPs is 100, contrasted with the 23 staff employed by the Australian Greens' extra parliamentary party organisation (Jackson, 2011, p. 64). As parliamentary leader, Bob Brown employs 11 personal staff (Jackson, 2011, p. 65). However, as Jackson notes, this is a relatively small figure compared to the 352 personal staff of the ALP government.

To understand the implications of the changing sources of party income and their relevance to the development of policy it is necessary to appreciate that certain sources of income have specific conditions attached to them. For example, the income (or income equivalent) derived from election funding usually must be spent on campaigning activities – or is intended to be a reimbursement for such activities. Donations are made to the party organisation, and as such can be spent by the party in any manner it wishes. However, parliamentary services income, which now constitutes the largest source of income for most political parties, is specifically directed to funding the parliamentary activities of a political party, and as a Liberal Democrats' MP explained, can only be legitimately expended by this arm of the party organisation in its capacity as a public agent: 'the parliamentary rules are quite strict in that you can only use parliamentary staff and money to communicate about parliamentary matters' (Howarth, Interview). For example, the communications allowance allocated to Westminster MPs and associated parliamentary resources 'may not be used for communicating information about your political activities or those of the party to which you belong' (UK Parliament (Dept. of Finance and Administration), 2007, p. 7).

Previously when donations to parties and other private sources of income constituted the bulk of parties' revenue, money was channelled into the party organisation, which was the primary employer of party staff and it was this arm of the party that funded the development of policy, without any legal conditions attached to the way in which this money was spent. However, as parties now derive the largest proportion of their income from parliamentary activities, this arm of the party is now the largest employer of staff. As Anthony Albanese reflects of the shift in policy-making within the ALP,

> Politics is now driven by people who are full time members of parliament and members of staff...There's a negative in that... Previously I think the party was more vibrant at the rank and file

level. There were more motions coming through and the party was more likely to be driven by that (Interview).

This does not come as a surprise, considering that the ALP has access to approximately 770 parliamentary and ministerial staff. Similarly, the lack of 'an established full-time professional organisation' has meant that the paid staff employed by Australian Democrat senators and State MPs have formed the 'backbone of the Democrats' machine', which has put the determination of policy 'in the hands of the politicians' (Abjorensen, 1991). Finally, in contrast to the 50 ministerial advisers that were employed by the NZ Labour Party while it was in government (Shaw, 2006, p. 267), the party itself employed only seven people. Consequently 'their level of involvement in policy is minimal…We've got the whole South Island with a quarter of the population and no one working full time paid for the Labour Party' (Barnett, Interview).

Although regulations constrain parliamentary expenditure, parties have generally been quite savvy in circumventing these regulations to utilise available staff (see for example Ghazarian, 2006, pp. 70–1), with the consequence that the bulk of parties' policy research, on a day-to-day basis, is undertaken by parliamentary researchers working for ministers and individual backbenchers, rather than the broader party organisation. Even if this does not occur as part of a calculated strategy, staff involvement in policy simply happens as a consequence of parliamentary politics. As Jackson observed in his study of the Australian Greens, parliamentarians' staffers 'did see at least a partial role in policy development for themselves, as they dealt with policy matters on a day-to-day basis when the MPs are called upon to make statements or vote on positions' (2011, p. 169).

Yet, in order to comply with the requirements of public funding, the work that goes into policy must be formally separated from the party at large. This has the potential to create a situation where the degree of integration with the party's policy-making process is minimal in order to create the appearance of party-political neutrality, and if it occurs at all, integration might come at the point where a minister or MP presents a well-researched and essentially complete policy paper to the party seeking ratification rather than input from the membership (see further discussion pp. 137–9). Unsurprisingly, such policies attract criticism from members over insufficient involvement, causing confusion and occasionally resentment between these two arms of the party, and sustaining a dual process of policy development. However, this lack of

integration can also be viewed as a product of the institutional and legal constraints under which parties operate.

Nevertheless, parties are aware of this potential policy disconnection, and have implemented several strategies in place to minimise disjoint and facilitate communication between the parliamentary wing and the broader party organisation. For example, the Liberal Democrats restructured their Policy Research Unit to bring together the staff and resources provided by the federal party organisation and those by parliamentary office, so those working on policy and parliamentary work could do so 'in tandem' (Simpson, Interview). However, since the party has taken a position in the governing coalition it has lost the parliamentary resources allocated to opposition parties, including Short Money, and therefore the policy-making capacity of the parliamentary party has been severely weakened. Liberal Democrats Peers are now more involved in the party, and all MPs are expected to tithe to the party organisation (Hazell and Yong, 2011, pp. 10–11; Evans and Sanderson-Nash, 2011, pp. 466–7).

Another way in which parties attempt to bridge the policy gap between the parliamentary wing and the extra-parliamentary party is through the common practice of employing party office holders as parliamentary staffers. This 'positive utilisation of staff' is particularly important for smaller parties of limited resources, where the staff and financial resources that accompany parliamentary office are invaluable (Ghazarian, 2006, p. 71). Within the Australian Democrats, it was not unusual for members of the National Executive and the party organisation to also be present on Senators' staff. The pragmatic argument for this practice rested on sharing knowledge and resources between various arms of the party, hence creating a more efficient process of decision-making (Cherry, Interview). As Ghazarian (2006, p. 72) argues, it is also seen by the party as 'a conduit through which the interests of the rank and file members could be transmitted directly to the parliamentarians'. Since achieving parliamentary party status, the presence of Australian Greens' Senators staff on policy and campaigning committees is now much more commonplace and at the State level, several active party members who have been office holders now have employment in MPs' offices, with the effect of embedding parliamentary staff in the party organisation, and vice versa.

Within the Liberal Democrats, the presence of MPs' staffers on policy working groups is designed to fulfil a similar integrating role by 'making sure that the staffing of those groups is linked to the parliamentary party member, so they're constantly reporting back to the parliamentary

party member on what's happening in the working group, what ideas are coming out' (Simpson, Interview). While this practice has the potential to create more fluid channels of communication between the two arms of the party, it also has the potential to undermine the fundamental separation of power between the party organisation and parliamentary wing, thus creating the potential for the parliamentary wing to increase its power within the organisation and an oligarchy to develop across these two arms of the party.

Another possible means by which policy development could be encouraged back into political party organisations, or at least to curtail the 'inappropriate' use of parliamentary staff, is to grant parties specific funds for policy development that are not restricted for use by the parliamentary party. Such a scheme currently operates in the UK, where registered parties are eligible for policy development grants from the Electoral Commission, with a total pool of £2 million per annum (*Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act* 2000 (UK), s 12). These grants are only available to parties with parliamentary representation (two sitting members in the House of Commons), a provision that continues to exclude the Greens. Interestingly, in contrast to the amount received by the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats from the policy fund, the Greens officially spent nothing on policy development in 2010 and only £32 in 2009 (Green Party England & Wales, 2011a, p. 11). As shown in Table 7.2, both the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats currently receive over £400,000 p.a. in such funds, which has 'boosted' the ability of the latter party to undertake policy development programmes and consultations (Simpson, Interview). However, given their relative size as a proportion of overall income, such grants do little to address the underlying division in internal party policy-making. Furthermore, there is no requirement that the funds be used to facilitate participation by the party's rank-and-file in policy development, and therefore could be allocated to employ professionals and experts to formulate party policy, potentially further marginalising the membership.

The input of members of parliament into the formal policy-making process

The second part of this book explores the potential for members of the parliamentary party to engage in their own process of policy-making, irrespective of what has been adopted by the party organisation as official party policy. One of the reasons why parliamentary parties

might resort to this course of action stems from the inadequate formal involvement of MPs (particularly the Cabinet/Shadow Cabinet) in parties' policy-development processes as outlined in Chapter 4. The systematic integration of MPs into policy forums such as working groups and conferences has not been given much attention either by scholars or parties themselves, possibly under the assumption that any participation by MPs at this level is an attempt to exert undue influence over the actions of the membership, who by right, 'own' party policy and the process of formulating it. However, integration at an early stage facilitates the development of policy that is workable and transferable to the parliamentary arena, and might also provide for a better (or more transparent) link between members' policy preferences and legislative actions.

Structural incentives for involvement

The extent to which MPs actually involve themselves in the formal process of policy formulation within parties is, in part, facilitated by the opportunities on offer. In some parties, the parliamentary caucus is given the opportunity to 'sign off' on a policy document before it is completed by the relevant policy committee and presented to the party membership for approval or rejection. For example, Liberal Democrat policy working group papers go to the Ministry/Shadow Ministry and the parliamentary party before they are finalised by the Federal Policy Committee, which, in the words of one MP, provides 'a good deal of opportunity for MPs to object to policy developments they don't like' (Howarth, Interview). A similar vetting procedure exists within the NZ Greens:

> Caucus has to sign off on new policy. We are supposed (in our own areas especially) to check it to see that there is nothing dangerous or embarrassing that's slipping through, because that can happen. The fact that we say no, we don't like it, doesn't mean it won't go through but at least there will be a discussion about it, so there are break points on it. I think Caucus is one of the main brakes – where our MPs and co-leaders will say 'this is crazy – we can't have this as part of our policy, we'll be the laughing stock of New Zealand'. That does happen (Bradford, Interview).

The difficulty with this involvement creating negative perceptions of the policy process is that it comes at a relatively late stage, and could be interpreted as the parliamentary party exercising an effective veto over the previous work and opinions of the membership.

Another way in which elected representatives participate in the formal intra-party policy-making process is through membership on policy committees and working groups. As Table 4.1 illustrated, party parliamentarians are allocated a set number of places on these groups in all parties except the UK Greens and the Australian Democrats – where policy oversight groups form on a more *ad hoc* basis. Rather than being viewed negatively (as a source of undue parliamentary involvement in policy-making), interaction between the membership and the party in public office within the structures of the formal policy process is crucial. For example, within the Liberal Democrats,

> The way we get the parliamentary party involved, which has sometimes been a problem with them going off in one direction and the party going off in another direction, is firstly to ensure that they're involved in the working groups, and that it is made clear to them by the leadership that they are responsible for the output to their parliamentary colleagues, and they can't throw up their hands and say 'this is just a working group of the federal party, I disagreed with it all'. No, they've got to take political responsibility for the results (Simpson, Interview).

However, a more proactive enforcement of policy 'duties' is viewed as being necessary within the Party as 'it has been known for MPs to fail to turn up to those meetings' (Liberal Democrats 2, Staffer, Interview). One reason for this may simply be the pressures of time – parliamentary duties do not leave much opportunity to participate in formal policy processes. Alternatively, a common practice is for MPs to send staffers on their behalf to these meetings. However, UK Labour MP Tom Watson has been much more critical of the similarly muted participation of elected representatives in his party's NPF:

> Less than 75 members and only a couple of cabinet ministers attended this weekend's policy forum. The National Policy Forum was meant to bring senior ministers and party representatives together to discuss policy on a very detailed level. With nearly half the members and more than three quarters of the Cabinet not turning up, it suggests very strongly that something is not working (Watson, 2007).

Although structural initiatives exist that attempt to engage MPs in the formal policy-making process of their party, the extent to which they

become involved is very much an individual choice, shaped by certain factors including time, areas of interest and previous involvement. As Liberal Democrats' MP David Howarth explained,

> I'm a member of large numbers of policy working groups – probably more than other MPs, but that's largely because I used to be on the FPC myself. I was on the Policy Committee for 10 years, so I know how important it can be and why it's important to be involved. My actual involvement in each of the groups varies depending on diary commitments…there's an attempt to help MPs take part by holding most of the meetings of the policy working groups in Westminster so we're able to get to them, but that isn't always possible…Some MPs don't take part at all and don't pay much attention to party policy development, even as it goes through the parliamentary party. I suppose the two variables are the degree to which people are inter-ested in policy in the first place, and the degree to which they're interested in that particular policy area. Not all MPs are interested in policy development – that's just the way it is (Interview).

Members of the ALP parliamentary party suggested that commitment 'varies within the party' according to 'people's own personal positions' and 'how much they think it's important'. Given the variable factors that structure MPs' engagement with the policy process, it is difficult to envisage an institutional/formal way to encourage or secure this engagement – most measures to address the problem must be cultural. However, one way in which this could be done is by contractual agree-ment, such as the 'Candidate Contracts' that have been endorsed in the *Refounding Labour* review (UK Labour Party, 2011c, p. 17). In signing these contracts, MPs acknowledge their responsibilities to the party, which may, for example, include active participation in policy forums. It is doubtful that such a contract would be legally binding, but could be influential in re-selections. The use of such contracts as a mechanism for achieving accountability is discussed further in the next chapter.

Individual initiatives

Beyond the membership of policy working groups and established party institutions, many MPs do claim to engage in, and foster, policy development initiatives within both their local parties and the party more broadly. When asked about their involvement in the policy-making process, common responses MPs gave were: participation in

local branch meetings and organising lectures, forums and debates, which were not necessarily inside the framework of their parties' formal policy-making processes. Again, the extent to which MPs participated in such activities was quite *ad hoc* and varied between individuals. However, an interesting theme that emerged from the interviews was the way in which MPs talked about such policy initiatives in very possessive terms, suggesting that MPs perceive that they are driving a debate that would otherwise not occur without their involvement [emphasis added to quotes]:

> Members complain that…what they need is something more than what arrives in the mail. It's complicated and they can't see what context it's in. *I've tried to overcome that by setting up forums ahead of policy development*, and saying come on, *we'll talk about the issues* so you can see where the drafts of the policy come from (Australian Democrats' MP).

> At a local level *I try to involve branch members* in the policy-making process…What I've tried to do in the past is set up little policy bodies within the [local party] where they can write up some papers and send them off. That's been successful for the branch members because they've been directly involved and been able to put forward their ideas (ALP MP).

> As their local MP *I keep saying 'you must do this'*. Did you realise there was a remit and so on and so from Dunedin?…*I've always encouraged party members to come up with ideas*. When there's a conference coming up – there's no point in having a seniors' branch if you don't have any ideas. There's no point in having a women's branch if you're just going to have a cup of tea. So my argument when I sign people up is: you have your say on Labour policy. Don't come and whinge to me about what is wrong, come in and say what your ideas are, turn up at the branch and put your ideas forward (NZ Labour MP).

At the end of the spectrum, some parliamentarians will actively develop party policy. For example, as mentioned in Chapter 5 (pp. 88–9), spurred on by inactivity and limited resources within the extra-parliamentary organisation, NZ Greens' MP Sue Bradford wrote a full draft of the community and voluntary sector policy, which was subsequently adopted by the party. ALP frontbencher Tanya Plibersek also

revealed the extent of her involvement in the party's housing afford-ability policy:

> …I released with Kevin Rudd and Wayne Swan a housing affordabil-ity discussion paper. A lot of those ideas are ideas I've discussed with party members in various public consultations and that they've emailed me. But the ideas are evaluated, synthesised, accepted or discarded by me in that drafting process. It's not like someone's exact idea would necessarily make it into a discussion paper like that, but certainly their opinion and influence in a broad sort of way does spark my thinking. It might be something that I com-pletely agree with, it might be something that ten different people have thought of, it might be something that I think is absolutely crazy, but I take note of all of that sort of correspondence and comment from party members.

The above quote illustrates the very fine line between integration into and control of the policy process, particularly in light of the limited resources allocated to the EPO (where members must work on a volun-tary basis) and the relative ease with which parliamentarians can lead policy debate. It also emphasises the individual agency inherent in policy development, whereby particular individuals must acknowledge and balance or synthesise competing views within the party, and a significant amount of trust is placed in them to do so.

Does participation foster linkage?

Three main points arise from the discussion in the chapter: the need to acknowledge the political realities of resource allocation, parliamen-tary expediency and strategy; the important, contentious and difficult policy decisions that are made by individuals within parties; and the need for transparency in this process. Contrary to the dictum that the party in public office should be the willing servant of the EPO, I have argued that the dominant position of the parliamentary party is inevit-able due to numerous systemic and institutional factors that have increasingly shifted the impetus for policy development to this domain. The temptation is then to isolate MPs from participation in formal party policy-making processes in order to rectify this imbalance of power, or to view their involvement with suspicion.

However, the participation of members of the parliamentary party in the formal policy development process of a party is a crucial step in

effectively transferring ideas and the policy preferences of the member-
ship to the legislative arena. Involvement in the process is viewed as an
important source of ideas and as a necessary connection with members,
and in turn, supporters and constituents:

> I sometimes get really good ideas, because it's really important for
> me being Sydney-based and working half the time in Canberra
> to know how things are in other States. I live in the city and I need
> to know when I'm making policy how it affects people living in
> country areas. So I value it highly for the actual ideas, for the
> insights it gives me into how policies affect people in different
> places (Plibersek, Interview).

> So the lesson of good party democracy if it's going to work and not
> be a hindrance is that you've got to engage. And the other lesson,
> to be honest, by having to engage (because this is party demo-
> cracy questioning what you're doing), you learn a lot about your
> policy and a lot about the way the people hear it and experience it
> from your members. It's actually quite a strength I think (Davey,
> Interview).

Done in an open and accessible fashion, it is also a means of securing
transparency, whereby members and parliamentarians can better
engage in a policy dialogue. The involvement of MPs is more effective
at earlier stages of policy development, such as during the writing of
discussion papers and active engagement with policy working groups,
as this utilises their expertise and enables the formulation of a policy
programme that can be realistically implemented.

> When a [policy] committee is being sidelined it tries its best to
> obstruct things. When it recognises that you are working through
> them, they tend to like to be led…It reinforces the goodwill and the
> good feeling. In a small party where unity is particularly important,
> and people recognise the importance of unity, as long as you work
> through the structures, people take responsibility for the unity of
> the party (Simpson, Interview).

A party that is better able to integrate its MPs into its formal policy
processes is much more likely to achieve a smoother, and more reliable
transmission of membership preferences, which also acknowledges the
realities of parliamentary politics. To conclude with the observations of

a former Australian Democrats' senator, the participation of both members and parliamentarians in the formulation of official party policy is

> Essential because if the senators can't live with the policy, then they're not going to implement it, and that's the fundamental thing – the policy has to be seen as a partnership. And this notion that the parliamentarians and the members are two different parties is something which I think all of us have to smack ourselves around to get rid of.

However, as the next part of the book will illustrate, this is often easier said than done.

8

Transferring Policy to the Parliament: The Roles of Elected Representatives

The previous four chapters set out the various ways in which 'official' policy is developed within the eight case-study parties and the possible avenues for membership participation in these processes. However, party policy once developed is not intended to lie dormant. Parties, through their representation in parliaments, seek to apply policies to legislative debates at hand. For governing parties, this may be to introduce bills that give effect to an area of party policy or a manifesto commitment, whereas for opposition parties this would usually involve taking a position on legislation consistent with party policy, either opposing the bill or attempting to negotiate concessions and amendments to better reflect the opposition party's own policy commitments. This section of the book, Chapters 8 and 9, analyses just how party policy is applied to legislative debate and the factors that impact upon this process.

Chapter 8 examines the formal role ascribed to MPs in deciding upon and applying policies to parliamentary activities and debate in the context of their role as both party and constituency representatives. The first part of the chapter examines the issue of policy transferral and accountability within the context of party government – which has served as the dominant paradigm of representative governance throughout the twentieth century. The second part turns to an analysis of the formal obligations that MPs assume as policy agents; contrasting legal and constitutional conceptions of an MP's duty to those imposed by the party organisation. I argue that these obligations have the potential to conflict, and consequently in the vast majority of instances a party (or its members) cannot legally mandate their elected representatives to act in accordance with their policy wishes. Finally, I evaluate how this contradiction is resolved within formal party documents (for example,

constitutions) and the effectiveness of the alternate internal mechanisms parties have adopted to pursue the accountability of their parliamentarians in the policy realm.

Policy transferral, party government and the Westminster parliamentary tradition

As the legitimising 'myth' that justifies the existence of parties as vehicles for representation and the aggregation of the policy preferences of the masses (see Katz, 1987, p. 3), party government relies on the ability of political parties to 'translate possession of the highest formal offices of a regime into operational control of government' (Rose, 1969, p. 413). Although scholars have offered slightly different conceptions of party government, a theme common to all is that for party government to function effectively, parties must formulate or decide on clear policies (or policy preferences), which are then presented to the electorate. Once elected to parliament, a party must have 'the organisational and institutional capacity to carry these out through the people it appoints for that purpose' (Mair, 2008, p. 223). In this way, political parties act as media for the transmission of policy preferences and are held accountable to the public and their supporters through internal power structures (for example, internal leadership contests) and general elections. Looking more specifically at policy transferral, party government requires several conditions. First, partisans must formulate policy intentions for enactment once in office. Second, partisans in office must give high priority to carrying out party policies, and must be sufficiently cohesive or disciplined to enable them to implement their policy. Third, the party policies that are promulgated must be put into practice by the personnel of the regime (Rose, 1969, pp. 416–18; Katz, 1986, p. 43; 1987, p. 7; Thomassen, 1994).

Although the language in this literature tends to be that of 'government', it is important to note that many of the assumptions and requirements of party government (for example, that parliamentary parties seek to implement party policies) can be applied to all party groups that have gained representation in the legislature. Whilst opposition parties may not be able to see their policies directly implemented, they can seek amendments to government bills in line with their own principles, or introduce private members' bills to pursue similar outcomes. It should also be noted that although policy must be 'decided' or 'formulated' by parties, there is no requirement that this be done through the participation of the membership (see Katz, 1987,

p. 4). As such, the theory of party government stands in contrast to the chain of linkage presented in Chapter 2 in which members are active in policy development and hints at one of the overarching dilemmas that plagues party politics: is it actually desirable that members participate, or should policy preferences be aggregated at the level of the system? This debate aside, the key element in the theoretical model of party government that is relevant here, and common to both models despite the lack of membership participation, is that a party's elected representatives work to implement the principles and policies of the party and in this sense there is an assumption that MPs can, and should, be required to do so.

Nonetheless, theories of party government and indeed parties themselves emerged well after the establishment of representative legislatures. Consequently there is a great deal of tension and many inconsistencies between the constitutional and legal design of Westminster parliaments that are intended to comprise of independent/constituency representatives, and the political reality and current practice of party government. This creates a potentially uncomfortable situation whereby MPs hold dual responsibilities to the party and the public that may theoretically conflict. In the eyes of the public law, parliamentarians are elected as independent representatives, and the law has expressed a strong disapproval with the concept of a party mandate – or that parliamentarians could be held accountable at law for failing to fulfil the wishes of their constituents, let alone their party members (see Gauja, 2010, pp. 193–211; McKenzie, 1963).

How does this legal precedent impact upon the internal organisation of parties and the implementation of party policy? The most significant consequence is that it guarantees the autonomy of parliamentary party from decisions of the extra-parliamentary party organisation in any matters that can be applied to the legislative arena, promoting the existence of two separate party organisations. If parliamentarians are to represent their constituencies, which are typically defined by electoral law in geographic rather than party terms, they must remain independent in their deliberations and cannot take orders from third parties or external bodies. This includes voting in parliament in accordance with party policy, even if it has been democratically formulated by the membership. Although it rarely arises, if a parliamentarian crosses the floor on an issue and votes against the wishes of their party, they cannot be expelled or forced to resign from parliament, even if the MP has taken a pledge or signed an agreement to do so (Tardi, 2007; Oliver, 2003, p. 133; Orr, 2002; Cowley, 1996, p. 219).

Duty to the party: A comparative analysis of party constitutions

So how do political parties attempt to manage this tension between party representation and constitutional parliamentary design? One way is to articulate a party's position on the issue and the expectations it has of its MPs is in the party's own constitution. An analysis of party constitutions and the formal rules regulating the relationship between the parliamentary party and the party as a whole paints a different picture of the role of an MP to that of the independent 'Westminster parliamentarian' outlined above. As illustrated below, rather than exercise independent judgement on issues of policy, in many cases party MPs are expected to remain formally subservient to the EPO. While this rhetoric is strongest within social democratic parties, there are significant variations between parties and democracies in how the difficult relationship between party and electorate representative is resolved.

Labour parties in Australia, New Zealand and the UK attempt to exert the greatest formal influence upon their parliamentarians, who are intended to act as party delegates. Within the social democratic party family, the strongest example of formal extra-parliamentary control is within NZ Labour, due to a combination of explicit party constitutional regulations governing its MPs, parliamentary practices that recognise parties as parliamentary groups and facilitate cohesion (see McGee, 2005, p. 83) and a party history that has raised awareness of the important yet often conflicting relationship between the parliamentary party and the EPO in the formulation and implementation of policy. Article 293 of the Party's Constitution explicitly states that 'the policy of the New Zealand Labour Party shall be binding on all members of the Parliamentary Labour Party'. Further, the Statement of Intent drafted at the Party's 1988 Dunedin Conference reiterates this expectation: 'the parliamentary leadership undertakes to implement policies which are consistent with the manifesto of the New Zealand Labour Party' (reproduced in Debnam, 1994, pp. 67–8). In part this is a reflection of the party's experiences – by demanding adherence to policy yet recognising the crucial role MPs must play in formulating it, the Statement of Intent was drafted to avoid future instances of infighting and conflict over policy similar to those which occurred when Labour was elected to government in the 1980s but abandoned the party's election policies 'without regard for detail or principle' (Debnam, 1994, p. 56).

Within the Australian Labor Party, the parliamentary party is granted some autonomy to make decisions 'directed towards establishing the collective attitude of the Parliamentary Party to any question or matter in the Federal Parliament'. However, this right is subject to compliance with the party's Platform and Conference decisions and a positive undertaking that all possible action be taken to implement these decisions (Part B, Art. 5). This approach acknowledges the practicalities of legislative decision-making: 'Conference meeting every two years cannot itself govern in circumstances where hundreds of decisions are taken each week, but it can – and it must – provide our guidelines now and into the future, and be on hand to give wise counsel to this or any other Labor government' (ALP, 1986, p. 8; see Lloyd, 2000, p. 61). Neither the ALP nor the NZ Labour Constitution makes mention of the public duty of the parliamentary party, nor do they give formal recognition to any rights of MPs to vote according to conscience, electoral or national interest.

Interestingly, unlike Australia and New Zealand, the UK Labour Party's *Rule Book* currently does not contain any mention of the relationship between the party's parliamentarians (the PLP) and the extra-parliamentary party organisation. However, statements of the appropriate relationship have been published elsewhere. Former Labour PM Clement Atlee wrote in 1937 that the Labour Party Conference 'lays down the policy of the Party and issues instructions which must be carried out by the Executive, the affiliated organizations and its representatives in Parliament and on local authorities…The Labour Party Conference is in fact a parliament of the movement' (quoted in McKenzie, 1963, p. 10). A publication produced by Labour Head Office in 1948, *The Rise of the Labour Party*, further emphasised the supremacy of the party conference – the 'Parliamentary Party carries through its duties within the framework of policy laid down by the Annual Party Conference to which it reports each year. The Parliamentary Party has no power to issue orders to the National Executive, or the Executive to the Parliamentary Party. Both are responsible only to the Party Conference' (quoted in McKenzie, 1963, p. 11).

Although there is a 'deeply ingrained discourse' of membership sovereignty 'based on the idea that the parliamentary group was created to serve the interests of the extra-parliamentary organisation', the independence of the PLP has always been a contentious topic of debate within the party (Pettitt, 2006, p. 291; see also Bille, 1997; McKenzie, 1963, p. 13). As early as 1907 the Labour conference passed a resolution allowing the parliamentary party flexibility in

the 'time and method' by which conference decisions on party policy were to be carried out (McKenzie, 1963, p. 394). More recently decisions in disciplinary matters have affirmed the PLP as a 'sovereign body', a status that Bale (1997, p. 161) argues 'affects the extent to which it can be bound by Conference decisions on matters of policy'.

In 2011 the Labour Conference took a historic step in approving changes to the party's constitution to formally codify the roles and responsibilities of the party leader, and of the broader parliamentary party. The *Refounding Labour* consultation document, circulated before the conference, noted that: 'Our representatives are elected because they carry the Labour banner. There may be a case for adopting a code to which they must all adhere, requiring minimum levels of participation in Parliament…and engagement with local communities' (UK Labour Party, 2011a, p. 18). The final report endorsed by the Conference (UK Labour Party, 2011c, p. 26) included some examples of what may be codified – including the requirement to adhere to the Code of Conduct of the PLP – however, the exact changes are yet to be drafted and approved by the Party. While it appears as though these reforms are responding to parliamentarians' under-performance in a broader sense (particularly in the wake of catalysts such as the expenses scandal), any constitutional changes have the potential to alter the balance between the PLP and the EPO.

The Liberal Democrats and the NZ Greens do not codify the relationship between the party and its elected representatives in their constitutions. The parliamentary party of the Liberal Democrats remains a distinct entity for organisational purposes, governed by its own rules. According to the Liberal Democrats' Constitution, the parliamentary party 'shall be entitled to make such regulations (not being inconsistent with this Constitution) as it thinks fit for the conduct of its own proceedings' (Art. 9.1). Absent explicit constitutional regulation, former NZ Greens' MP Nandor Tanczos regarded the relationship between the Greens' parliamentary party and the broader party organisation as similarly flexible; the influence of party policy upon MPs as akin to 'legislators and judges – they write the law and we interpret it' (Interview).

The constitutions of three parties, the Australian Democrats, the Australian Greens and the Green Party of England and Wales, explicitly attempt to balance MPs' roles as constituency representatives with their duty to the party. The actions and activities of all elected

Australian Greens' MPs must be consistent with the Charter of the Greens (Art. 41.1). All MPs must also adhere to the policies of the Greens, except in circumstances where there is a conflict between the Greens' national policy and the interests of the parliamentarians' constituents and/or their conscience (Art. 41.2). In such circumstances the MP must provide reasons for this action to his/her electorate and the party (Art. 41.3–4). Similarly, the Australian Democrats' Constitution requires that all parliamentarians adhere to party policy, except in instances where it conflicts with the parliamentarian's own view or electoral duty, in which case he/she may vote according to conscience (s 11.3). Although this provision seems to shift the balance of power in favour of the parliamentary party, it is corrected somewhat by a further provision that requires the parliamentarian to report all differences of opinion to the National Executive.

Article 11 of the Constitution of the Green Party of England and Wales places an onus on its elected representatives to remain accountable to the EPO. The article states:

> Green Party members who are elected or otherwise appointed to public office have responsibilities to the public, to the body on which they serve and to the Green Party. Whilst they must fulfil public duties, they also remain accountable to the party (s ii).

> Elected members and other representatives should seek to further the Object and Aims of the Green Party…Their accountability in fulfilling this is to the appropriate Green party/parties corresponding to the Authority they have been elected to (s iii).

The constitution is, however, curiously silent on what 'accountability' involves and the consequences of non-compliance. With respect to party policies and objectives, elected members 'have a responsibility to promote the policies of the national and local green parties, as expressed in the Manifesto for a Sustainable Society and national, regional and local manifestos'. Elected representatives are free to disagree with party policy, but upon publicly stating their own position, 'should at the same time state and explain the position of the Green Party' (Art. 11 (iv)).

The way in which the relationship between the parliamentary party and the extra-parliamentary organisation is codified in party rules and

Table 8.1   Constitutional Regulation of MPs' Relationship to the Party

Adherence to Party	Balancing Party/Parliamentary Duties	No Regulation
Australian Labor Party	Australian Democrats	UK Labour*
NZ Labour Party	Australian Greens Green Party of England & Wales	Liberal Democrats NZ Greens

Sources: Party constitutions and rules.
*Note that following the approval of the *Refounding Labour* report at the 2011 September Conference the party has pledged to amend its constitution to codify the roles, rights and duties of its MPs.

constitutions is illustrated in Table 8.1 above. Labour parties in New Zealand and Australia conform to the expectation that the party in public office should be subservient (at least in a formal sense) to the EPO – a characteristic of their historical development and one of the distinguishing features of the mass party model. Interestingly, unlike their counterparts in Western Europe, green parties in the UK and Australia acknowledge the potential for the role of MPs as both constituency and party representatives to conflict, and make provision for this in their constitutions. European Green parties, for example in Germany, have historically emphasised the role of their elected MPs as party delegates much more heavily and demanded adherence to party policy and the views of the membership (Kreusser, 2003, p. 6). This indicates that there could be something culturally or constitutionally specific about parties operating in Westminster systems in recognising the conflicting roles of an MP, but further research is required to test this proposition.

Alternate accountability mechanisms

If policy transmission between the party and the parliament is to effectively occur as per the model of parliamentary party delegates outlined in the party constitutions surveyed above, there must be some mechanism(s) by which a party's parliamentarians can be held to account if they fail to abide by the policy directions set by the broader party organisation. As I have argued, in Westminster parliaments such accountability cannot be sought by legal means as MPs are essentially viewed as free agents and the law will not uphold any agreement that purports to constrain the independence of MPs' decision-making. Consequently, parties rely upon mechanisms internal to their

organisation to ensure that policy decisions are complied with, the most common of which are analysed below.

Providing explanations and transparent decision-making

For those party constitutions that acknowledge and balance the duties of an MP as having to fulfil both public and party functions, the option of taking a conscience vote and voting contrary to party policy is always subject to explanation. In the Australian Democrats, this explanation must be provided to the party's executive and in the Australian Greens it must be provided to both the executive and the electorate. When elected representatives of the English Greens 'do not agree with the party and publicly state their own position, they should at the same time state and explain the position of the Green Party' (2011, Art. 11 (iv)). A similar practice is observed in the Liberal Democrats, although it is not formally codified: if parliamentarians respond to a debate 'in a way that is completely against current party policy, they have to do so under their own name, not on behalf of the party' (Simpson, Interview). Apart from encouraging transparency and avoiding confusion, there is very little coercive value in this mechanism, and it is usually seen as a precursor to the more effective process of candidate selection.

Many parties will include reports from and questions to members of the parliamentary party on their conference agendas. For example, the NZ Labour parliamentary party is constitutionally required to present a report to Conference of its work in the previous year (Article 297). However, there is only limited evidence to suggest that this forum functions as an effective mechanism in pursuing accountability. The primary reason is the increasing tendency for party conferences to function as stage-managed media events, where debate is tightly controlled and reports serve as vehicles for advertising rather than scrutiny (Faucher-King, 2005; Button, 2002, p. 42). Given the high-profile events that many party conferences have become, it appears that party members may be more reticent in airing their grievances for the sake of maintaining a unified external image and increasing their chances of electoral success. Furthermore, the party conference as a mechanism of accountability only operates retrospectively and often infrequently – for example, the ALP National Conference convenes only once every three years. Even then there is a suggestion that the ALP conference has become a forum in which decisions of the parliamentary party are ratified rather than questioned:

> On a number of occasions between 1983 and 1996 the cabinet or the prime minister committed Labor to quite new policy initiatives

without first obtaining the blessing of the party's National Conference. For instance, cabinet introduced tertiary education fees, announced the sale of Qantas and Australian Airlines and moved to restructure the telecommunications industry. Afterwards it used Labor's factional system to engineer the National Conference votes required to formally bring ALP policy into line with that already announced by the government (Ward and Stewart, 2006, p. 158).

The ineffectiveness of the 2008 NSW State Labor Conference's motion to reject electricity privatisation and the Premier's prompt dismissal of this decision provides a telling example of the limited utility of the party conference as a means by which to direct and scrutinise the actions of the parliamentary party, and the inherent contradictions between party and constituency representation. In May 2008 the Labor Conference, the party's formal policy-making body, voted overwhelmingly to reject the State Labor government's plans to privatise electricity by 702 to 107 votes. Although privatisation was publicly advocated by the majority of the Parliamentary Labor Party, it was strongly opposed by union delegates, and the outcome of the vote sent a clear signal to the Labor government that the party machine did not support its actions in office (see Cavalier, 2010, Chapters 4 and 5). However, the day after the vote, Premier Morris Iemma announced his intention to continue with the privatisation despite the unequivocal opinion of the Conference, justifying his divergence from party policy as a decision 'taken in the best interests of the people of NSW' (ABC, 2008). The decision that is always open to an MP to act either in the public interest (when it diverges from that of the party), and to justify his/her departure from the will of the conference on pubic interest grounds illustrates the problematic nature of the party conference as a mechanism for policy accountability in the broader context of representative government.

Candidate selection processes

Akin to general elections, which constitute the primary way that citizens hold governments accountable, regular candidate selection contests within political parties are a potential means by which party members can seek responsiveness from their MPs (Bowler et al., 1999, p. 7; Hazan and Rahat, 2010). If members do not like the actions of a particular MP, which could include advocating or not advocating for a particular policy position, they may choose simply not to endorse his/her candidature at the next election. Interviews with party MPs

revealed that they regarded this as the most effective way of achieving accountability, or in Australian Greens' senator Christine Milne's words, the best 'controlling mechanism' through which to influence the legislative decisions of the party in public office. A similar awareness of the power of candidate selections imbued parliamentarians' thinking, regardless of the party to which they belonged:

> When we Democrat senators come up for preselection, members have the right to throw you out. You've always got to look at what's happening with your membership base (Lees, Interview).

> …Of course Liberal Democrat MPs have to be reselected each election. If the party members really think you have been going away from party policy they could hold you accountable (Davey, Interview).

In addition to acting as a means of accountability, candidate selection processes also function to install potential parliamentary representatives who are, in theory, sympathetic to the views of the membership and the position of the party in instances where consultation with the EPO is not possible, therefore providing for a type of accountability through responsiveness:

> If you're in the situation in parliament where a piece of legislation or package of reforms is presented, you simply wouldn't have the time or the resources to involve party members in making those sorts of decisions. That's why we have a pre-selection process. The people that elect you to be the Labor candidate for a particular area have to have some faith that you are able to make decisions on their behalf (Plibersek, Interview).

Candidates for parliament are directly elected by their local parties/ regional divisions in the Australian Democrats, the Liberal Democrats (*Constitution*, s 11.5), the Australian Greens (s 40.1), the English Greens (Bye-Law 3a), UK Labour (s 5C) and the ALP (Part C, s 15). Acknowledging the potential influence of candidate selection, the UK Labour Party's leadership has even attempted to harness the power of preselections by circulating voting records to constituency parties in the hope of disciplining MPs who do not toe 'the party line' through the disapproval of their own members (see Cowley, 2005, p. 64). Conversely, Labour parliamentarians in the 1950s were able to insulate

themselves from discipline by the party leadership by receiving assurances from their constituency parties that they would be supported in any selection contest (Epstein, 1956, p. 372).

In New Zealand, both constituency and party list candidates in the Greens are elected by the rank and file, either in local meetings (constituency candidates) or by a postal ballot of the membership (list candidates). The NZ Labour Party is the only outlying case, with selections conducted by selection committees comprised of executive members and local area representatives (ss 242–55). This is particularly interesting because, of the three democracies, New Zealand is the only one to regulate the process, specifying that parties must follow 'democratic procedures in candidate selection' (*Electoral Act* 1993, s 71). Consequently, the presence of several representatives elected from the membership in candidate selection panels (as opposed to direct democratic procedures in the selection of candidates) must be sufficient to fulfil the requirements of the Act, although this has not been legally challenged.

Nonetheless, candidate selection as a mode of policy accountability is weak for several reasons. First, apart from the fact that it operates retrospectively, de-selection can only occur in tandem with a general election, hence the opportunities that members have to express their disapproval are limited, particularly in legislatures where the term of office of an elected representative is quite lengthy, for example the Australian Senate (six years). The practice of 'branch stacking', in which candidates bankroll new memberships in local branches in return for support in candidate selection contests, has caused significant controversies in Australian major parties, particularly the ALP. Further, often candidate selection by the rank and file is subject to conditions set by the party's executive, such as affirmative action measures (for example, the ALP's measures to have not less than 40 per cent of seats held by women from 2012). In other instances, a prior approval or the subsequent ratification of a candidate's selection is required by the executive. This process of vetting candidates occurs within the UK Labour Party (s 5), the Liberal Democrats (Art. 11.1, 11.3) and the Australian Democrats (Art. 11.2). While these conditions may be necessary or desirable to meet overarching democratic goals (for example, gender equality and the representation of minorities), the trade-off is that the members' choice may not be realised. Consistent with their ideology and grassroots ethos, Green parties across the three democracies surveyed were the only party type opposed to executive interference beyond that necessary for administrative purposes. For example,

the Australian Greens' Constitution provides that 'the National Council may formulate guidelines to regulate the selection of candidates, but not to override a fair and democratic process' (s 40.4).

As part of its 2011 National Review, the ALP recommended the adoption of primaries for the selection of its lower house candidates, allowing party supporters and the general public to participate in the selection of parliamentary candidates (Bracks et al., 2011, pp. 22–3). Primaries have also been trialled by the National Party in Australia, used routinely by the Conservatives in the UK and have been supported for introduction in the UK Labour Party by David Miliband (Orr, 2011, pp. 967–8). Previously restricted to states such as Iceland, Taiwan, Mexico, Spain and the United States (Hazan and Rahat, 2010, p. 40), primaries constitute an important development as the ability to participate in candidate selection contests in Westminster democracies has traditionally been an exclusive right of the membership. The emerging trend to primaries has important implications for parties as policy organisations. While increasing the inclusiveness of the contest, primaries at the same time weaken the accountability of parliamentarians to party members by diluting their voting rights, indirectly reducing policy influence. If primaries are adopted by political parties, candidate selection will weaken as a mechanism for achieving accountability to the party as the selectors (to whom the parliamentarian is accountable/responsible) widens – to include not only party members, but supporters and those in the local community. Hence policy responsiveness and accountability will continue to shift from the membership to the broader community, lessening the influence of the former and supporting the idea of the hollowing out of the party. While such reforms have often been advertised as democratising the party organisation, the question is for whom: members, leaders or the general public?

Party meetings

Another potential way in which MPs feel that they are responsible to the party membership is through attendance at local party meetings, which not only provides parliamentarians with the opportunity to explain their legislative activities and actions, but also enables them to proactively ascertain the views of party members, thus presenting a more dynamic type of accountability. In this way, responsiveness is secured through ongoing involvement and continuing links with the broader party organisation and participating in its activities. However, it is largely a voluntary mechanism, and there are significant variations

in participation amongst individual MPs depending on the importance they place upon attending these meetings (see discussion next chapter, pp. 179–81).

The extent to which MPs will listen to the views of the party membership varies within parties and depends on 'people's own personal positions…how much they think it's important' (Albanese, Interview). An innovative approach adopted by Australian Democrats senator Andrew Bartlett was to use surveys of his local membership to solicit opinion on controversial issues undergoing debate in parliament. However, this type of consultation is an isolated example and the majority of MPs prefer to consult with their membership through more conventional forums such as party meetings and issue discussions, albeit on an *ad hoc* basis.

Even in social democratic parties, MPs do not view their attendance at party meetings as an exercise in delegation – to receive orders from the membership – but rather as one of consultation, debate and to extend the policy process *to* the membership:

> I feel a strong sense of accountability, to my constituency as well as to party members. I am not, though, their delegate to parliament and I am sure most understand that. How the accountability works is that I explain, respond to questions, account for my votes, actions and views, and they have the right to ask questions and to put arguments back. My constituency party has never passed a resolution attempting to tell me to do something; they know that is not the nature of the relationship. But they do know I will always answer, discuss, take up concerns, and let them know honestly my own views (UK Labour MP, Interview).

Attendance at local party group meetings and maintaining links with social movements by participating in protest activity was emphasised to a significantly greater extent by Green Party MPs, who hold a sense of 'responsibility' towards attending (Tanczos, Interview), and who regard it both as a primary accountability mechanism and an opportunity to assess the views of the party on contentious legislation.

> From a personal perspective, I try to make sure I'm very actively involved in the party as well as being a politician…I've never had to make a decision inconsistent with our policy, but if it isn't covered in our policy I'd make sure I talked to people about what we're doing and I'd make sure I get their feedback and that people are happy

with the decision that we're taking. If there's a big issue coming up, I make sure that's discussed (Siewert, Interview).

For me personally, [accountability] is being a member of a local group, going to those meetings, giving a report on what's happening in parliament, answering questions. I'm accountable in the sense that there is also an expectation that you will attend meetings of other groups. If they're involved in some sort of public issue, a contentious issue, if you can you will go along: often to speak or at least to participate (Hale, Interview).

There'd hardly be a meeting go by where you wouldn't have the MPs at those meetings. And I would say that that would be the main level of our accountability within the party – going to those meetings. We give reports. We participate in much of the discussion. It's an opportunity to catch up with people from around the State, both formally and informally, in a meeting structure (Rhiannon, Interview).

Candidates for public office in the NZ Greens sign a pledge to maintain regular and ongoing contact with the Province in which they live if elected, which includes the expectation that MPs report back to provincial meetings – 'it's a way of giving them feedback, but on occasion it has been used to question what MPs have said and done' (Clendon, Interview). The UK Labour Party has also placed faith in the use of candidate contracts as a means of trying to increase engagement between those elected and their constituency party members and supporters, adopting the measure as part of the *Refounding Labour* reforms approved by the Conference in September 2011. Performance and engagement are then, in turn, tied to resource allocation – such as funding for newsletters and leaflets (UK Labour Party, 2011a, p. 11).

However, incentives for participation cannot come from coercion alone. Institutional frameworks can also be created to support transparency, which in turn may alter political culture over time. For example, membership participation in the Australian Greens 'is actively encouraged through formal rules allowing members to attend *all* meetings of the party, even if they are not always accorded full speaking rights' (Miragliotta, 2006, pp. 588–9). Similarly, within the English Greens, all meetings of elected and appointed Green Party bodies at the national level are open to members (of more than one year) to attend as observers (2011, s 12(v)). By a similar token, representatives

of the extra-parliamentary party in NZ Labour have the right to attend meetings of the parliamentary caucus.

The extent of consultation and the levels of engagement MPs maintain with their extra-parliamentary party organisations is one indicator of the strength of party influence upon legislators and the potential of party meetings to function as mechanisms of accountability. The evidence indicates that whilst party members may potentially constitute an influential source of information and opinion influencing the decision-making processes of MPs, levels of engagement vary significantly amongst parliamentarians and are largely dependent on the individual initiative on the part of the MP to seek this out. The Greens were the only party grouping of MPs that consistently emphasised the importance of ongoing consultation and communication between the parliamentary party and the party's membership.

Other mechanisms of accountability

Another possible means of holding party parliamentarians accountable is through disciplinary bodies set up within the framework of the party organisation. Although the power of these bodies varies significantly between parties, they exist in some form in all parties except the New Zealand and Australian Greens. For example, the Liberal Democrats part-appoint and part-elect a Federal Appeals Panel and the ALP elects a National Appeals Tribunal. In the UK and NZ Labour Parties, dispute resolution is within the power of these parties' executive councils (NEC and NZ Council). However, in the majority of instances they are composed of elected or appointed party elites and essentially create a situation in which the leadership disciplines itself, reinforcing the disjuncture between accountability to the party executive and accountability to the wider membership. Furthermore, disciplinary bodies are by their very nature antagonistic; highlighting and prolonging disputes within a party.

Another example is the informal processes of debate and discussion within parties that arise in response to particular topics and that may provide a greater level of scrutiny. As the Liberal Democrats' Ed Davey comments, this includes self-policing amongst parliamentarians and the prompt commentary and criticism provided by and disseminated through online media:

> If a spokesperson says something which is quite out of line with the policy directions and values of the party, you can bet your bottom dollar that other parliamentarians will spot this. So other MPs will

say 'what is that about?' and you can also be absolutely clear, and even more so in the age of bloggers, that party members will be saying 'what on earth did they say?' So even in those moments where there isn't an official party policy or process, the party is still influential.

However, as Gibson et al. (forthcoming) argue, while unofficial party websites and blogs such as Liberal Democrat Voice and Labour Home provide an important alternative forum for party members to express their views, those views do not tend to be as critical of the party as might be expected, and during election periods even take on a supportive role.

Finally, an innovative attempt to improve the accountability of parliamentarians has been implemented by the NZ Greens in the form of 'performance evaluations'. As former activist and now parliamentarian Dave Clendon explained, the impetus behind the evaluations was the perception that some Green parliamentarians were 'under-performing':

They just weren't getting through the work, they weren't building relationships with their core constituencies and they were taken to task. Because there weren't structured channels for doing that, it got really tense. So we did try to establish a formal mechanism where you can say 'look, we're not happy with your performance, can we ask you why'? In a performance review that's the question you ask – how can I help you to do your job better rather than blame (Interview).

Formal performance evaluations are conducted with the full consent and cooperation of Green MPs, who are assessed by a group of approximately ten people including the other MPs, parliamentary party executive assistants and researchers in three areas: parliamentary, caucus and party performance. However, the evaluations are designed to be administered within the parliamentary party and while MPs regard this as useful in 'learning something about our own failings and strengths' (Bradford, Interview) or as a 'professional development' exercise (Tanczos, Interview), the results of the evaluations are not disclosed to the broader party or membership. The Greens have also had some difficulty in creating criteria for evaluation beyond subjective questions and blunt quantitative measures (for example, the number of press releases issued). Nevertheless, 'it is a real ambition of ours to get something in

place which is robust and that Caucus is comfortable with and particularly that the executive is comfortable with' (Clendon, Interview).

Accountability in policy transferral

Although party government has become the dominant paradigm in political governance over the last century, many of the requirements for its effective operation potentially conflict with the norms of Burkean representative government, developed from the Westminster parliamentary tradition. One of the most significant tensions is the dual role MPs play as both party and constituency representatives. Whilst there is some variation by party type in the way in which these two roles are acknowledged and reconciled in party rules and constitutions, these documents generally paint a picture of a party MP as that of a delegate to the policy decisions of conference or at the very least, accountable to the extra-parliamentary party organisation for decisions taken in the legislative chamber. However, this conception of the role of an MP stands in contrast to expectations of parliamentarians as expressed in the common law, which closely follow the Burkean tradition of a trustee. Consequently, political parties and party members do not have recourse to the law to hold their parliamentarians accountable if they decide (either as individuals or a group) to diverge from the dictates of party policy.

Political parties have therefore sought to hold their parliamentarians accountable through alternate means endogenous to the party, through engineering 'specific organisational structural instruments that try to guarantee the undistorted transmission of the political intentions and desires of the represented' (Kreusser, 2003, p. 8). These instruments have been implemented and utilised by parties with varying levels of success. For example, while candidate selection processes are generally regarded as effective in creating responsiveness in the minds of MPs themselves, disciplinary bodies are viewed as less so. Generally, retrospective measures such as reports to conference, particularly considering the time lag between political events and organised party meetings, are ineffective in prompting MPs to consider and respond to members' views. Some mechanisms, such as candidate selection processes where vetting from the party organisation is involved, may increase accountability to the party's executive, but not necessarily to its rank and file. Primaries may well serve to shift the focus of accountability to party supporters, or even the general electorate. A more effective mechanism is a culture of engagement and responsiveness to the broader party

organisation (including the membership) in facilitating policy transferral – seen most clearly amongst Green MPs in their attitudes towards attendance at party meetings. This suggests that in the absence of external enforcement mechanisms, party culture and the socialisation of both members and parliamentarians alike to a 'partnership' model of policy development and application is more effective in securing accountability than coercive measures alone.

9
Attitudes to Representation

The previous chapter examined the various ways in which political parties attempt to regulate the behaviour of their elected representatives, through formal and informal means such as pledges, candidate selection and party meetings. One of the difficulties encountered by parties and parliamentarians in identifying and enforcing their respective responsibilities is the multi-dimensional nature of representation, which involves public, parliamentary and party duties. Whereas the last chapter focused on representation from the perspective of an extra-parliamentary political party, this chapter analyses the influence of party on representation, based on a comparative analysis of parliamentarians' perceptions of, and attitudes towards their legislative roles. Parliamentarians' role perceptions structure their legislative behaviour and hence from a policy perspective, influence the point at which party policy is transferred to the legislative arena.

The chapter examines several elements of this interaction: first, whether MPs see themselves as party partisans, and whether representing one's political party conflicts (both theoretically and in actual practice) with a duty to the parliament and representing a geographic electorate. Second, the chapter analyses the extent to which political parties actually influence parliamentarians' legislative decision-making on an everyday basis, specifically by assessing the impact of party policy, MPs' engagement with their constituency parties, and the dictates of the party's parliamentary leadership. An analysis of the pervasiveness of these different dimensions is designed to address the broader question of how responsive MPs are to their political parties and the policies on which they were elected – an important aspect of the operation of party government in modern democracies and a crucial element in the chain of linkage as outlined in Chapter 2. If party organisations have

little impact on the way in which MPs perceive and carry out their legislative tasks, this provides further evidence that there is a fundamental disconnect between party members and parliamentarians in intra-party policy development.

Dimensions of the legislative role: Party, electorate and parliament

The first section of this chapter looks at the salience of party in shaping the attitudes MPs possess to their legislative roles and, in particular, the interests and constituencies they represent. If the chain of party linkage is to be maintained, we would expect MPs to be responsive to their party organisations and the views of the membership. However, as the previous chapter illustrated, representation is not a uni-dimensional task and MPs have several (potentially competing) roles in addition to party representation, first and foremost constituency representation, that they need to play.

The most common role categorisations that have been applied to MPs are the *delegate* of voters, the Burkean *trustee* and the hybrid *politico*, distinctions that are based on the degree of agency an individual possesses in fulfilling their legislative role (Wahlke et al., 1962, p. 16; Emy, 1975). The Burkean trustee has a significant degree of independence to determine issues of policy. While the representative is expected to pursue the interests of their constituency, their primary duty is to the parliament (synonymous with the nation). Conversely, delegates are bound to adhere to the wishes of their constituents. Developed within the context of US congressional politics (see also Miller and Stokes, 1963), the agency referred to in these role orientations has been traditionally determined by reference to voters in geographic constituencies, and hence the main dimension of conflict is between the legislator as a representative of the electorate or of the nation, rather than between the legislator and his or her party.

However, this role categorisation has become further complicated by the realities of party politics (see Pitkin, 1967, pp. 147–8). Legislative scholars have found it difficult to apply the above role typology to democracies outside the US, where party discipline is a prominent feature of parliamentary politics (e.g. Thomassen, 1994, p. 242; Thomassen and Andeweg, 2004, pp. 47–9). Looking at Westminster, Searing (1994, p. 16) suggested four roles: parliamentarians as policy advocates, ministerial aspirants, parliament men and constituency members. However, none of these roles capture the primacy of party and reflect the

aspirations of MPs rather than to whom they are accountable. Thomassen (1994, p. 248) has suggested that we adopt a responsible party model of representation, 'in which, not trusteeship, but rather a delegate role with respect to party, is an essential characteristic'. In recognition of the importance of party, Katz (1999) has added another role orientation to that of the delegate and the trustee, the 'partisan'. Although the 'normal expectation is that the positions of party organization, voters, and the representative herself will coincide…from this perspective, in cases of conflict the representative's primary responsibility is to support the positions taken by her party as an organisation' (Katz, 1999, p. 63). Therefore, from the literature to date we can identify three main dimensions of the legislative role that MPs need to balance, and which could theoretically conflict: the electorate, the parliament and the party. This tripartite categorisation is similar to that adopted by Rush and Giddings (2011, p. 18), distinguishing between the constituency role, the scrutiny role and the partisan role.

Previous literature on the significance of party on legislative role perceptions

Although party orientation seems to be the principal factor that explains MPs' voting behaviour in Westminster-style and many European legislatures when measured by roll call votes (Thomassen, 1994; Converse and Pierce, 1986; Barnes, 1977), there has been little analysis to date of how party membership influences parliamentarians' role orientations and their style and focus of representation. In one sense this is a reflection of the dominance of the party government model of representation in legislative studies, which conceives of only two key actors in the process of representation: parties and voters (Thomassen, 1994, p. 7; Katz, 1987, p. 7; Rose, 1969, pp. 416–18). Parties are regarded as unitary actors and the prevalence of party discipline is such that the role of individual MPs is largely insignificant – to the extent that the agency of individual MPs has been neglected in contemporary research on parliamentary representation. For example, recent empirical studies of individual MPs' attitudes to representation and their legislative responsibilities tend to focus on instances where they have either rebelled from the party line (see for example Cowley, 2002, 2005); or the vote has been one of conscience (see Judge, 1999, pp. 62–9; Pattie et al., 1998).

The vast majority of existing role orientation studies primarily focus on the differences between legislatures and their respective electoral

systems, and subsequently do not discriminate between MPs of particular parties in reporting their findings (see for example Patzelt, 1997; Wessels, 1999; and Thomassen and Esaiasson, 2006). Of those studies that have examined the impact of party orientation on role perceptions, the results are mixed. Research on the European Parliament and the US Congress has found the effect of party on role perceptions to be very weak (Navarro, 2005; Katz, 1999, pp. 72–3). As Page et al. (1984, p. 751) note, 'representation occurs mostly independent of party…to a substantial extent, congressional partisanship is an elite (and perhaps interest group related) phenomenon'. However, given that Congressional party discipline is notoriously weak (Katz, 2007, pp. 143–5) and that scholars are yet to determine whether an identifiable party system exists at the European Union level, these results are not wholly unexpected.

A comparison of several studies undertaken in states whose national legislatures exhibit higher levels of party cohesion suggests that party affiliation nonetheless does influence representative style, broadly along left-right ideological dimensions with left MPs more likely to perceive of themselves as party representatives and conservative MPs as trustees. Rush and Giddings (2011, pp. 104–9) found that when UK parliamentarians were asked, 'who do you represent?' Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs ranked constituents first, but Conservatives ranked the nation second and the party third, while the order was reversed for Labour and the Liberal Democrats were in the middle. In Denmark, Damgaard (1997, p. 84) reports that whilst centre, liberal and conservative parliamentarians are strongly individualist, the socialists advocate the primacy of party. A similar pattern has been reported between social democratic, liberal and conservative groupings in the UK (Cowley, 2002; Rush and Giddings, 2002, pp. 11–13). Andeweg's (1997) research into the Dutch parliament is the only study published in English that also includes a green party in a breakdown of representative orientations by party type. His findings support the suggestion that the focus of representation varies considerably by party along the left/right dimension, with all of the *GroenLinks* MPs mentioning their party's voters as the focus of representation, compared to three-quarters of the Labour Party (PvdA) members and about one-third of conservative Liberal (VVD) members (Andeweg, 1997, p. 120). In both Australia and Norway there is significant variation in role conceptions between MPs of different parties, but neither case corresponds with the simple left/right scale. Although Norwegian conservative parties adhered to the trend of containing relatively more trustee MPs amongst

their ranks, the Socialist left party did not fit this image with equal numbers of trustees and delegates in its party group (Heidar, 1997, p. 101). Curiously, Studlar and McAllister's study of Australian representatives' role conceptions in the early 1990s revealed a converse trend, with parliamentary candidates of the conservative Liberal/National grouping most likely to identify themselves as partisans (Studlar and McAllister, 1994, p. 395). However, this study did not include any Green MPs and the results (for comparative purposes) are somewhat 'muddied' by the inclusion of all major party candidates for the Australian Parliament, including but not limited to sitting MPs.

Considering this previous research, I investigate the suggestion that MPs' attitudes to their representative roles are shaped by the party to which they belong, and that the effects and strength of party influence will broadly correspond to left/right ideological dimensions. Therefore parliamentarians of leftist parties should exhibit the qualities of a party partisan (and be more willing to abide by or apply party policy) to a greater extent than party MPs situated in the centre/centre right of the ideological spectrum.

Role perceptions in the Westminster parliamentary tradition: Previous empirical survey results

Before turning to the analysis of the effects of political parties on role perceptions, it is important to note that the institutional context (the parliament) within which legislators operate is potentially a significant determinant of their legislative behaviour and attitudes to representation (Rush and Giddings, 2002). As argued in the previous chapter, the constitutional design of representative democracy in the UK, Australia and New Zealand is rooted in an overall conception of the role of the parliamentarian as an independent representative, and as such this could be considered as the 'default' perception of the representative role.

The results of surveys conducted amongst MPs of Westminster parliaments generally reflect this notion of the 'independent parliamentarian'. In the UK, individual differences in role perceptions can be ascertained from previous studies of Westminster and the British Representation Study (BRS) data (see for example Searing, 1994). Most Westminster MPs, regardless of their party, share a common conception of their roles as 'independent' legislators. As Burnell (1980, p. 14) has argued, 'they see themselves as representatives very much defined by Burke: they claim the right to exercise their individual judgement, and on that basis to treat the Party's Election Manifesto

and Programme as little more than advisory'. In the 1997 BRS, West-minster MPs were asked whether they should vote with their party, regardless of conscience or the national interest. Only a small percentage of MPs actually agreed with this statement, but of those who did, the majority were from the Labour Party (19 per cent for party over conscience and 10 per cent for party over the national interest, followed by the Conservatives (10 per cent conscience; 8 per cent national interest) and then the Liberal Democrats (4 per cent in both cases). The greater propensity of Labour parliamentarians to view themselves as partisans was also reported by Rush and Giddings (2002, p. 11), who found that although all British MPs regarded themselves as representing their constituents first and foremost, 'Conservatives were more likely to place the nation second and the party third, whereas Labour respondents placed the party second and the nation third. This emphasis on party among Labour respondents permeated most aspects of their role perceptions'.

Table 9.1 Situations Where UK MPs Would Vote Against the Party Whip (%)

	Labour			Liberal Democrats			Conservatives		
	All	Some	Never	All	Some	Never	All	Some	Never
Disagree with Party	2	81	17	–	100	–	–	95	5
Disagree, but in Manifesto	4	41	55	–	71	29	–	65	35
Believe Constits. Disagree	–	80	20	–	71	29	5	85	10
Risk Defeating Govt.	6	48	46	–	86	14	5	75	20
Risk Bringing Down Govt.	2	21	77	–	57	43	5	30	65

N = 75. *Source*: British Representation Study 2005.

In the 2005 BRS, MPs were asked more nuanced questions as to their attitudes to representation; specifically the circumstances in which they would vote against the party whip. Again, the results in Table 9.1 confirm the independent thought of Commons MPs, the majority of whom would vote against their party in some situations even if this threatened to defeat the government. However, in instances where the MP disagreed with the party's position, regardless of the reason, Labour MPs were most likely to toe the party line.

Evidence of the saliency of party upon representatives' conceptions of their legislative roles in Australia is more mixed. Although the Australian Democrats, like the UK Liberal Democrats, are least likely to identify themselves as partisans, the 1993 Australian Candidate Study (ACS) found a converse trend amongst the major parties: Liberal (conservative) candidates were more likely to view themselves as partisan than Labor candidates (Studlar and McAllister, 1994, p. 395). Nevertheless, it should be noted that the representational study was conducted amongst all major party candidates standing for election, not only sitting MPs, so the results should be compared with caution. Indeed, in a subsequent publication based on the same data but only including successful candidates and previous incumbents, Studlar and McAllister (1996, p. 76) found that conservative legislators 'are less likely than their Labor counterparts to emphasize party factors and are more likely to emphasize the free mandate', echoing the British experience.

This pattern of role perceptions amongst party parliamentarians was once again reaffirmed in the 2010 ACS (Table 9.2), but with a slightly more detailed question that included a number of representative interests. This study did not include the Australian Democrats as by 2008 they had lost parliamentary representation.

Table 9.2 Candidates' Perceptions of an MP's Representative Role (% in agreement)

	Greens	ALP	Liberal/National
Party	21	18	5
Voters	9	7	3
Electorate	53	65	91
Entire country	16	10	2
Specific group	1	0	0

N = 246 *Source*: ACS (2010).

In this survey, candidates of all political parties ranked their representative duty to their electorate first. Party was ranked second by all candidates, but by a higher percentage of candidates in the Greens (21 per cent) and the ALP (18 per cent) in contrast to the Liberal National Coalition (5 per cent). A higher proportion of Green candidates also emphasised representing the entire country – this could be explained by the party's focus on environmental issues, which typically cut across local and regional boundaries and often require a national or international response. All candidates surveyed did not see that representing a

particular group in society was an important aspect of their legislative role – indicating that where groups that are aligned with political parties (such as unions, for example) their interests are either subsumed within another category (for example, the party or voters) or that this is not a significant concern for individual legislators.

Another way of looking at how political parties might shape parliamentarians' behaviour is by analysing how much time they devote to activities associated with the legislative role, for example, attending party meetings versus speaking in public forums, dealing with constituents' problems etc. The candidate surveys that have been conducted in the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia enable us to make broad comparisons about the relative importance (in terms of the time spent on the activity) on these various tasks. Tables 9.3 to 9.6 draw together the results of candidate surveys in Australia, New Zealand and the UK conducted between 2001 and 2005, which asked comparable questions of MPs on the allocation of their working time.

Table 9.3 Hours Spent (per Month) Attending Local Community Functions (%)

Party	Less than 10	10–20	More than 20
Labour (NZ)	31	**44**	25
Greens (NZ)	40	**60**	–
ALP	9	43	**48**
Greens (Aust.)	**90**	10	–
Democrats (Aust.)	**93**	7	–
Labour (UK)	**36**	29	35
Liberal Democrats	25	25	**50**

Sources: BRS 2005 (N = 71); NZCS 2002 (N = 45); ACS 2001 (N = 60).

Table 9.4 Hours Spent (per Month) Dealing with Constituents' Problems (%)

Party	Less than 10	10–20	More than 20
Labour (NZ)	12	**44**	44
Greens (NZ)	–	40	60
ALP	6	15	79
Greens (Aust.)	**80**	–	20
Democrats (Aust.)	77	8	15
Labour (UK)	9	23	68
Liberal Democrats	37.5	25	37.5

Sources: BRS 2005 (N = 73); NZCS 2002 (N = 44); ACS 2001 (N = 52).

Table 9.5 Hours Spent (per Month) Speaking at Public Meetings (%)

Party	Less than 10	10–20	More than 20
Labour (NZ)	56	25	19
Greens (NZ)	–	40	60
ALP	70	21	9
Greens (Aust.)	90	10	–
Democrats (Aust.)	83	17	–
Labour (UK)	83	15	2
Liberal Democrats	75	25	–

Sources: BRS 2005 (N = 70); NZCS 2002 (N = 45); ACS 2001 (N = 55).

Table 9.6 Hours Spent (per Month) Attending Party Meetings (%)

Party	Less than 10	10–20	More than 20
Labour (NZ)	63	31	6
Greens (NZ)	40	40	20
ALP	64	25	11
Greens (Aust.)	90	10	–
Democrats (Aust.)	75	25	–
Labour (UK)	81	19	–
Liberal Democrats	78	11	11

Sources: BRS 2005 (N = 70); NZCS 2002 (N = 46); ACS 2001 (N = 62).

The 2005 BRS and the 2002 New Zealand Candidate Study (NZCS) are the most recent data on parliamentary activities that are available for the United Kingdom and New Zealand. The Australian Candidate Studies from 2004 to 2007 did not include questions that enable a longitudinal comparison of the direct influence of party, parliament or the electorate on the role conceptions of parliamentarians; however, these questions were included again in the 2010 ACS. Data for the ALP and the Greens from the 2010 survey is presented in Table 9.7.

The strongest trend evident in the above tables is that parliamentarians, regardless of their party orientation, spend significantly less time attending party meetings than on other aspects of the legislative role. In the 2010 ACS, time spent on party fundraising was also relatively small in the both the ALP and the Greens. This is particularly interesting when compared to time spent on constituents' problems, which figures more prominently amongst MPs of the social democratic parties – suggesting that if party is a strong factor shaping conceptions of the representative task, this is not reflected by a disproportionately greater

Table 9.7 Hours Spent (per month) on Parliamentary Activities (% of Australian MPs)

	Australian Labor Party			Australian Greens		
	Less than 10	10–20	More than 20	Less than 10	10–20	More than 20
Public Meetings	52	37	11	91	9	0
Community Functions	25	11	64	82	18	0
Constituents' Problems	24	12	64	75	10	15
Party Meetings	76	15	9	81	19	0
Party Fundraising	83	7	10	100	0	0

Average N = 82. *Source*: ACS (2010).

amount of time spent on party activities. Parliamentarians of all parties (with the exception of the NZ Greens) also spend comparatively little time attending and speaking at public meetings. Outside the parliament, the bulk of a parliamentarian's time is devoted to attending community functions and dealing with constituency concerns. Within each party family the amount of time spent on these tasks appears to be distributed fairly evenly between individuals in the party, although (as mentioned) there is some evidence to suggest that a greater proportion of social democratic MPs spend more time dealing with constituents' problems: 44 per cent of NZ Labour, 79 per cent of ALP (this dropped to 46 per cent in 2010) and 68 per cent of UK Labour respondents spent on average more than 20 hours per month on this task.

   The only outlying cases in terms of time spent on the local community/constituency function are the Australian Greens and the Australian Democrats – the vast majority of whose parliamentarians spent less than ten hours per month on these tasks. This could be explained by the fact that these MPs are not elected to parliament by a local constituency (rather the electors of a State) and hence do not perform a constituency function. Further, questions to address the time spent on parliamentary activities (for example, committee work, debates etc.) were not included in the ACS. Time spent on such parliamentary activities may have explained the relatively smaller timeshare allocated to constituency and party work by the Australian Greens and the Democrats, which have traditionally focused on exerting influence and securing governmental accountability through parliamentary means. In the 2010 ACS, Greens parliamentary candidates ascribed a relatively greater importance to activities on the floor of the parliament as a fundamental component of a legislator's role: 44 per cent of Greens' candidates saw this as very important, compared to 28 per cent of ALP candidates.

Observations from interviews

The interviews conducted with MPs confirmed legislative independence as the 'default' perception amongst members of Westminster-style parliaments. Although party is a significant socialising force and this independence is subject to a number of organisational constraints such as party discipline and the resources and time available to members to form a considered opinion (discussed below), none of these influences was seen by interviewees as compromising their agency. If any tensions did arise between party and electoral representation, most parliamentarians adopted a number of creative approaches to resolving

conflict, whether this occurred through practical measures or theoretical reasoning.

Social democratic MPs

The partisan nature of representation and the duty of an MP as a 'party representative' was a perception that occurred most frequently amongst Labour MPs in the three parliaments. For example, one NZ Labour parliamentarian explained that she was in the 'fortunate position' to be a member of parliament, 'but I'm not here because of my charm and good looks. It's because of all those people standing behind you and beside you that are helping to propel you here' (Pettis, Interview). A UK Labour MP commented that 'all MPs have to remember that the main reason they got elected was because of the name of the Party after theirs on the ballot paper'. Frontbencher Tanya Plibersek expressed a similar sentiment with respect to the ALP:

> Our philosophy is that people don't elect you to the Parliament. They elect the Labor Party in your seat to the Parliament. For the most part, a person's personal following in any seat is slim compared to the party identification and there's some areas where you will see people really jack up and refuse to enter the chamber for a vote, but it is very, very rare.

These perceptions reveal a sense of duty to the party that is based on the acceptance that the individual has been elected on the basis of a party platform, or political 'brand', both in terms of the voting effects of party identification and the resources the party was able to supply. However, interviewees revealed conceptions of party representation that were predicated upon different foundations. Tanya Plibersek (ALP) also saw party representation as the product of the collective will of like-minded individuals:

> I think that you have to examine your own conscience and there are some things that no matter what the party decision was, I would not be able to vote for that thing in parliament. But if you're regularly making that decision…if you've made that decision more than once or twice in your lifetime you should seriously consider whether you should remain in the political party.

Anthony Albanese, also of the ALP, highlighted the importance of party representation as providing political agency, in contrast to the

place of an Independent parliamentarian: 'I'm part of a political party, I'm bound by a political party, I support that political party and I don't decry from that. Because of that I have an opportunity to influence government rather than just be an individual shouting out things' (Interview). Albanese's response suggests that party representation, far from being dichotomous with constituency representation, could actually facilitate the latter.

How can the prominence accorded to party representation by social democratic MPs in the interviews be reconciled with the existing survey evidence that indicates they are for the most part, independent legislators? Katz suggests that the independent deliberations of MPs include considerations of political strategy and not only policy preferences – hence MPs can 'truthfully claim to be following their own judgement in preference to the views of their parties' (Katz, 1999, p. 64). Another explanation may lie in the efforts that many Labour MPs make in attempting to reconcile the interests of their electorate with those of their party within the broader context of the parliamentary party organisation, before an issue even enters the chamber. If parliamentarians are presented with an issue that appears contrary to the party's platform or policy, they will often 'pursue the argument within the party', and 'take up constituents' views with ministers and get responses and justification' (UK Labour MP, Interview). Interestingly, this is a strategy that was only suggested by the parliamentarians belonging to social democratic parties, and might represent a practical attempt by those legislators to accommodate different conceptions of representation within the framework of a tightly disciplined party structure (see discussion next chapter).

Liberal democratic MPs

Unlike the social democratic MPs, where a definite trend towards party representation is evident, the interviews with MPs from liberal democratic parties did not suggest a common conception of representation was shared amongst legislators. For example, two Australian Democrats parliamentarians interviewed gave almost polar accounts of their roles as representatives:

> Who do you represent? Do you represent the people? Do you represent your committee? Do you represent your conscience? Do you represent the party? Who are you? That's a question that really has to be asked, and I think that most people – voters – think that you represent the voters. I think you represent the people. I don't think you represent the party (Richard Jones, Interview).

> There is a belief, albeit a non-constitutionally recognised one, that the party room is supreme…I don't have a problem with the notion that I'm the person that they've selected to go into the parliament to make that final decision…but by the time I reach that point I should have consulted with my members, I must be accountable to my members, I must be conscious of party policy, conscious of what the President of the party says (Stott-Despoja, Interview).

The level of debate amongst parliamentary party members was such that one Australian Democrats Senator described the party based on his parliamentary experience as 'not a united team of seven – we're seven Independents who share common values' (Greig, Interview). Given the liberal ideology of these parties, the diversity in parliamentarians' attitudes to representation shown here in interviews with the Democrats and earlier in survey responses from the Liberal Democrats is not surprising. However, this diversity also extends to parliamentarians from Green parties, whom, if the hypothesis examined at the beginning of this chapter were correct, would almost all see themselves as party representatives given that green parties are commonly situated to the left of the ideological spectrum (for example see Miragliotta, 2006, pp. 586–7; Manning, 2002, p. 17).

Green MPs

Like liberal democratic MPs, green MPs have mixed perceptions as to whether they see themselves as party or electorate representatives. When asked their view as to whether an MP should be able to vote with their conscience on issues they felt conflicted with the party's position, three of the 16 Green MPs holding public office in Australian federal and State parliaments felt strongly that they should, four were strongly opposed and the remaining nine felt that party MPs should be allowed to vote with their conscience, but that this would only happen very rarely in practice (Vromen and Gauja, 2009). Green MPs who were in favour of the conscience vote cited their previous parliamentary experience as a strong factor influencing this preference, indicating the parliament may be a stronger socialising force in reshaping attitudes than party in the case of the Greens, illustrated in the following two quotes:

> My thoughts have changed since I became more involved and an MP. There are some things I don't want the party to tell me how to

vote on…I think it takes responsibility away from the MP…Sometimes you can put your own conscience on hold and go to the party and say – 'you make the decision'. I can't do that. And it's only since I've been put in this position that's it really come home to me that it is unacceptable to bind people (Siewert, Interview).

Basically I am a really strong supporter of all parliamentarians having a conscience vote and I wouldn't be in politics without one. This is on all votes…My view is that to maintain your own integrity you have to have the capacity at some point, if you simply cannot in all conscience vote for something or not vote for something. In all my years in parliament I never voted against what the Greens had decided, but the fact that I know I can is very important for me because I cannot stand the herd mentality (Milne, Interview).

Given that Green parties in Australia and New Zealand are located to the ideological left of Labour, this evidence presents a challenge to the hypothesis that MPs view their representational roles along the left/right dimension with the party furthest left also being the most partisan. However, this does not mean that political parties are not a socialising force. Rather than party ideology being the primary determinant, the political culture of a party, State variations, and its organisational structure (as expressed in the party's rules and constitution) may provide a more convincing explanation.

The four parliamentarians who strongly opposed the use of conscience votes in the previously cited study all belonged to a specific State branch of the Green Party of Australia, the New South Wales (NSW) branch. Green Party interviewees commented that this branch has a very strong culture of regarding its parliamentarians as party delegates, and unlike the national Constitution of the party, the NSW Constitution explicitly outlaws the practice of conscience voting, regardless of the issue (Art. 41.5). As NSW Legislative Council MP Lee Rhiannon explained, 'we don't have a conscience vote, so we're bound by the policies of the party' (Interview). We see the socialisation effect of this constitutional and organisational imperative in the perceptions of former NSW Senator, Kerry Nettle, who regarded herself 'primarily as a representative of the party. It's the way I was elected, as a Green' (quoted in Vromen et al., 2009, p. 106). The culture of the NSW Greens (as a distinctive branch of the party) is, in this respect, very similar to that of the labour parties, whose history is grounded in a strong discourse of membership sovereignty.

Do tensions exist? How are they resolved?

The question as to whether a parliamentarian conceives of himself or herself as a representative of the party, the electorate or the parliament may actually be redundant, as these role conceptions very rarely conflict in the minds of representatives. For example, Australian Democrats' MP Andrew Bartlett did not see there to be any tension in being a representative of the party and the electorate, as 'you're always weighing up a bunch of factors'. A UK Labour MP explained that the views of party members, the EPO, constituents' interests, the national interest etc. 'generally all pull in the same direction. At the end of the day, your own judgement and conscience are the deciding factors, but your judgement takes account of all the other factors. I have to justify my voting all the time (as do other MPs) to our constituents and to party members and supporters'.

   Although parliamentarians did acknowledge the possibility that these representative roles could conflict in theory, they emphasised that in practice this rarely (if ever) occurs. In addition to the observation that tensions between different representative roles are usually lost within a host of considerations that depend on the individual issue, there are a number of additional factors that work together to promote consistency. As previously discussed, firstly Labour MPs will resolve this practically by advocating for their constituents within the party room, thus negating conflict before it even gets to the chamber. Second, supporting the observations of Eulau et al. (1959, p. 745), given that MPs were elected to parliament with party endorsement, most considered they had a mandate to implement party policy and personally believed that party's policy and its principles coincided with what was best for the electorate. This was particularly true for the MPs of liberal democratic parties, who saw their organisations as representing broad values rather than detailed policy preferences, which in many ways are easier to reconcile with the interests of particular constituencies. Australian Democrat parliamentarians felt that considering their duty to the electorate within the broader principles and objectives of the party was enough (in the absence of actual policy) to satisfy both representative interests simultaneously. The only exception was a Senator who commented that being a representative of the party and the electorate could not easily be reconciled 'because our members tend to be, in left-right terms, more left, heavily critical of the government of the day, and we know that our voters are people who vote for the government of the day' (Allison, Interview).

The pragmatic solution devised by Green MPs to this potential conflict is to adhere to the principles of the party, but create a different 'sales pitch' to the party MPs' broader constituencies. As Rachael Siewert explained:

> We understand where our base is coming from but we don't change our policy because of it. We sell it differently, or we'll pitch different aspects of it, but we won't change it. We're not poll driven. We'll explain our policies in a way that people can understand or in a way that's relevant, but we won't change it.

Another reason, highlighted by Liberal Democrat MP David Howarth, is the difficulty of actually gauging the interests of a member of parliament's constituency: 'very often it is because the interests of constituents are never one way or the other – there are a lot of varied interests. And it's unlikely that you will be in a situation where the interests of everybody, or a large number of constituents, go in one direction or the other'.

The significance of party – Practical perspectives

A second way in which to analyse the impact of party on legislative role perceptions and behaviour is to go beyond attitudes to look at the range and importance of different influences and interests on the decision-making processes of parliamentarians. In this section I examine the significance of three aspects of this party dimension: party policy, the views of the EPO and the parliamentary party leadership.

The impact of party policy

The influence of policy was explained by an ALP parliamentarian in the following way: 'if you're committed to something then you've got to make sure it's clearly and unambiguously in the platform. Resolutions are also binding, so [policy influence] can be through that, and with very few exceptions that is what occurs' (Albanese, Interview). However, this relationship of influence is not based on a direct mandate. In practice, parties tend to formulate policy in very broad terms (in the language of aspirations and objectives) or they simply do not have policy on all the issues that come up for debate in the legislature, so it is only really the broad policy principles of the party that come into play. The influence of policy principles (as opposed to detailed directives) appears to be similar across all party types,

regardless of the organisational relationship between the party and its MPs:

> What's in the Labor Party platform is sometimes different to… they're broad statements of principles rather than details of policy implementation, so I guess you'd say that the membership of the party is more likely to affect the direction of the party and its principles than to draft legislation (Plibersek, ALP, Interview).

> Obviously new issues crop up now and again and you just need to make a response in line with what you believe the principles of party policy to be. Obviously there will be very rapidly developing areas of policy and often you just don't have time to do that – you just have to react (Howarth, Liberal Democrats, Interview).

Although Australian Democrat senators are formally 'guided by a very strict set of policies', the reality is that in everyday matters parliamentarians exercise a great deal of discretion in applying party policy – referring not to detailed policies, but rather the 'principles of the party' (Stott-Despoja, Interview), 'underlying philosophies' (Greig, Interview) and the 'vibe' of the party membership (Cherry, Interview).

Former NZ Greens MP Nandor Tanczos regarded 'broad-brush direction setting' as the most useful form of membership input into policy, allowing MPs a degree of flexibility to mould party policy to the issues at hand. Failing this, NZ Green MPs generally 'go back to the principles' (Interview). An Australian Greens' MP explained the process of interpretation as: 'if an issue comes up about which the Greens have no specific policy and of course there are thousands of issues that come up day to day on all manner of things, then the parliamentarians make the decision based on the principles of the Greens as they see fit' (Milne, Interview). Even in the NSW branch of the Australian Greens, which does not allow its parliamentarians a conscience vote, on many occasions MPs are granted a greater degree of flexibility to work within the party's broader principles and objectives in that 'you can interpret different policies in various ways to still allow a degree of freedom' (Cohen, Interview).

The style and focus most common to MPs in this study was summed up nicely by Australian Greens' MP, Christine Milne, when she argued that the parliamentary party 'operates on a trustee model – we are the trustees of the greens' philosophy and we are trusted to deliver on that and are accountable for that' (Interview). In this conception, whilst the

party remains the legislator's primary representational focus, unlike Thomassen's (1994, p. 248) party delegate, the *party trustee* has a greater degree of independence or agency to implement the broader principles and philosophies of his/her party rather than specific policy directives. This particular representative conception stems from the practical reality that parliamentarians must have some discretion to respond to changing circumstances:

> To what extent have we got freedom to adapt? We are supposed to react today to something the Prime Minister's just said – the detail of it – and we may not have any specific policies, so to what extent is it built on the policy that already exists or are we deviating? If the MPs step out of line too far of course our own party will turn on us. Learning how to ride that line is something that I guess all MPs have to do. The longer any of us are MPs I think the more we learn where the lines are and what you can do and not do, how much latitude you have (Bradford, Interview).

The role conception of the 'party trustee' (adopted by most parliamentarians) provides a possible explanation and reconciliation for the seemingly inconsistent survey evidence that suggests that MPs view themselves as independent legislators, bound by a party mandate. In terms of policy, it allows parliamentarians a freedom to interpret and apply the broader principles of the party rather than detailed directives.

The membership, extra-parliamentary organisation and connections with the party

Another means by which to assess the impact of party on legislative roles and behaviour is to gauge the level of contact that MPs have with their party members and supporters, in contrast to their constituents. Parliamentarians were asked in interviews their level of contact, and how they maintained links with their political parties. The amount of party activity undertaken and the importance accorded to this task varied significantly between individuals. Examples of such links with the party included serving on policy committees, attending national conferences and distributing newsletters and parliamentary reports. Attending local and regional party meetings was by far the most common response, but the frequency of attendance varied from those MPs who attended on a regular basis (for example, bi-monthly), to those who attended no more than two such meetings a year. Parliamentarians

of all party types generally felt that such contact was worthwhile as a source of inspiration, ideas, or just to 'touch base' with the party organisation.

However, the interview evidence needs to be weighed against the time that MPs allocate to party meeting attendance, which, as the survey results earlier in this chapter revealed is a relatively unimportant aspect of the legislative role for party parliamentarians in all eight cases. The party meetings that MPs are most likely to organise and attend are usually open to the general public, consisting of general debates on topical issues rather than following a party-led programme, which could be expected in a shift to more open and consultative forms of policy participation:

> I do a lot of consultations with non-Labor Party members as well; open forums usually organised by members of parliament in particular areas where they would write out to their constituency. Probably the ones that were best attended were when I had childcare as part of my portfolio responsibilities. There would sometimes be a couple of hundred people in the room at any one time wanting to talk about childcare policy…I found those fantastically valuable in making up my mind about the best way to deal with some of the problems in the area (Plibersek, Interview).

A Labour MP in the UK spoke of distributing feedback forms and questionnaires to his local party, but also stressed that he did the same, 'area, by area, across the constituency with residents as a whole. I feel a strong sense of accountability to my constituency as well as to Party members'. Former Liberal Democrats' MP David Howarth did not find it necessary to prioritise, or deal with communications from the local party in a different way to those of constituents: 'we don't distinguish in that correspondence between party members and anybody else – so we deal with all the letters, emails and telephone calls in the same way'. For those MPs who did consult with the party membership, this was generally done in a rather *ad hoc* manner, with the ultimate responsibility for the decision resting with the individual parliamentarian:

> If there's policy that the party's given guidance on we'd vote on that of course, but where the party doesn't have a position…I could talk to a few people, but it would just be the people I know…I probably would talk to a few people but at the end of the day it would be me

making the decision based on what I think is right (Tanczos, Interview).

Apart from the pressures of time, another reason for reluctance amongst parliamentarians to actively engage with their local parties is the perception that they fail to reflect the views of the party as a whole:

> There's a monthly borough executive, which is not representative of the party. There's a council group meeting which is also not representative of the party. There are pappadams and politics, which are in my area and every other month we have a curry and a political discussion. That's still not representative of the party but there's more people at that so by definition it's more representative. So I'll go along to that (Davey, Interview).

As with the elite perceptions of membership activity that were discussed in Chapter 5, Davey's interactions with the party membership are structured by his belief that many local forums and meetings are unrepresentative. Consequently the potential of these meetings to act as effective mechanisms for policy transferral or influence is muted.

The parliamentary party leadership

Previous research has suggested that the advice (or directions) of the party leadership constitutes a significant influence upon the decision-making processes of party MPs (Rush and Giddings, 2011, pp. 113–16; Bolleyer, 2009; Cowley, 2002). Indeed, party cohesion in the three legislatures covered in this book is high: parliamentary parties tend to vote as tightly disciplined groupings (see for example Kam, 2009). Data on the Rice cohesion index of party voting in these legislatures indicates that representatives of the same party vote together 95 per cent of the time in formal divisions (Bingham Powell, 2000, p. 60). But does a powerful leadership necessarily create a more disciplined parliamentary party? In-depth interviews with MPs provide valuable insights into why this is the case, and how parliamentary party hierarchy operates to influence parliamentarians' decisions.

All MPs interviewed, regardless of the party they belonged to, readily admitted in the vast majority of instances they would vote in the chamber according to the position that their party had pre-determined. In his work on rebellions within the UK Labour Party, Cowley (2005) has emphasised the threat of discipline or demotion and the possibility of

promotion as important mechanisms used within the party to promote unity. However, amongst the interviewees for this research, this 'stick and carrot' approach was not a significant element influencing MPs' voting decisions. Rather, the three most common factors were ideological coherence and unity, political strategy and resource allocation.

As a Liberal Democrat MP explained, 'by and large in the vast majority of situations it's obvious how everyone has to vote' – that is, MPs of a particular party will vote consistently with one another simply because they share similar ideological principles and values (Davey, Interview). In this instance, the party leadership performs a benign coordinating role in aggregating the opinion of the caucus and directing party MPs to vote as they would anyway. Whilst strong party discipline has been criticised as compromising parliaments as deliberative institutions (see for example Herman and Lodge, 1978), if there is significant policy disagreement amongst MPs, this is resolved within the parliamentary party room rather than in the chamber:

> I think party discipline's about having robust debate in the room, and then once the decision is made that's when the discipline comes in. I think that discipline doesn't necessarily mean lack of debate and in fact I think that good discipline comes from robust debate, because when you've had the debate and you've lost, or you've won – then collectively accepting that is where the discipline comes in, but it's not instead of robust debate (Moroney, Interview).

Another consideration is that of political strategy. As several NZ Labour parliamentarians argued, the MPs of a particular party will vote together because within politics, 'disunity is death'. Whilst it is possible that MPs' policy principles may come second to maintaining a strong political team, the opportunity for debate within the party caucus (as described above) constitutes one mechanism by which both policy preference and strategy can be reconciled.

The final reason MPs voted on the advice of the parliamentary leadership and the decisions of the caucus was simply a matter of time, legislative expertise and resource allocation. This was by far the most common explanation provided by MPs in the smaller parties: the Greens and the Australian Democrats. In dividing portfolio responsibilities amongst members of the parliamentary party, MPs meet regularly and are happy to defer to the advice of the relevant portfolio-holder on how to vote on a proposed piece of legislation. Each member of the parliamentary party will 'cover different areas and we basically follow

the leader, the portfolio-holder' (Bartlett, Interview; see also Ward, 1997, p. 125). A similar process occurs within the Australian Greens:

> We generally come to the same view on many matters and now that we've got the division of portfolio responsibilities, we certainly tend to say, well whoever is dealing with that matter…they're obviously more on top of it, they've had the opportunity to research more and to develop and to discuss with both Greens and members of the community and interest groups. So one will defer to their opinion (Hale, Interview).

Leadership therefore constitutes an important influence on parliamentarians' decision-making, not simply as a means of exercising control, but also as a coordination mechanism to manage individuals' limited resources.

Method of election

Previous studies have indicated that the method by which members of parliament are elected may have a significant impact upon their legislative role perceptions. In Australia, Studlar and McAllister (1996, p. 76) found that contrary to the popular belief that the Australian Senate is a house of review: 'above the partisan conflict of the lower house', senators were more likely to endorse the responsible party model of representation than their House of Representatives counterparts. The Australian Senate is elected on a State-by-State basis through a variant of proportional representation. In practice, electors vote for a particular party group rather than an individual candidate. This process is similar to the election of New Zealand list MPs under the mixed member proportional system. List MPs in New Zealand do not represent a geographic electorate, and while Australian Senators represent a particular State, arguably this electorate is too large and dispersed for MPs to undertake specific constituency work that is broadly similar to that undertaken by lower house (or single member electorate) MPs and to form a comparable relationship with their constituents. Given that MPs under both these systems need to be pre-selected on a party ticket to ensure re-selection, it could be argued that their primary allegiance would be to the party rather than the electorate and that these electoral systems prioritise party rather than constituency service. As Karp (2002, p. 139) suggests, 'electorate MPs have a strong incentive to respond to local interests…whereas list MPs have a stronger incentive to respond to party leaders, and develop expertise that transcends local electorates'.

Although survey evidence from the NZ Candidate Studies confirmed a distinct difference in the legislative priorities of list and electorate MPs, with the latter group prioritising constituency activities to a greater extent (Gilton and Miller, 2006, p. 182; Miller, 2005, p. 207; Miller, 2004, pp. 100–2; Karp, 2002, p. 140), parliamentarians interviewed for this research generally disagreed with such a strong distinction. While not necessarily representing a geographic constituency, many list MPs assumed a responsibility to servicing the needs of a particular electorate based on a particular issue or ethnic grouping, which tied in closely to their parliamentary activities. Furthermore, Labour list MPs were still expected to maintain links with a regional area (that may consist of one or two electorates) and the party has usually insisted that they maintain a constituency office. As one NZ Labour MP explained, 'when I've been a list MP it's been expected that I can win a seat next time round, so I've carried on acting very much as if I were a constituency MP' (Interview). The role distinction between list and constituency MP was further blurred by the fact that Labour list MPs who had previously been electorate MPs commented that they were still drawn into constituency work, by virtue of their previously higher profile amongst electors and the fact that they were still visible to the general public.

One important aspect of the role of a list MP belonging to a governing party is addressing constituents' views in geographic electorates where the government may not hold the seat. Interviewed when NZ Labour was in government, list MP Sue Moroney commented:

> For me, my list role has been about making sure that the non-Labour held electorates in our region have a Labour MP that those communities can connect with. So my role has been more geographically based. I wouldn't say that it would be aligned with the constituency MP role because I've been careful not to do one-on-one individual constituency work in those non-Labour held electorates. I've been focusing on instead making sure that the key community organisations in those non-Labour held electorates – that I visit them frequently, that they know who I am, that they know they can make contact with me if there are issues that they wish to raise. I think that's been quite useful given that we are in government, because it means they have access to a government MP even though their local member of parliament is not in the government.

If we combine the views ascertained from interviews with the fact that Australian upper house MPs (represented by the Democrats and Greens

in this research) have very mixed perceptions about the extent to which they see themselves as party partisans (see pp. 173–5), the distinct role difference between MPs elected according to a list system and constituency MPs appears not to be as clear-cut as previously suggested. In turn, this throws doubt on the hypothesis that the method under which MPs are elected will determine their responsiveness; or if it does, this effect is mediated by other factors, such as MPs' experiences in the parliament.

Attitudes to representation and party policy

The interviews conducted by the author, coupled with existing research on MPs' representative roles in Australia, New Zealand and the UK provided mixed evidence to support the suggestion that partisan representation varies between parties according to the left/right ideological spectrum. MPs who belonged to social democratic parties did possess a stronger, more consistent identification with the role of a legislator as a party representative. This was also common to a specific subset of Green parliamentarians in Australia, who were subject to a specific constitutional dictate from their State party. However, MPs of liberal democratic parties and the majority of the Greens (both to the ideological left and right of social democratic parties) were individualist in their attitudes to their representative role. This evidence suggests that political parties have the capacity to be a significant socialising force on MPs, despite their constitutional and legal independence in Westminster legislatures. However, patterns of socialisation and therefore the potential of MPs to respond to the views and policies of the party membership are more likely to vary with the specific culture of a party and the internal rules that regulate the relationship between the party and its elected MPs, rather than along a simple left/right spectrum. Although some acknowledged the theoretical possibility, the different facets (party, electorate, parliament) of the representative role rarely came into conflict for MPs. Numerous strategies, such as advocating constituents' interests within the party room, and rationalisation (that is, convincing oneself that what one does is in the interests of both the party and the electorate) have been adopted by parliamentarians to resolve these potential conflicts.

The chapter also examined the salience of different aspects of party influence on MPs' decision-making processes: consultation and engagement with party members, the impact of party policy, advice of the party leadership and method of election. Although prioritised to a

greater extent by the Green parties, consultation and maintaining connections with local party members are strategies that are utilised by MPs on an individual basis and there is little evidence to suggest that they provide a significant influence upon the behaviour or partisan attitudes of party MPs in social or liberal democratic parties. Party policy was deemed to have a significant impact in shaping legislative decisions along party lines. However, the degree of freedom party MPs possess in interpreting party policy and the fact that policy does not necessarily cover all issues that arise for debate in the legislature suggests that MPs could be viewed more as 'trustees' rather than 'delegates' of party policy. This may arguably weaken the transmission of policy preferences from party members to the parliament, but it is a more realistic role conception that accommodates political necessities, resource and time constraints, and acknowledges the constituency representative role and general public duty of the parliamentarian in Westminster representative democracies.

Maintaining party cohesion and discipline were also important dimensions in shaping legislative roles. However, rather than MPs being coerced into following the decisions of the party by the leadership, interviewees suggested that this was a conscious decision based on coincidence of ideological principles and policy preferences, political strategy, expertise, resource allocation and the division of labour within parliamentary party groupings. Finally, the material presented in this chapter suggests that MPs' method of election has less impact on their representative role conceptions than previously suggested, as parliamentarians elected on party tickets do not seem to emphasise party representation to the detriment of constituency and parliamentary service. However, further systematic research is necessary to fully investigate this point. Overall, parliamentarians' diverse attitudes to representation that incorporate constituency and national interests, and which are also influenced by MPs' own experiences of parliament, act to complicate the model of party linkage that conceives MPs as subservient to (or at the very least answerable to) the EPO and the membership, and strengthen the potential for divergent, or parallel, streams of policy-making to occur within contemporary political parties.

10
Parliamentary Decision-Making and the Implementation of Policy

One of the arguments this book makes is that political parties essentially comprise two separate organisations, the membership and the parliamentary party, which can often create 'parallel lives' in the realm of policy-making. Although party members may potentially participate in the formulation of party policy, subject to the constraints identified in the first part of this book, the actual application and transfer of this policy to the legislative arena faces a number of challenges. Even if we assume party policy is the product of membership participation, it has only limited relevance and application to the legislative arena. Chapter 9 highlighted the complexity of the representative duties that are undertaken by MPs, the fact that they are constituency and public, as well as party representatives, and some of the intervening factors that curtail the strict application of party policy and the membership's views to the parliamentary chamber, such as parliamentarians' duties to the public and the electorate, and matters of conscience. Although extra-parliamentary parties might like to control the actions of their elected representatives, Chapter 8 argued that this is a legally futile and often difficult exercise.

This chapter continues to analyse the relationship between party members and legislators in the policy development process by examining the extent to which the structure and everyday working mode of a parliamentary party facilitates or hinders the transfer of party policy to the legislative arena. It analyses the key decision-making groups and individuals within the parliamentary party, their relationship with the wider membership and some of the pressures that encourage the process of policy decision-making to occur in isolation from the broader party. Finally, given the institutional, cultural and practical constraints that shape the policy activities of parliamentary parties, the chapter

explores some of the various ways in which MPs engage in 'alternate' ways of making party policy.

Understanding political processes and their relevance to policy

The previous chapter examined parliamentarians' attitudes to their roles as representatives and legislators. The evidence presented revealed an interesting paradox: despite the diversity of views amongst MPs, parliamentary parties in Westminster democracies maintain very high levels of party discipline and cohesion (see for example Kam, 2009). In this situation, we might expect the opportunities that individual members have to influence policy outcomes would be low (Cross, 2008, pp. 612–13; Arter, 2006). Nevertheless, although party unity may characterise voting patterns in the parliament and is more readily analysed and measurable, this of itself is the outcome of a series of processes and negotiations that take place behind the closed doors of the party room. While the dominance of party over parliament is characteristic of Westminster politics, 'for the most part, that dominance renders parliamentary voting an insensitive and unreliable indicator of the complex patterns of opinion to be found amongst MPs' (Jones, 1995, p. 141). An analysis of the way in which these 'complex patterns' are reconciled to produce a coherent or unified outcome in the legislature is important not only from the standpoint of assessing the efficacy of representative democracy, but for the implications these processes have for the internal organisation of a political party and the relationship between its constituent faces. However, as numerous scholars have observed, 'as all these processes are taking place behind the closed doors of parliamentary party meetings and in informal settings, it is difficult to observe them and therefore they tend to be neglected in political representation research' (Thomassen and Esaiasson, 2006, pp. 218–19; see also Thomassen, 1994; Esaiasson and Heidar, 2000; Thomassen and Anderweg, 2004).

The need to understand the working mode of the parliamentary party and how policy decisions are made within this forum is made more acute by the increasing autonomy and influence of the party in public office at the expense of the party's central office and its membership, as has been identified in the literature on party organisational models and evolution (Bolleyer, 2009; Katz and Mair, 2002). Although the party on the ground is necessary for providing the preconditions of party government, for example, selecting candidates and leaders, James (1999, p. 10) argues that once these preconditions are fulfilled the party

at large plays no formal role in the workings of a Westminster-style government. In support of his argument James relies on the recollections of Edward Short, the Chief Whip of the first Wilson government (1964–66), in providing a précis of the relationship between party and government that 'holds true for all governments':

> The centre of gravity, so far as policy-making and decision-taking were concerned, had now moved from [party headquarters] to White-hall. In spite of all our efforts to inform and consult the [party] officials and the National Executive Committee, there was a feeling of alienation and, dare one say, of jealousy (quoted in James, 1999, p. 10).

However, this is not necessarily the norm for governments in all democracies. Previous research has suggested that the party exercises greater influence over cabinet decisions (or at least is consulted in them) in Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Austria, Belgium and Italy (de Winter, 1993; Laver and Shepsle, 1994; see also Pedersen, 2010). Whether or not backbenchers and the broader party organisation are excluded from consultation in Australia, New Zealand and if this still occurs in the UK will be addressed in this chapter. The analysis of the influence of the EPO on decisions of the parliamentary party also needs to be extended to parties that have secured parliamentary representation, but are not necessarily in government. In these parliamentary parties we may find that MPs have the time and will to engage the party in policy decisions, or that the ascendancy of the party in public office in Westminster democracies is such that EPOs play little part in parliamentary decision-making despite legislative status (that is, whether political parties are in government or in opposition).

Processes of decision-making in parliamentary parties

In the previous chapter I briefly examined the impact of party policy on the perceptions individual MPs held about their legislative and representative roles. Although many MPs acknowledged the existence and the importance of official party policy, in many instances this was either too ambiguous or detailed to be of use and in numerous areas such policy did not exist, necessitating policy development 'on the run'. As Ed Davey explained:

> There are lots of decisions that have to be taken at short notice… particularly on individual issues of the day, where the spokesperson

– the parliamentarian – has to make up the policy because we don't
have a policy on it, because you don't have a policy on everything.

In the absence or inapplicability of 'official' policy approved by the
membership, how does the parliamentary party 'make up' party policy?
Who are the key decision-makers, what are the pressures they face and
their attitudes/relationship to the broader party organisation? This part
of the chapter outlines the key decision-making bodies and intra-
parliamentary party dynamics that characterise decision-making processes
within the eight parties included in this study.

All parliamentary parties meet regularly once parliament is in session
(usually once a week), and this is the primary forum where the legis-
lative agenda and political strategy of any given party is presented by
the party leadership and discussed. However, the amount of delibera-
tion that actually takes place in these meetings varies significantly
between parties – depending upon the parliamentary party's size, its
legislative status (whether it is in opposition or government) and its
political culture. In most instances, particularly within the larger par-
liamentary parties, there is a strong division of labour between the
front and backbenches and a clear hierarchy of influence and control,
with the majority of political and policy decisions being made by the
party leadership with only limited consultation with the wider parlia-
mentary party. The structure of the chapter reflects the importance of
party size as a key variable in determining the working mode of parlia-
mentary parties. The parliamentary processes that characterise the
larger parties in the study are discussed in this section of the chapter,
while smaller parties are discussed below.

Large parliamentary parties

At one end of the scale, the weekly meeting of the UK Parliamentary
Labour Party (PLP) is seen as an opportunity for 'discussion rather than
decision' and regarded as an 'information meeting' where formal votes
are rare (Cowley, 2002, p. 154). Structured around reports and speeches
from PLP representatives on the party's executive and policy-making
bodies, (shadow) ministers and senior party staffers, the weekly meet-
ing of the PLP has historically been characterised as more of a directive
than a debate: 'the leaders, who summoned the meetings, attended to
inform their supporters of decisions already taken, not to seek their
advice or invite discussion' (Norton, 1979, p. 21). The Chief Whip and
Leader with the (Shadow) Secretary of State responsible for the area in

question ultimately determine the whipping, and MPs are expected to abide by this decision and respect the policies of the PLP (UK Labour 2, Labour MP, Interview).

The leader and senior MPs also dominate decision-making within the NZ Parliamentary Labour Party, a pattern of influence that is even more acute when the party is in government (Palmer, 1994, p. 241). According to one minister interviewed, cabinet is 'where you can argue the toss and you make the political decisions'. The NZ Labour Caucus meets every Tuesday the parliament is in session, but unlike the UK Labour PLP, decisions are often made by vote. Once an issue is settled, Labour MPs are expected to abide by caucus decisions and vote with the party in parliament. However, a unique feature of NZ Labour's decision-making process is the integration of the extra-parliamentary party, with party representatives present at each caucus meeting (usually the Party President and General Secretary), delivering the party's report and meeting with the leader on a weekly basis.

Within the ALP's federal parliamentary party, political decisions are taken in the first instance by the cabinet/shadow cabinet on the recommendation of the minister/shadow minister. Although there is 'quite often discussion and sometimes quite enthusiastic discussion about a (shadow) ministerial recommendation' at cabinet meetings, 'at the end of the day they're not often knocked over' (Plibersek, Interview). Once a position has been decided in cabinet, all ministers are bound to adhere to the collective cabinet vote, even in latter stages of deliberation. Bills are then loosely discussed in parliamentary factional groupings before going to a meeting of the entire parliamentary party (the Labor Caucus) for discussion and approval or rejection, although the latter outcome is in reality quite rare owing to the fact that the size of the frontbench and its collective stance provides a 'pretty good head start. Generally [they] wouldn't get rolled' (Albanese, Interview).

Like the social democratic parties, the party's frontbench formulates the Liberal Democrats' position on legislation. However, the parliamentary party has strived throughout its history to achieve consensus through deliberation and discussion. Speaking from the experience of having a number of proposals rejected by the parliamentary party, Ed Davey explained that 'spokespeople who have legislation coming up will by and large...particularly if it's more controversial or unclear, put forward their case and their recommendations and we will debate it. Sometimes we will debate it fiercely'. Davey further noted that decisions in the Parliamentary Party meetings are usually based on the principles of consensus: 'we try not to put things to a vote. We try to

persuade people round. Very rarely do you get votes on it actually. There's not a formal constitutional process of taking a decision on that. There might be, but I'm not aware of it – it hasn't come into play' (Interview).

However, this opportunity for deliberation may well have been a luxury of the party's former opposition status. Whilst former MP David Howarth explained that 'usually the way it works is that there is a discussion in the Parliamentary Party, but no vote, and then the team leaders hear the discussion and go away and think about it and the line appears later', the party's current position as the junior partner in coalition means that the Conservative Party leads the decision-making process, and it is up to Liberal Democrat ministers to do their best to implement the Party's agenda and to 'coalitionise policy' (Hazell and Yong, 2011, p. 8; see further Bogdanor, 2011). Hazell and Yong (2011, pp. 3–6) also report that while the coalition had expected to discuss and resolve disputes through the cabinet process, in practice the main forms of decision-making between the two parties have been informal, including frequent meetings between the party leaders, their senior ministers and advisors. However, as a mitigation against the centralising tendency of these informal forums, the Liberal Democrats have established a series of parliamentary party committees that are designed to be a coordination mechanism amongst MPs of both houses, to establish stronger links between the frontbench and backbench of the party, and act as a place to share information and encourage cohesion yet enable MPs to bring forward distinctively Liberal Democrat policy ideas (see for example, Williams, 2011).

Nonetheless, despite some individual variations, the broad pattern amongst these parties is that regardless of whether they are in opposition or government, the primary responsibility for decision-making, including policy formulation, rests with the cabinet or shadow cabinet, or the responsible party minister. Some of the pressures leading to this centralisation are discussed in the chapter, which include the necessity of 'quick decision-making' in response to parliamentary schedules and media demands, increasing policy complexity, and the fact that MPs are specialists or 'experts' in the field. Other factors, such as the distribution of resources, which favours the parliamentary party, were discussed in Chapter 7.

The inner and outer circles in larger parliamentary parties

The first thing to note about the larger parliamentary parties in Westminster parliaments is the distinct organisational structures and hier-

archies that characterise these groups. The Liberal Democrats and the social democratic parliamentary parties have elected officers, whips, weekly meetings and a body of formalised rules that regulates the operation of the party in public office. These mechanisms fulfil two key functions: to enable the leadership to communicate its wishes to the backbenchers, and vice versa: to communicate the desires of the backbenchers to the leadership in the hope that any disagreement within the parliamentary party can be mediated before it becomes public (Cowley, 2002, p. 148). The most interesting aspect of these rules and structures (from the perspective of models of party organisation and the relationship between the parliamentary party and the party members) is the division of the party in public office into two distinct groupings: the leadership and the backbench.

This division is based on both constitutional doctrine and political practice. Ministers (members of the party in government) are distinguished from backbenchers (or the parliamentary party as a whole) and bound together as a separate entity within the legislature by the long-standing constitutional doctrine of collective responsibility (see Norton, 1982, pp. 61–3). Under this doctrine, ministers are bound to adhere to government policy. If they wish to vote against it, they must resign and return to the backbench. This does occur occasionally in actual political practice, often creating a great deal of media attention. For example, in March 2003, high profile UK Labour House of Commons Leader Robin Cook refused to accept collective responsibility for the decision to commit British troops to Iraq and resigned from Blair's frontbench.

Although it has no constitutional basis, the principle of collective responsibility also extends to the frontbench in opposition parties, having developed as a norm of political practice during the post-war period (see Punnett, 1973, pp. 287–8). In 2007 Conservative Shadow Europe Minister Graham Brady resigned from Cameron's shadow cabinet in a dispute of the party's stance on grammar schools. Another example of a high-profile frontbench resignation on policy grounds occurred in 2002 when Senator Carmen Lawrence resigned from the ALP Shadow Ministry to oppose the Parliamentary Labor Party's stance on asylum seekers and Australia's involvement in the war in Iraq, amongst other policy positions she felt were out of touch with the party's membership. In a press conference called to announce her resignation, Lawrence (2002) explained:

> I've found myself increasingly out of step with the majority of my Shadow Cabinet colleagues. That may be me, not them. I don't find

my own views and values reflected in a lot of decisions that are made by that Shadow Cabinet, and in fairness to a great many people in the Labor Party, I think that they don't always reflect their views either...I've got to the point with my colleagues in the Shadow Cabinet where I don't believe I can continue to support and defend a range of policies, as well as, if you like, the general direction and disposition of that Shadow Cabinet...It's not fair on my Shadow Cabinet colleagues to seek to be an exception to the rule that you don't speak out and that you don't dissent.

The rationale for the doctrine is the need to present a unified front when in government. It has been described as 'an illogical, even distasteful doctrine, but there is no practical alternative to it' (James, 1999, pp. 6–7). The doctrine also demands confidentiality – particularly in ministerial meetings – to allow participants to discuss and debate issues freely. However, this potentially has the effect of hampering channels of communication between the party in government and the wider parliamentary party, which cannot be involved in such high-level discussions.

These established norms of parliamentary practice and cabinet government therefore act to concentrate decision-making processes and the exercise of power within the frontbench, particularly so when the party holds government. Consequently, the impact of many individual MPs on the majority of policy decisions is likely to be limited. According to former NZ Labour Chief Whip, Tim Barnett, this is an unavoidable situation:

The reality is, the model of cabinet government means that 50 per cent of caucus are ministers, whips or the speaker team and 50 per cent are backbenchers. Within this, the whips don't tend to know what is going on and the speakers don't in terms of policy, so maybe it's 33 per cent who have a really good knowledge – who are ministers. And they still do lead different lives. They have a different sense of insight, they are involved in the minutiae of policy and there's only a limited extent to which that can be shared with us – confidentiality – just the practical side of things. So there are two worlds there and I think that's inevitable (Interview).

Notwithstanding constitutional conventions, everyday political practices also operate to concentrate power in the ministry/shadow ministry. For example, the practical realities of limited time, knowledge

and specialisation encourage conformity and adherence to the party whip, sparing MPs 'the labour of individual decision-making and the burden of individual responsibility' (Berrington, 1968, pp. 369–70). In the majority of instances, the parliamentary party will defer to the judgement of the relevant portfolio-holder:

> Basically the position is...normally the whip is set by the lead spokesperson...obviously the large majority of debates in Parliament are not on major political issues where people have deeply prin-cipled positions. A lot of it is very routine and they normally would go along with what the lead spokesperson recommends and it would save them having to read the [whole bill] themselves. But if someone strongly felt that the line the spokesperson was following was wrong they're free to challenge that in the parliamentary party meeting and those discussions have been had in the past (Liberal Democrats 2, Staffer, Interview).

> The normal procedure is that the teams which are in charge of that policy area get to decide what the line is and which way to vote on particular amendments and particular questions. The reason for that is that it's often very difficult to know in advance what the specific vote will be about. On the report stage of the bills there will be many amendments moved or at least put down – only some of those will be moved and on only some of them we will vote. It's often not clear until the day before what in fact the votes are going to be about (Howarth, Interview).

Similar pressures of time and lack of information exist within all parties. Given that in an average year a Commons MP is faced with over 300 divisions and a member of the Australian House of Representatives must consider over 200 bills (Harris, 2005, p. 337), it is not unreason-able to expect parliamentarians to defer to more informed opinions provided by the frontbench. As a UK Labour backbencher commented, 'we're only human. It's just not humanly possible for an MP to know about everything you're voting for' (quoted in Cowley, 2005, p. 28).

Consequently, there is a tendency for decision-making to become concentrated within a smaller section of the parliamentary party – the leadership – a tendency that is even more acute when a political party is in a position of government. This is due to a combination of consti-tutional conventions and established practices, resource allocation and

the practical necessity to maintain a disciplined parliamentary grouping as dissent can prove damaging to a party's electoral fortunes. This concentration does not, of itself, lead to a discernable impact on the parliamentary party's propensity to apply party policy and the preferences of its members. However, the conflicting representative roles of an MP (particularly the need to work for 'the people' when in government) could potentially mitigate against this, especially when the party leadership perceives a difference in opinion between the party membership and the wider public. Pressures of time and office mean that this group of individuals would be least likely to engage with party members on a regular basis (for example, attending party meetings) thus weakening the integration function, and leaving policy consultations as the most viable option for seeking engagement within the membership.

Mechanisms for inclusion

However, as Cowley (2002, p. 2) notes, parliamentarians (especially backbench MPs) 'do have the potential to act both as a constraint on, or – perhaps more rarely – as a prod to, government action. All but the most technical of decisions are affected by some considerations of party management'. MPs interviewed, regardless of the party to which they belonged, agreed that backbench support was crucial for the smooth running of a parliamentary party and the passage of legislation. A UK Labour backbencher commented that 'ministers are always aware of how issues are playing with the backbenchers, and the best involve them and the wider party in the policy choices facing them'. The key to establishing a successful working relationship between the front and backbenchers is seen as establishing a culture of inclusion: 'it's recognising the fact that you don't want people to feel on the outer' (Barnett, Interview).

Given the inevitable dominance of the frontbench, how is the majority of the parliamentary party involved in policy decisions and what can political parties do to foster this sense of inclusion? There are a number of procedural and institutional mechanisms that have been established by political parties to enable and mediate communication between the front and backbenches. The most common facilitator is the office of the party Whip, which for the parties included in this study is elected by the parliamentary party. Apart from performing an administrative role in coordinating voting within the legislative chamber, the Whip liaises with both the cabinet or shadow cabinet and the backbenchers, in addition to providing a support/welfare role.

For example, the UK Labour Whips Office has claimed to be 'consultative and inclusive', in order to 'prevent problems arising as early as possible', and allowing a 'two-way relationship to mature so that backbenchers never feel alienated from the policy making process' (Coates, 1999, quoted in Cowley, 2002, p. 150). However, the Labour whips have been criticised by their own backbenchers for failing to deliver a two-way channel of communication and taking their concerns into account, functioning instead as 'the instrument of the Government, not the voice of MPs' (Cowley, 2002, p. 153). In Australia and New Zealand, where party discipline is stricter and the relatively smaller size of parliamentary party groupings facilitates easier and more direct channels of communication between the parliamentary party and the leadership, the role of the Whip as a mediator is not as prominent.

Parliamentarians from the NZ Labour Party were at great pains to emphasise the serious intent of consultation with the entire parliamentary party in any policy decisions made, by establishing a series of backbench committees based on the legislative priorities of the party. Every piece of legislation that passes through cabinet/shadow cabinet must go through a caucus committee, where ministers will debate the proposed bill and its consistency with the party's policies and principles before it comes to a meeting of the parliamentary caucus. For example, former backbencher Jill Pettis commented that

> Sometimes policy does come from within the executive, but it doesn't go anywhere without a consultation process. It just does not go anywhere. The backbench meet regularly in a variety of party committee roles and if something looks like it's a policy that hasn't been past the vetting process, huge umbrage is taken…The policy-making process is a very serious business…If a bill comes up and a minister or somebody in his or her office, or an official, has forgotten about the consultation process (purely and simply because of lack of time), the minister is very shame-faced and apologetic…This was cock-up, not conspiracy. And it is always cock-up, not conspiracy (Interview).

From the perspective of a former NZ Labour Minister who initiated legislation and made key policy decisions:

> You have to take a full briefing to the caucus committee and anyone can come to that from the backbench, not just the members of that committee. So you tell all your colleagues what's on the agenda,

> what you're talking about…anyone who wants to talk about it can go along, get the details of the bill, argue about it and debate it. When it goes to caucus, the prime minister has to be told that the caucus committee has signed it off, otherwise it doesn't go anywhere (Dyson, Interview).

Unlike the NZ Labour Party, decision-making in the ALP remains much more centralised. It is interesting to compare the perceptions of an ALP Minister as to the process of consultation with her parliamentary party, which although indicating some responsiveness to the views of the backbench, is very much concerned with upholding the will and maintaining the authority of the cabinet:

> A minister should take into account the likely response of the Caucus before they get to that stage and sometimes you can smooth over some of the difficulties and sometimes you can't and you just have to have a fight. But I think that I would say that most people put a fair amount of thought into how something will be received by their Caucus colleagues (Plibersek, Interview).

What explains this divergence? Interviewees felt that the importance attached to consultation and caucus committees in NZ Labour was the product of history – in particular a response to the turbulent period of government from 1984–90 where right-wing interests dominated the parliamentary party. During this period party policy was simply 'layered over by the government's policies, which then became the party's policies' (Michael Smith, Interview). Consequently, 'there is that sort of closeness' with the party 'where there never used to be… when we had all the troubles in the 80s and the 90s when everything broke down. But today there is that opportunity for caucus members to have an input. And if a caucus member doesn't get an input they'll certainly let the main caucus know' (NZ Labour MP, Interview). The NZ Labour Party has therefore developed a set of rules and procedures based on their previous experience in government, designed to avoid a repeat of the process and to avert major conflict.

The ALP does have a similar system of caucus committees, formed around policy areas and comprised of backbenchers that deliberate the legislation or proposal before it is discussed in the full caucus. In the past, the usual practice has been for all legislation to go through the relevant caucus policy committee; however, there is some apprehension within the caucus that the role of these policy committees is

gradually being eroded (Hall, Interview). The primary concern here is the creation of a culture of decision-making within the party whereby only legislation and proposals that are deemed 'controversial enough' will be assessed by caucus committees, creating the potential for initiatives that are labelled as straightforward or uncontroversial by the shadow cabinet to escape detailed scrutiny. Nevertheless, even if legislation is picked up by a committee, the timeframe for deliberation by a party in opposition is very limited in order to comply with the parliamentary schedule – usually ranging from one day to one week. As discussed on p. 192, the Liberal Democrats have also established a series of backbench committees designed to facilitate greater inclusion and policy discussion. However, based on their operate to date, Hazell and Yong (2011, p. 9) conclude that the parliamentary party committees 'hold out the promise of influence on and distinctiveness from the executive – although not yet'.

The relationship between the front and backbenchers and the party

Although the distinction between frontbenchers and backbenchers in Westminster parliaments has important consequences in locating the locus of decision-making power within the parliamentary party, what implications does this distinction hold for the intra-party policy process and parties' ability to function as participatory and representative institutions? Insofar as members of parliament are expected to function as representatives of their parties and apply party policy to legislation at hand, members of the cabinet face an added tension in balancing the responsibilities of government with their duty to uphold and further party policy. This essentially compounds the inevitable tension between the party in parliament and the EPO: 'they've got the problems and priorities of policy development in government and we want to change the world' (Michael Smith, Interview). As Palmer (1994, p. 243) writes, 'party election manifestos are inherently incomplete documents, and party policies often appear in a different light to cabinet ministers when analysed in the circumstances of government; sometimes they even seem impossible for a responsible government to implement'. This balancing act is made all the more difficult as the pressures on legislators to deliver open and accountable government increase.

It follows that we might expect to observe a different relationship between the EPO and members of the cabinet/shadow cabinet than between the EPO and the party's backbenchers. Although Laver and

Shepsle in their comparative edited collection on cabinet ministers and parliamentary government found that 'ministers seem to operate within ministries as agents of their parties, with the job, more or less, of promoting party policy as far as they can in their particular niche of government' (Laver and Shepsle, 1994, p. 10), evidence gathered in this research provides some support for the suggestion that back-benchers have a greater capacity to view themselves, and are regarded by their parties, as champions of the views of the party membership, particularly when a party is in government.

Jill Pettis' comment (above p. 197) exemplifies a perception that was raised by several backbenchers in interviews – that they (both as a group and individually) acted as a check on the actions of the govern-ment in safeguarding the official policies of the party and the views of the membership. As a representative of the parliamentary party on the NZ Council of the Labour Party, one backbencher felt that she had a 'job to say to the Parliamentary Labour Party "that's in policy" if people had forgotten' (Interview). Similarly, a former minister commented:

> When a piece of legislation is drafted, a minister's got to get it through the caucus committee for approval and they've got to get it through the caucus before it can be tabled. *The job of a backbencher, to a large degree, is making sure that that ends up looking like the party policy and delivering on the party policy* (NZ Labour 2, Constituency MP, Interview, emphasis added).

This perception of the different role and flexibility of a backbench MP in assuming the role of a party advocate also extends to the Australian Labor Party. In deciding to resign from the ALP's frontbench, Carmen Lawrence (2002) felt that free of the pressures of shadow government and collective responsibility, she would be able to more effectively work for the furtherance of party policy:

> I want to move to the back bench so that I can work assiduously as a member of the Labor Party, which is a party that I joined up with a great many years ago and I'm not giving up on, to try to change direction on some of these issues. So that I'm not silent when the decisions are made or even before they're made.

Another example of the nuances of this relationship is the UK Labour Party leadership's unsuccessful strategy of circulating voting records to

constituency parties in the hope of disciplining MPs who do not toe 'the party line' through the disapproval of their own members. Although Labour MPs must be reselected by their local parties, this strategy assumes that the 'official party line' formulated by the frontbench and applied to divisions in the Commons concurs with the views of the membership. However, this assumption does not always hold:

> One MP recalled a party member who came up to her after a large rebellion (in which she had not participated) to say, 'If you're not prepared to vote against the government, what good are you?'…In several cases, reading out the occasions when the MP had voted against the party line produced cheers of approval from party meetings. One MP was clapped into her local party meeting and given a standing ovation after she participated in the lone parent revolt. Another MP – who had previously not enjoyed entirely harmonious relations with his local party – reported that once his voting record had been revealed to his activists, he enjoyed his easiest reselection ever (Cowley, 2005, p. 64).

There is also survey data that suggests Labour members view the PLP as an important mediating force between the EPO and the government. In a YouGov survey of Labour members and former members conducted in 2006 commissioned by the LabOur Commission – an independent association of Labour members conducting an inquiry into accountability within the Labour Party – participants were asked the following question:

> Labour MPs play an important part in supporting a Labour government in Parliament. But sometimes the government can introduce legislation or do things that vary from the policy of the Labour Party. Do you think that the duty of Labour MPs in such circumstances is…?

The responses (presented in Table 10.1) indicate the majority of members surveyed do not view the position of a backbench MP as a simple party delegate, nor as a passive voice of the government. Rather, backbenchers are to negotiate with the government to best reflect the principles of the party. In terms of the transmission of policy preferences from the party membership to the parliament, backbenchers potentially play a crucial role in representing the views of the rank and file, particularly when a party is in government, and provide a countervailing force to the

Table 10.1   UK Labour Members' Perceptions of the Role of Backbench MPs

	%
To support government legislation or actions with their votes	8
To negotiate firmly with government ministers to secure the best possible compromise before finally voting with the government	61
To vote for the government's legislation or actions only if they are fully in line with the party's policy, even if that means the government might be defeated	28
Don't know	3

N = 670. Source: YouGov (2006).

general trend for decision-making power to be concentrated in the frontbench of large parliamentary parties – generally viewed as less responsive to the views of the general membership.

Small parliamentary parties

Although smaller parliamentary parties such as the Greens and the Australian Democrats (comprising of less than 15 MPs) are not divided into front and backbenches, the size of these parties necessitates a different division of labour that also has important consequences for decision-making within the party. In these parties each member of the parliamentary party is allocated responsibility for a particular portfolio area, or group of portfolio areas. Like the larger parliamentary parties, these smaller parties will also conduct weekly meetings once parliament is in session, but instead of following the lead of the frontbench the parliamentary party will typically defer to the decision of the individual member responsible for a particular policy area, as in the Australian Democrats: 'we all cover different areas and we basically follow the leader, the portfolio-holder' (Bartlett, Interview). Senators 'simply do not have time to sit there and discuss every bill', and as such 'an extraordinary amount of trust and faith is placed in the responsible portfolio holder' (Greig, Interview). These views once again indicate the importance of pressures of time and workload allocation in structuring policy decisions, and also support Thomassen and Andeweg's (2004, p. 50) argument that although the final policy position of a particular party will represent a collectivist position, 'this question can be strongly influenced by individual members of parliament representing particular policy views or particular interests'.

Like their larger counterparts, there is also variation in the degree of discussion and deliberation within the party rooms of smaller parties. As noted in the previous chapter, although resource and personnel shortages in the Australian Democrats necessitated deference to responsible individuals, there was a significant degree of consultation between members of the party room. Generally, discussion in the party room was consistent with the Democrats' principles of debate, compromise and consensus, with a diversity of opinions sought on contentious issues and a willingness to acknowledge the views of others. Portfolio holders routinely distributed briefings to members of the party room, which outlined the issues contained in a particular bill and formed the basis of debate and consequently the party room's position (examples were provided to the author). A brief discussion of the legislation's relationship to the existing policy and principles of the party was provided. Therefore, within these briefings party policy and principles (in the absence of explicit policy) were acknowledged in the party room's deliberations.

Although a similar division of labour occurs between individuals on the basis of portfolio areas, Green parties in Australia and New Zealand apply the same principles of consensus decision-making to their deliberations in the party room as is applied to decisions made within the broader party organisation. The Australian Greens argue that this form of decision-making aims 'to achieve a decision in which all participants are satisfied. It attempts to avoid the winners and losers created by voting', and 'makes a better decision with an increased commitment to carrying it out' (quoted in Jaensch et al., 2004, p. 22). In this sense, consensus decision-making in the Australian Democrats and the Green parties replaces the culture of party discipline (that characterises social democratic parties) in facilitating parliamentary party cohesion. However, problems arise when such a democratic culture is embraced overzealously for the sake of a unified external image, creating tensions in everyday working relationships between MPs (Cherry, Interview). The culture of consensus may also serve to mask personality disputes within the party that eventually boil-over and cause significant electoral damage, particularly if such issues (as the Australian Democrats experienced in the aftermath of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) negotiations) remain a source of underlying tension for extended periods of time.

Within smaller parliamentary parties with limited resources and extensive workloads the individual parliamentarian becomes extremely important in the decision-making process. Consequently, the extent to

which party policy is adhered to, or the degree to which the views of the party membership influence debate in the party room, becomes a matter of judgement and personal preference of each parliamentarian, and much rests on the attitude and commitment of these individuals to the party. For example, while many MPs may have claimed to be responsive to party policy and the views of the party membership, former Leader of the Australian Democrats, Andrew Bartlett, spoke scathingly about the attitude of some members of his parliamentary party to policy formulated by the membership, despite the party's democratic rhetoric:

> It was partly a marketing exercise rather than something people actually believed in…I don't think that there was any commitment at all from anybody else, in any meaningful sense…a bit of lip service from one or two, and for some of them not much short of open contempt (Interview).

Individual variations such as these make it extremely difficult to evaluate or make generalisations about the parliamentary party's propensity to follow party policy, as analysing the relationship from the level of the 'group' obscures important characteristics, pressures and attitudes that all work to shape the policy development process and the legislative action (or inaction) that results.

Coalitions and balance of power positions

An added tension faced by political parties that must govern in coalition and those that hold (or have held balance of power positions) is the need to negotiate policy and legislative positions with other parties in order to achieve compromise and impact. This is a tension that has been studied more in consensus democracies with multi-party systems that routinely produce coalition governments (see for example Pedersen, 2010). However, it is also highly relevant for political parties that routinely hold the balance of power in Westminster systems, and particularly so since the 2010 general election which produced a hung parliament in both Australia and the UK and propelling the Liberal Democrats into coalition government with the Conservatives.

In parties governing either in coalition or holding a balance of power position, strict adherence to the official policies as developed by the membership may not be possible as parliamentarians are faced with the potential conflict between either staying true to the party's formal

position, or compromising on some issues to achieve effective governance. In the Liberal Democrats' case, academic analysis shows that the party actually 'did well' in terms of policy negotiations with their coalition partner: around 75 per cent of the Liberal Democrats' manifesto commitments appeared in the joint policy document *Programme for Government* (HM Government, 2010) compared with only 60 per cent of the Conservative manifesto, and the final agreement was closer to the Liberal Democrats' original manifesto position when viewed in terms of the left-right ideological scale, albeit to the right of centre (Hazell and Yong, 2011, p. 2; Quinn et al., 2011, p. 302). Indeed, the coalition agreement was supported by both party parliamentarians, who voted 50-0 in favour of a coalition, and by party members at a special conference convened to ensure that the agreement had legitimacy amongst the grassroots membership (Bogdanor, 2011, p. 33; Evans and Sanderson Nash, 2011, p. 461).

However, when it has come to actually implementing the programme the Liberal Democrats have faced much more difficult tensions. A major test for the Liberal Democrats, and one that clearly illustrated the strains that emerge in a policy-making process from the position of a coalition partner, was the debate over higher education funding (Griffiths, 2011). One of the key differences between the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives during the 2010 election campaign was on the issue of tuition fee increases. The Conservatives proposed to 'carefully consider' the outcome of a review into higher education funding set up by the previous Labour government (the Browne Review), whereas the Liberal Democrats campaigned against any increases – the party's MPs signed a pledge organised by the National Union of Students (NUS) to this effect and the position was consistent with the party's 'official' policy to abolish tuition fees. The coalition agreement that was subsequently formulated deferred to the outcome of the Browne Review into higher education, but specifically stated that 'if the response of the Government to Lord Browne's report is one that the Liberal Democrats cannot accept, then arrangements will be made for Liberal Democrats MPs to abstain in any vote' (HM Government, 2010, pp. 32–3). The eventual policy put forward by the government did include an increase that enabled universities to charge up to £9,000.

Despite widespread student protests and significant criticism of the legislation from outside and within the party, the legislation went before the House of Commons in December 2010 and the government won the tuition fees vote by a majority of 21. However, the vote caused

major ructions within the party: 21 Liberal Democrat MPs voted against the bill (including two former leaders, Charles Kennedy and Menzies Campbell), eight abstained and the Parliamentary Private Secretaries resigned (Hansard Society, 2011, pp. 16–17). This rebellion, constituting 37 per cent of the parliamentary party, was the largest in the party's history and higher than the Labour revolt over the decision to join the Iraq war (Driver, 2011, p. 108). The party has suffered a significant drop in public support since the tuition fees legislation was passed, falling from the 23 per cent gained in the 2010 election to just 8 per cent in December 2010 (at the time of the vote). As at July 2012 Liberal Democrats voting intention stands at 9 per cent of the electorate (YouGov/*The Sun* poll of 1,730 voters, conducted on 22–23 July 2012).

In May 2011 the Party circulated a document, *Liberal Democrats: Our Manifesto in Practice* (Liberal Democrats, 2011c) to all party members outlining some 67 manifesto commitments and party policies that had been implemented in the first eight months of the coalition (*The Guardian*, 28 December 2010, p. 10). These included establishing fixed term parliaments and holding a referendum on the alternative vote. However, while the party may have had numerous successes in implementing their manifesto commitments in government including the alternative vote referendum and the introduction of fixed term parliaments, unless these are effectively publicised, high profile policy events such as the tuition fees will hamper the party's distinctiveness.

As the higher education vote illustrates, although parties like the Liberal Democrats struggle with the problem of alienating their members and supporters in coalition and balance of power negotiations, governing parties that must rely on coalition partners for support also risk marginalising members of their own parliamentary party in negotiating the passage of legislation. An interesting difficulty raised by NZ Labour MPs was the problem of 'cutting out' a party's own backbenchers in discussions with coalition partners and consequently creating some resentment within the PLP:

> Although I'm an advocate of MMP the only part that I don't like so much – is that sometimes other parties will get consulted before your own backbench. The reason being is that if you don't have support from the coalition partners and those who are in agreement with you, it's dead in the water. That negotiation can go on before it even hits your own caucus, and it goes on in secret. It is a necessary evil, but sometimes the leaders of other parties may know about

legislation that is proposed that caucus members may not even know about (NZ Labour MP 4, Interview).

In this way, the transition to coalition government has diluted the ability of backbenchers to participate in policy debates and to advocate their own views in the party room before legislation is introduced into the house, given that some government legislation has to be approved by coalition partners (see Malone, 2008, p. 228). In the Liberal Democrats' experience, this inflexibility has led to a high rate of rebellion amongst the party's MPs. As Hazell and Yong (2011, pp. 8–9) note, in the first year of the coalition government 33 of the party's 35 backbenchers rebelled at least once (see also Cowley and Stuart, 2010).

Similar tensions of policy and principle versus governance, compromise and pragmatism have also affected smaller or emerging political parties gaining electoral success and having to negotiate the problems associated with holding the balance of power, such as the Australian Democrats and the green parties in Australia and New Zealand. For example, as Bale and Wilson (2006, p. 399) reported, in the aftermath of the 2005 general election, NZ Greens' members 'were already questioning whether the support agreement negotiated by party leaders with the Labour government was worth it, and why the agreement was not subjected to a vote by party members'. Experience in Europe suggests that as Green parties gain legislative significance, organisational reforms and evolutions in working practices tend to privilege a typically pragmatic parliamentary party at the expense of the broader membership (see Rihoux and Rüdig, 2006, pp. 17–19; also Lees, 2005, p. 171; Poguntke, 2001; Rihoux, 2001). In discussing the development of the NZ Greens, former MP Nandor Tanczos reflected:

The Green Party comes out of an activist movement, it's been a very activist party and it still retains those connections to the roots to some degree, but inevitably there's a process of becoming a professional political party. This place does change you – not just personally, but institutionally and organisationally – and I think that's the process that the party is going through now. It's like saying, do we want to be the conscience of parliament, or do we want to be the government? And I think that most people have the view that if you're into the game, then the point is to be the government. Not at all costs – you've still got principles that apply, but it means that we've got to tailor how we operate to a bigger audience.

> Inevitably some of the activists are going to find that uncomfortable (Interview).

A similar tension is being experienced by the Greens in Australia as electoral success is increasing the number of MPs elected to State, territory and federal parliaments, placing the party in a more influential position where pragmatism comes increasingly into play (Vromen and Gauja, 2009; Miragliotta, 2006). As NSW Greens' MP Lee Rhiannon acknowledged:

> Organisations face challenges as they grow: how do you stay true to your principles? How do you involve people? Greens feel very passionately about the issue of democracy within the party, and as your party gets larger it's actually harder…How are our publicly elected members (councillors and MPs) accountable to the party? When you look at the history of progressive parties…they start off with fine ideals, people get elected and you'll so often end up with a party wing and an MPs' wing. There are problems there. I think that's something that we need to be aware of.

However, this is not a phenomenon that is exclusive to Green parties. Indeed, as 'MPs are socialized via their work in parliament to accept certain norms and procedures…they have come to appreciate the necessity of policy compromises for parliamentary decisions' (Pedersen, 2010, p. 741). It is necessary for Green parties establishing themselves as key players in the parliamentary arena to learn from the experience of the Australian Democrats that balancing these two objectives (principles and pragmatism) is no easy task. Although this tension troubled the Democrats throughout their history, it was brought to the fore during the parliamentary party's negotiations with the Howard government over taxation reform between 1998–99, when the party's pragmatists prevailed in their support of the imposition of a goods and services tax, allegedly contrary to what many within the party saw as the Democrats' core principles of fairness and equality (see Gauja, 2005). The internal turmoil spurred factional battles and leadership struggles that persisted for several years and caused irreparable damage to the relationship between the parliamentary party and the membership, arguably resulting in the party's electoral and organisational downfall (Economou and Ghazarian, 2008).

Therefore, we see that consensus democracy is a double-edged sword for political parties as policy-making institutions. While coalition parties

or those occupying a balance of power position may be in a better position to achieve legislative impact and represent their members, they are not often able to implement their agendas or party policies in a pure form. Consequently they engage in a process of negotiation and compromise, further complicating the chain of policy transferral described in Chapter 2 and the model of party government ingrained in Westminster parliaments – though not necessarily to the detriment of broader notions of representative democracy (see Lijphart, 1999, pp. 275–300).

Alternate policy development

Thus far I have analysed decision-making processes within parliamentary parties: how structural and procedural factors influence the distribution of power within the party in public office and necessitate policy-making 'on the run'. In this section I briefly examine some of the ways in which a parallel stream of policy is developed within the parliamentary party and by individual MPs, and the relationship of this stream to official party policy. Some of the most common ways in which 'alternate' policy is formulated are through the reinterpretation and extrapolation of existing party policy; the creation of new policy based on general party principles; making election promises and drafting general election manifestos; and through the initiatives of individual MPs – such as drafting spokesperson's papers, issue sheets or private members' bills.

Interpretation and extrapolation of existing policy

One of the most common points raised by MPs interviewed was the significance of 'policy interpretation' as a potential means by which parliamentary parties assume *de facto* control over policy-making within their respective party organisations. Given the slow nature of intra-party policy development and the significant time lag between party conferences contrasted with rapidly changing political circumstances, older party policies are often 'subject to interpretation' by the parliamentary party (Button, 2002, p. 41). For example, although the NSW Green Party does not allow its parliamentarians a conscience vote (see Chapter 9, p. 175), as former MP Ian Cohen explained, 'there's still a lot of flexibility' and policies can be interpreted by MPs in numerous ways allowing for significant degrees of freedom. An interesting anecdote was shared by former NZ Greens MP, Nandor Tanczos, who commented that on the campaign trail many candidates are not familiar

with specific Green Party policies, 'but they think back to the principles and usually they can kind of work it out'. In instances where there is a body of policy but a specific question isn't addressed, NZ Green MPs will 'extrapolate policy – and that's pretty straightforward'. However, there is an expectation that MPs will always 'take a position consistent with any policy that we've got' (Interview).

However, and to a significant extent, the process of interpreting principles, objectives and party policy is arbitrary: 'the interpretation of it is something which is in the eye of the beholder and you can interpret party policy to mean whatever you like' (Cherry, Interview). Even though the interpretation must be consistent with party principles, the democratic link between the parliamentary wing and the membership is tenuous because it relies on the assumption that both arms of the party have an equal appreciation of the party's ideology and objectives. Rather than making policies more explicit to reduce such confusion over their interpretation, some political parties are reducing the level of detail and increasing the generality of their official policy documents in order to recognise the practical constraints MPs face in responding to dynamic legislative agendas, and allowing their parliamentarians greater freedom in interpretation and application. For example, the Liberal Democrats and social democratic parties in Australia, New Zealand and the UK have shifted from detailed conference remits to discussion of position papers, general principles and 'important areas of the future' (Michael Smith, Interview). Similarly, the NZ Greens in more recent policies have 'tended to talk more about principles from which you can derive action and create a little bit of flexibility, partly to give MPs room to move because in the absence of policy they have to make it on the hoof' (Clendon, Interview). At the 2011 ALP National Conference party delegates voted to change the party's policy on gay marriage, but did so under the proviso that the resolution would not be binding on members of the parliamentary party – effectively changing the policy in principle only and issuing no more than guidance to parliamentarians on the issue.

Creation of new policy

As Clendon suggests, in many instances political parties will not have official policy that can be applied to a specific legislative issue or debate, requiring MPs to essentially create party policy on the spot. In this situation, some parliamentary parties have implemented formal and informal mechanisms to ensure a degree of consultation and transparency in this decision-making process, for example, by putting the proposal through backbench committees or party room/caucus meet-

ings. However, as Greg Simpson (former Head of Liberal Democrats' Policy Unit) explained:

> We have to work on the basis of trust – that the parliamentarians will either respond on the basis of policy as is, in the spirit of policy if it is too old to account for the change in circumstance, or to consult with the FPC and to discuss with their colleagues in the Shadow Cabinet and to agree if they are going to respond, this is the way to respond (Interview).

Parliamentarians interviewed were aware of the significant amount of trust placed in them by the party membership and EPO, and emphasised the importance of (and expectation that) they would adhere to the party's general principles. For example, a Liberal Democrat MP commented that 'obviously new issues crop up now and again and you just need to make a response in line with what you believe the principles of party policy to be' (Howarth, Interview). Similarly, a former NZ Labour Minister explained,

> There are just things that happen. When I was Minister for Transport 9/11 happened and suddenly you had to come up with responses in terms of airline security and airport security. Well you don't have party policy sitting there to consult and so you've obviously got a responsibility as a Labour Party politician to implement it in a way that fits the general philosophy of the people who put you there. There are lots of cases where that happens (NZ Labour MP 2, Interview).

A NZ Greens' MP described the parliamentary party's decision-making processes in the absence of policy as follows:

> If there's nothing there then you always go back to the principles. There might then be disagreements about how those principles apply in any particular circumstance, or there might be tactical differences…In these circumstances, the NZ Greens work through the issue as a caucus and try to achieve consensus. If this fails, the parliamentary party will agree to vote differently and everyone's happy with that as long as there's adequate notice given to everyone and everyone knows what's going on (Tanczos, Interview).

Nevertheless, dealing with an issue in this way through a transparent and principled process is somewhat of a 'best-case' scenario. For example,

the previous culture of the Liberal Democrats was to simply defer to the parliamentary spokesperson in this situation:

> In the past what's happened is that the parliamentary party or spokesperson has said 'I've got to make a statement in the Commons, I've got to speak on *Newsnight* tonight. I can't wait for this party process to deliver – I'm going to say what the party policy is and that's that (Julie Smith, Interview).

Instances of parliamentary parties creating policy inconsistent with established party principles have occurred in many of the parties in this study, particularly during periods in government. In addition to the Liberal Democrats' stance on university tuition fees discussed earlier, examples include the economic rationalist policies of the NZ Labour government during the 1980s, when 'the government really took not a bit of notice of the manifesto' (Dyson, Interview). Similar economic policies of deregulation and privatisation, the mining and sale of uranium to France, and the recognition of the independence of East Timor were carried out by the Hawke Labor government in Australia and retrospectively endorsed by National Conferences (Albanese, Interview; Ward and Stewart, 2006, p. 158; Parkin and Warhurst, 2000, p. 32).

Election promises and manifestos

Another way in which the parliamentary party creates policy in parallel to the broader party organisation is in the drafting of general election manifestos and making detailed election promises. For example, in the Liberal Democrats, the General Election Manifesto, which is drawn up by the Parliamentary Party and approved by the FPC 'has in effect the status of party policy' (Liberal Democrats, 2006, p. 5). Although manifestos are meant to derive from existing policy and general principles, as strategic political tools and campaign documents in most parties their creation is the exclusive responsibility of the parliamentary party (particularly the leadership in larger parties). This provides an opportunity for the party in public office to advertise and advocate specific commitments on behalf of the broader party that have far greater exposure and arguably more resonance with the voting public than published official party policies. In the absence of a parliamentary party group, the English Greens' election manifesto (which also has the status of policy) is drafted by the party's Regional Council, with final editing undertaken by the Elections Co-ordinator (Green Party England and Wales, 2011b, p. 3).

The NZ Labour Party's manifesto has only to be approved by caucus and the party's policy committee, and the potential for MPs to include their own policy ideas without necessarily consulting the party's grass-roots is evident:

> Conference mandates the policy committee and they start drawing up the manifesto. Then it goes through the ministers and the caucus, and on occasions…you see ministers step in to weed out things they don't like or try and bring in left-field things that they've thought of, but rarely in a way that offends the vast majority of the party. The other thing that's happened (particularly in the last election when our policy process did not produce the big ideas that we needed) is that a kind of parallel process emerged…Quite close to the election, some very big policy ideas (which were entirely in line with Labour policy) suddenly emerged, like getting rid of the interest from student loans and the expansion of welfare rebate programs. So it was as though the people who were controlling the money – the senior politicians – were taking some inspiration from the process but were adapting it to fit what they wanted (Barnett, Interview).

Although in this example election policy was consistent with party principles, the detail of election promises affords the parliamentary party leadership significant flexibility to flesh out the detail of policy principles, in a way similar to the processes of interpretation and new policy creation outlined above. As a matter of political strategy and because these processes fall within the bounds of campaign rather than policy decisions, the timing of policy releases and the tenor of their specific 'sales pitch' is controlled by the leadership, and in most cases party members will be no more involved with, or aware of, the leadership's plans than the general public.

Initiatives of individual parliamentarians

Finally, there are a number of ways in which individual MPs, through their own initiative and expertise, can in effect draft party policy. Parliamentarians often publish discussion papers (also referred to issue sheets or spokesperson's papers), which are usually created using the parliamentarians' own resources rather than the party coffers and only in limited consultation with the broader party. Although not officially regarded as policy, such documents can be very influential within the parliamentary party, potentially leading debate in topical areas. Their

purpose is to 'flesh out the fine detail of policy, to present existing policy in a new context or to stimulate new ideas for debate within and outside the party' (Liberal Democrats, 2006, p. 6). The Green Party of England and Wales has developed a similar mechanism whereby the Party's Regional Council can issue 'policy statements', which apply an existing policy to a topical situation (Green Party of England and Wales, 2011b, p. 3) and allows the party some flexibility and speed to determine a public position on an issue when necessary.

Another way in which individual MPs can create alternate policy, or simply 'layer over the top' of existing policy is to draft and submit private member's bills for consideration by the parliament. Although this practice is quite rare and it must be remembered that these bills are tools for MPs to advocate issues that they support as individuals – not party MPs, an example occurred within the NZ Greens when former MP Sue Bradford put up a private member's bill in 2007 proposing to lower the voting age to 16 and introducing compulsory civics education in New Zealand schools. As Bradford explained, although she thought the *Civics Education and Voting Age Bill* (which was approved by the party Caucus) 'fitted very well with Green Party policy', it caused a great deal of controversy within the party both in terms of content and that normal consultation processes had not been followed.

> So I put up this private member's bill and caucus signed it off, but then the party got very, very angry about it because a lot of people in the party didn't like it…[Previously] our party was silent on it. We didn't have policy for it and we didn't have policy against it, but a lot of older people in the party got very upset at the thought of 16 year olds voting. That taught me a lesson (Interview).

The furore caused by the bill led to changes in Green MPs' ability to initiate private members bills, which is now restricted to the first 18 months of an electoral cycle in order to maintain party cohesion going into a general election. As Bradford somewhat flippantly commented, it's 'now under a lot more control – it's to stop bad people like me putting bills up'. Nevertheless, the party's actions have led to a change in MPs' attitudes to developing policy in isolation from the broader membership: 'it is preferable that our private members bills are party policy so I'm also working – a lot of people are – through the policy process. If we could get it to be Green Party policy then there wouldn't be such a problem'.

The working mode of the parliamentary party

There is an overwhelming consensus in the comparative parties litera-ture that the ascendancy and now the primacy of the party in public office is now a key characteristic of contemporary party organisations. However, to fully appreciate the implications of this balance of power for policy formulation within parties, it is necessary to look more speci-fically at the distribution of power within the party in public office, and the structures, processes and institutional factors that influence the working mode of the parliamentary party. This chapter sought to demonstrate that like broader party organisations, distinct hierarchies of power also exist within parliamentary parties in Westminster demo-cracies. In larger parliamentary parties there is a clear division of labour between the party's front and backbenchers with the locus of decision-making clearly concentrated in the former – although some parties make a concerted effort to involve backbenchers in legislative decision-making. This is particularly interesting and arguably necessary as there is evidence to suggest that backbenchers have a closer relationship to the party's membership than their ministerial counterparts, acting as champions of party policy and a potentially useful mediating force and means of linkage between a cabinet/shadow cabinet and the wider party.

Patterns of decision-making within smaller parliamentary parties, faced with the difficulties of limited resource allocation, are charac-terised by significant trust and deference to individual MPs as policy portfolio experts. The small, opposition parties examined in this study (the Australian Democrats and the Greens) have at some point in their histories also faced the added tension of balancing pragmatism with principle in their quests to achieve legislative outcomes and signi-ficance, with the risk of compromising official party policy and alienat-ing the membership. The Liberal Democrats are currently placed in a similar position by virtue of their status as the junior coalition partner to the Conservatives in the Cameron-Clegg government.

Irrespective of the size of the party, a shortened media cycle, the nature of parliamentary processes and the quick decisions required to keep pace with a dynamic legislative agenda necessitate that parlia-mentarians make policy 'on the run'. In the absence of specific official party policy, which interviewees insisted occurred 'most of the time', MPs create new policy based on what they believe the general prin-ciples of the party to be, or reinterpret existing policy to fit new political circumstances. The party leadership may draft election manifestos or

make campaign promises; individual MPs may also author discussion papers that often have considerable resonance within the parliamentary party, or initiate private member's bills. Although all these initiatives potentially have an immediate and significant legislative impact depending on the status of the party – whether it is in government or opposition – the crucial point to note is that they all occur outside the normal processes of official policy development within the party. Consequently, a parallel stream of parliamentary party policy is created and as Chapter 8 argued, this is subject only to limited accountability from the broader party and the membership. From a normative perspective, while this process might sit uncomfortably with the chain of linkage and intra-party democracy presented at the beginning of this book, the considerations that MPs must make in their legislative duties under a system of representative parliamentary democracy are much broader than the political parties that they belong to; once again highlighting the difficult tensions between party and parliamentary government.

11
Conclusion: Policy-Making in Parties Today

This book sought to examine the process by which policy is developed within political parties, who participates, the factors that shape participation and policy development, and the relationship between the actors involved in the process. It aimed to provide a more nuanced account of the complexities of policy-making within parties than has previously been undertaken, integrating analyses of both party and parliamentary realms in order to assess how parties enable citizen participation in policy-making, and the relevance of this to the everyday actions of legislators.

What are the key trends that characterise policy-making?

As Chapter 3 highlighted, despite worldwide trends of declining engagement with political parties (both in terms of decreasing party memberships and weakening partisan attachments) – parties generally still regard and market themselves as participatory institutions. The formal organisation and purpose of political parties (as derived from their own rhetoric, constitutions and rules) suggest that they provide a vehicle for the membership to develop policy as a reflection of partisan support or interests within the wider community, which is then adopted by the party as official policy and adhered to by its MPs in legislative debate and divisions.

The first part of the book analysed the efficacy of modern political parties as centres for citizen participation in politics. I assessed a number of forums commonly used by parties to encourage membership involvement in their formal policy development processes: local meetings, policy working groups, conferences, ballots and consultation exercises. The most significant factor influencing the opportunities for formal

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participation in these activities is party size – it is far easier to facilitate membership participation and access to policy institutions in parties with fewer members.

Nevertheless, despite the correlation between party size and the formal opportunities for meaningful participation in the policy development processes of any given party, there is no further link between participatory opportunities and the level of membership participation that actually occurs. Although slightly higher rates of membership engagement with policy processes were found within green parties – even in the most internally democratic of parties (for example, the Australian Democrats) members just don't seem to participate. The problem of membership disengagement from policy development initiatives extends across all party types in all democracies surveyed in this volume.

In federated democracies such as Australia, and those with distinct territorial divisions marked by numerous layers of government, there is some evidence to suggest that participation is more vibrant at the local level, which is often obscured in party research focused on national politics. Parties such as the Liberal Democrats and the English and Australian Greens emphasise the autonomy of their local groups and the potential of members to engage in policy-making that is relevant and more immediate, thereby producing greater perceptions of efficacy and meaning. Nonetheless, the localisation of participation has important consequences for the development of national policy as party activists who might otherwise be involved in this process find their time and energy drained by local demands.

Many of the empirical examples and arguments that have been presented in this book raise broader questions for the nature of representative democracy in modern societies, and the function undertaken by political parties in providing centres for participation and representation. Chapter 3 developed a typology of the various organisational means by which parties facilitate membership participation in the policy process, either through direct, representative, delegate or consultative channels. Whilst parties of different types emphasised particular variants of participation, there is a distinctive trend, led by social democratic parties, to engaging party members by way of consultation – in contrast to their traditional focus on democratic participation through delegation. The low rates of participation that plague political parties of all types have created opportunities for formal policy-making to become dominated by a very small active core of members – although this dominance appears to be taking place with the acquiescence of the general membership.

In order to remedy the perception that active members constitute an unrepresentative minority, parties have begun to open up policy consultations to the wider public. This shift in the nature of participatory structures within parties marks a fundamental departure from the mass party model, challenging the 'traditional' role of party members as a means from which to source partisan policy ideas and input that is representative of the party's supporters and voters. It has also raised broader questions as to how we now think about the nature of party membership, and the blurring distinction between party members and supporters in a possible move to what could be parties built upon, and that derive their democratic legitimacy from, looser networks of affiliation. The implications for intra-party organisation and dynamics are significant: party activists no longer have the privileged place that they once had in policy decision-making, and have had to either join the public to contribute to consultations, or develop new strategies for influencing the political direction of their parties, which may mean bypassing formal policy structures by engaging the media and directly lobbying the party's elected representatives.

Although the trend to outsourcing and opening-up parties is seemingly incompatible with maintaining a vibrant and satisfied party membership, particularly if members feel as though they are being marginalised by the process, the broader implications for representative democracy are not necessarily negative. It may be that parties continue to function as aggregators of partisan interests and centres of political participation – but that this process is extended to the general public rather than being mediated by a party membership and the parties themselves effectively hollow out. However, the way such consultations are conducted then becomes the paramount concern for a healthy democracy. What distinguishes previous forms of policy participation in political parties (such as local meetings, conferences etc.) is the way in which they functioned to aggregate supporters' views within a 'bottom-up' structure. Heavily facilitated by the party leadership, and particularly by the cabinet in governing parties, modern policy consultations could conceivably dictate (rather than aggregate) policy preferences in a top-down fashion. As such, this development needs to be closely monitored.

Chapter 7 examined some of the ways in which party staffers and parliamentarians attempt to facilitate policy development within parties and engage with formal party (as distinct from parliamentary) processes. I argued that whilst individuals in key positions within the party (such as conference convenors and Policy Unit staff) can potentially exercise

a great degree of influence over the policy agenda, this should not necessarily be equated with an orchestrated programme of elite control. Case studies of a number of gatekeeper roles suggested that most individuals in these positions exercised diligence in their task despite suffering from resource shortages, and although this often involved making difficult decisions that could be viewed as inherently political (for example, choosing motions to submit to conference) – these decisions were made autonomously from the party's leaders. Nevertheless, the chapter also argued that given the perception held by some MPs that members were ambivalent or apathetic towards policy development, many parliamentarians felt that they had to 'step in' to encourage members to participate, and in this way assumed some measure of control over the process.

But policy development by the membership and supporters is only one part of the process. How does official party policy relate to the parliamentary activities of a party's elected representatives? To the extent that membership apathy and the trend to consultative participation is encouraging a more top-down approach to policy formulation led by the parliamentary party, it is no great surprise that overall we don't observe too much conflict between party policy and that which is adopted by the parliamentary party. The second reason why, in practice, it is rare to observe overt conflict between party policy and the legislative activities of party MPs is the absence, irrelevance or inapplicability of official party policy to the realm of parliamentary politics.

In part this disconnection is perpetuated by the fundamental contradiction between the reality of party government and the constitutional design of Westminster representative democracy, presented in Chapter 8. In the model of party government, parliamentarians who are elected under a party label are expected to adhere to the policies of their party as articulated in a general election manifesto and to work towards implementing these policies in government. Accountability to both the party and the voters is secured by means of candidate selection contests and general elections. Nonetheless, this conception of the role of a representative stands in contrast to that imbued in the constitutional design of Westminster democracies – that of an independent parliamentarian. In practice, parliamentarians have several 'masters' to whom they are accountable, and party policy plays little more than an advisory role in legislative deliberations. Whether or not it is desirable for MPs to be subservient to their parties is a difficult normative question and a matter for continued debate, particularly as citizens' expectations of the role of formal political institutions such as parties and parliaments

shift. Rather than resolve this issue, however, the book sought to expose the various factors that influence the policy decisions of individual parliamentarians, and to question the assumption that MPs are driven by an allegiance to party alone – an assumption of much of the writings on party government.

Starting from the perspective that party MPs are essentially autonomous actors in the legislative arena, Chapter 9 sought to analyse the extent to which membership of a political party influenced MPs' actions and decision-making processes through an examination of legislative role perceptions, an approach that has not been previously utilised in party organisational studies. Although most parliamentarians saw themselves as independent representatives in the Burkean tradition; they did not necessarily see this independence as incompatible with representing the interests of their parties – contrary to the theoretical distinction between Westminster independence and party government posed above. The main way in which MPs were able to do this was to either rationalise the potentially competing imperatives of party, parliament and constituency, or to adopt the role conception of a 'party trustee' – bound to uphold the *broad* principles of the political banner under which they were elected, but free to interpret these principles in a way appropriate to the specific legislation at hand.

This freedom of interpretation and the lack of specific party policy in many areas are factors that essentially enable the parliamentary party to undertake its own stream of policy-making, distinct from the broader party organisation, without creating overt conflict. Chapter 10 outlined some of the ways in which this can occur, for example, by reinterpreting and extrapolating existing party policy, creating new policy based on general party principles where none previously existed, by making election pledges and specific promises and through individual initiatives such as drafting discussion papers. The chapter also looked at the policy impact of forming coalitions, and the distribution of power within the parliamentary party to analyse where the primary decision-making power resides. In larger parties this is placed in the party's frontbench, whereas in the smaller parliamentary parties it is the individuals responsible for particular policy areas that have significant power in respect to their own areas of expertise. For the Liberal Democrats, governing in coalition with the Conservatives has created significant policy tensions between the party and some of its MPs. Interestingly, the research also found that where a distinct division of labour existed between the front and backbenchers of a party, it was the latter grouping that felt they had responsibility for upholding the

policy of the party and the views of the membership. This perception was particularly prominent within the backbenchers of governing parties.

What factors play a role in shaping the policy process?

Chapter 2 flagged three key factors as having a potentially significant impact on the policy process that political parties adopt and their ability to function as participatory and representative institutions: national context, party family and legislative status. Of these factors, the national context proved to be the least important. What was particularly interesting was the degree to which many of the challenges faced by political parties transcended national borders – parties of all the democracies examined had difficulty encouraging participation and their parliamentarians held similar perceptions of their representative tasks. The only instance in which the national context made a significant difference was in population size and the respective overall size of party memberships, which was deemed to be a significant determinant on the nature of the formal participatory opportunities on offer.

Rather, common trends are observed across parties of a particular family. Reflecting the shared ideologies and similar histories of these groupings, parties of the same family adopted common participatory practices and structures (with the exception of liberal democratic parties). Green parties tended to exhibit marginally higher levels of membership participation and engagement in intra-party processes, which cut across democracies (with the exception of the NZ Greens). The impact of party type was also salient in explaining role orientations: social democratic MPs were more likely to view themselves as partisans and liberal democrats as independent representatives.

Legislative status (whether a party is in government or opposition) and parliamentary party size were key factors in shaping the processes involved in parliamentary decision-making and the extent to which all MPs were incorporated in parliamentary policy decisions. Larger parliamentary parties tended to concentrate decision-making in frontbench of the party, which intensified in government. Parliamentary party cohesion and inclusion were generally easier to achieve in the smaller parties and parties in opposition. In instances where disagreement did occur, these parties were placed further away from the media limelight and disunity was often overlooked. As former Australian Democrats' leader Andrew Bartlett commented: 'there have been a few instances when we've voted differently, but people don't even tend to notice'.

Given that engaging the extra-parliamentary party organisation in parliamentary decision-making brings with it the possibility of dissent and difference of opinion, this is also easier to achieve in opposition. Nevertheless, confirming previous research on green parties in Western Europe and possibly explaining the lower rates of membership engagement in the NZ Greens, the examples presented in this book (including the recent experience of the Liberal Democrats in coalition) indicate that as political parties increase their legislative importance and move closer to government or a balance of power position there is a distinct shift in emphasis to the 'structural requirements of parliamentary politics' (Poguntke, 2001, p. 8), whether this be legislative negotiation in a consensus chamber, considerations of electoral survival, or the associated shift in resource allocation. This changing emphasis has the potential to weaken the parliamentary party's responsiveness to the broader party organisation; however, this can possibly be mediated through fostering a strong political culture of engagement and establishing processes to integrate both MPs and members into a joint stream of policy-making.

Policy development: Normative questions and further research

Based on these observations, under what conditions might a more reliable chain of linkage and the better integration of both members and parliamentarians in policy development be likely to occur? As previously mentioned, a stronger link between participation and representation is likely to be achieved through flexibility rather than rigidity. This involves striking a balance between the degree to which members dictate party policy and the extent to which parliamentarians are responsive to it, and will inevitably involve compromise at both ends of the chain. Concerning representation, the tension between party, electorate and parliamentary loyalties (a key source of disconnection) is practically (and most effectively) resolved when MPs act as 'party trustees' – adhering to the broad, underlying principles of the party and accounting for their positions to the membership with a full and transparent account of the parliamentary decision-making process that also attempts to engage all members of the caucus. The general perception that the party in public office often acts independently of (and contrary to) the extra-parliamentary party is not entirely accurate – party is a significant socialising force and as I argued in Chapter 10 there are many individuals within the parliamentary party who advocate for the policies of the party and the views of the membership.

A significant lesson is that unless party MPs have played an active part in formulating the more detailed party policy, they are less likely to implement specific directives from the party organisation. Consequently, members must allow parliamentarians to contribute to the development of official party policy early in the process rather than view their participation with great suspicion as a means by which to achieve effective control of policy development to the detriment of the membership. Another solution would be to encourage (as many parties are now doing) more generalised membership involvement in setting the policy and political direction of the party, rather than issuing specific policy positions and thus allowing for greater flexibility for MPs to respond to a dynamic parliamentary agenda.

The responsiveness of elected representatives to those represented (in this case the party members) depends on a number of institutional and behavioural factors, which can partly be achieved by institutional engineering. For example, parties can establish rules for the conduct of their parliamentarians and their relationship to the broader party organisation, or provide for the presence of both MPs and members on policy working groups. However, strengthening the linkage chain depends to a very large extent on the political culture of a party. For example, candidate selection procedures and provisions to encourage ongoing links with party members are more effective in creating a culture of respect and transparency than in controlling MPs with the prospect of disciplinary measures.

However, there are many more questions that remain unanswered and more avenues of inquiry that remain to be explored. It was not the intention of this volume to provide the final say on party policy development, but rather to reveal some of the complexities inherent in the process, the underlying assumptions that both scholars and parties make as to who should participate, and to highlight structural constraints and the relationships of influence between the various actors. An analysis of these themes could easily extend to democracies beyond Westminster, and to party families (such as conservative parties) not covered in this volume. The way in which parties' formal policy processes might continue to adapt to organisational initiatives such as supporters' networks and primaries, parliamentary reforms and technological developments will continue to provide fascinating avenues for research, as might policy development in political parties without any formal members at all.

Policy-making in parties today: The impact for democracy

Assessing the role of parties in modern British democracy, the Power Inquiry (2006, p. 188) concluded that 'the political party as an organising principle cannot…be written off. Our political system would be more chaotic and less effective without political parties. None of this is to say, however, that parties as they are currently formulated cannot be radically re-thought'. While the authors of the report recommended widespread changes to electoral laws and party financing to reignite popular engagement with representative politics, organisational changes within political parties themselves were viewed to be somewhat of a 'lost cause'. The report looked sceptically upon

> Proposals which suggest that the decline in party membership and allegiance can simply be reversed by the use of more imaginative organisational structures and processes, such as primary-style elections for parliamentary candidates or more informal meetings for local parties. While we accept that such innovations may attract some extra members or support to local parties and should not be discouraged, we do not feel that these can address the profound structural barriers to rebuilding the relationship between parties and people which are inherent in the wider party and electoral system as it is currently constituted (Power Inquiry, 2006, p. 188).

I both agree and disagree with the conclusions of the Power Inquiry. In this book I have sought to analyse one of the 'profound structural barriers' to which the Power Inquiry refers: the disconnection between participation and representation in contemporary political parties, viewed through the prism of policy development. Unlike the conclusions of the Power Inquiry, which appear overly dismissive of the importance of party organisational changes, this book concludes that party organisation and processes do matter – and that such processes and structures are already adapting to a changing political landscape and can potentially continue to evolve for the enhancement of democracy.

Whether or not parties are striving to meet social expectations by promoting membership participation and internal party democracy, or actually perpetuating false ones, it is clear that the dominant social conception of the role of parties remains that which developed in response to the political practice of the early twentieth century, and it continues to shape political debate today. In this view, parties should

act as both centres of participation and representation, with policy preferences filtering up through the grassroots to be implemented by the party's representatives in the legislature. This model assumes a distinct chain of accountability between members, voters, the party organisation and its elected representatives.

However, to suggest that parties should alter their processes to achieve the same normative vision of political participation that characterised the mass party phase and electoral politics in the twentieth century is unhelpful. Although it may be difficult to let go of this ideal, the age of mass memberships has well and truly passed and it appears that citizens are moving towards different forms of political participation – away from practices mediated by an extensive party machine. The localisation of party political engagement and the increased use of consultation mechanisms within parties provide evidence of this adaptation and suggest that political parties can still function as vehicles for citizen participation in politics – albeit in ways different to the traditional attendance at branch meetings and voting at party conferences. However, if new and evolving processes of participation are to be effective and meaningful they must function to transmit ideas and aggregate the preferences of participants from the citizenry to the representatives – not vice versa. Not only will this require greater transparency and close scrutiny of the participatory processes and structures involved, but cultural reform is crucial as well. However, both cultural and structural reforms must also be aware of, and responsive to, citizens' expectations and demands.

There is one sense in which I agree with the remarks made by the Power Inquiry report: the need to look beyond party organisations. Another difficulty in evaluating the performance and future potential of political parties in contemporary democracies is the general tendency amongst party scholars to examine the operation of political parties in isolation, without acknowledging that they must function within a pre-existing system of representative parliamentary democracy. This system, particularly in Westminster democracies, is not necessarily conducive to maintaining a chain of linkage between the supporters and members of political parties and legislative outcomes – considering that parliamentarians must fulfil both parliamentary and public duties in addition to their party obligations. Until now, overt conflict between the party membership and parliamentary party has routinely been avoided simply because political parties live parallel lives in the process of policy-making. Short of overhauling the legal and constitutional design of parliamentary democracy to focus account-

ability to fewer sources (or even a single source), political parties would benefit from recognising the inherent tensions in the parliamentary task and either allowing their parliamentarians more 'official' flexibility in their legislative deliberations, or greater involvement in formal party policy processes. Participation and representation, as opposite ends of the linkage chain, are more likely to be secured if this chain is flexible rather than rigid and in this sense fostering the culture of a working 'partnership' is essential. It may well be that this dilemma will be solved in the future simply by the complete erosion of party memberships, to be replaced by wider community consultations led by elected representatives. Nonetheless, even if parties shift their function of providing a vehicle of participation from members to the broader public, it is still essential that participatory opportunities be genuine and actually acknowledged by party parliamentarians. Failing this responsiveness, public disenchantment and disengagement will continue to characterise electoral politics into the twenty-first century.

Appendix   Policy Process Diagrams

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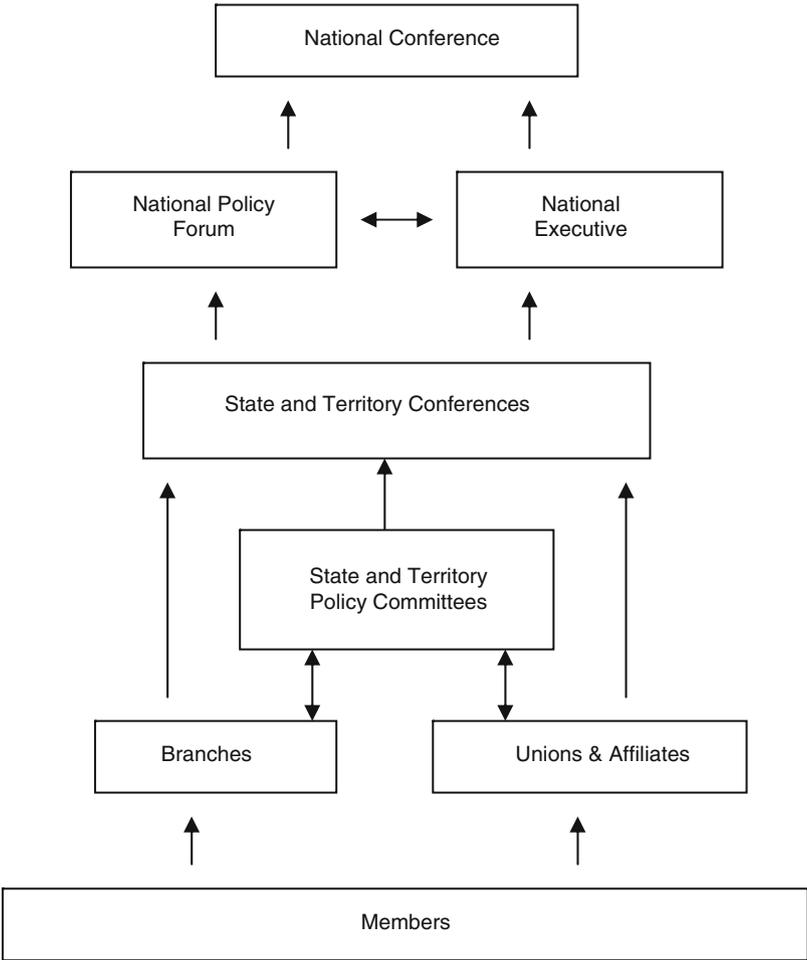
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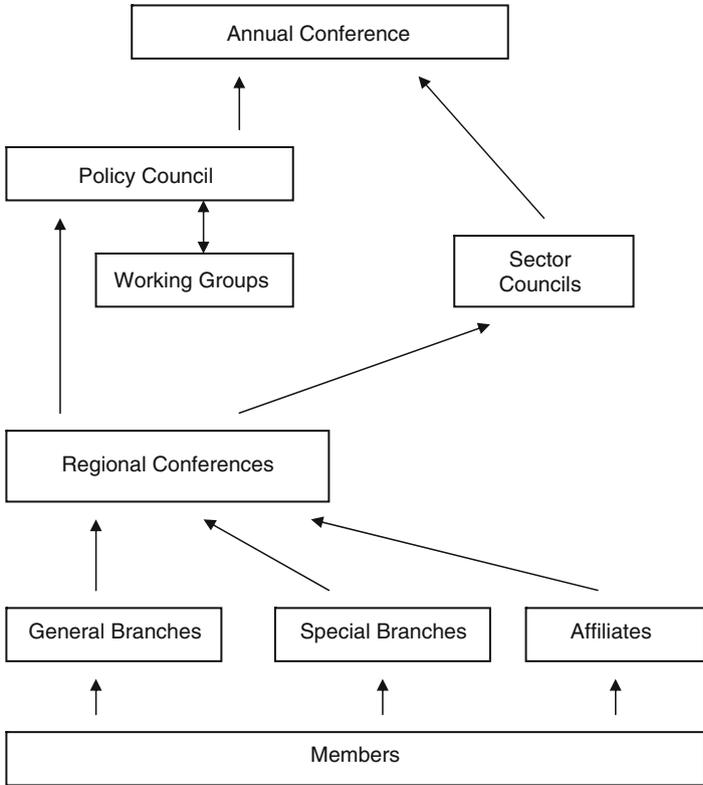
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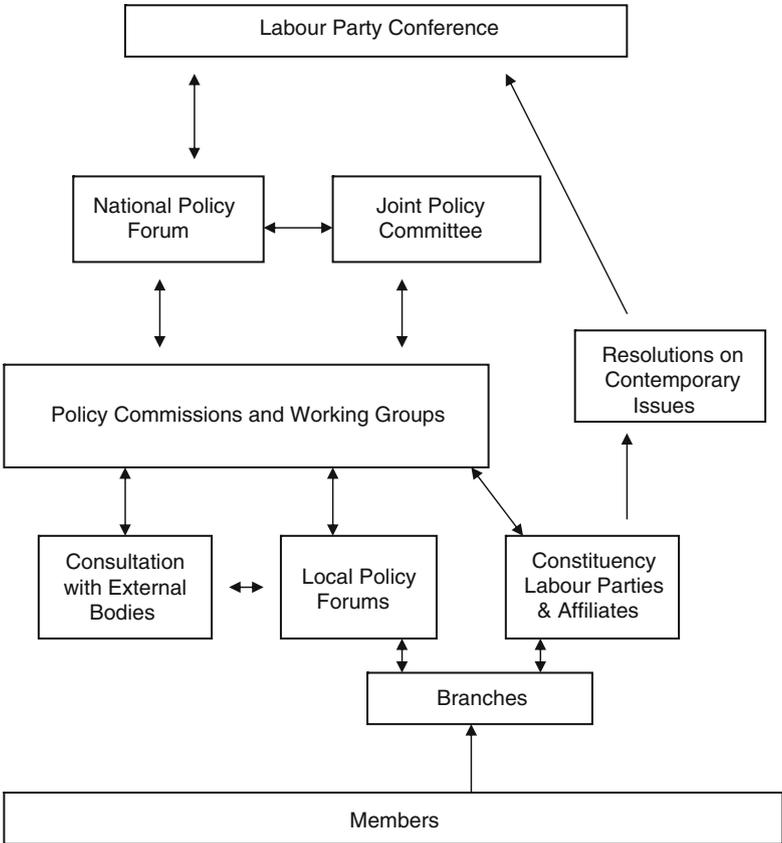
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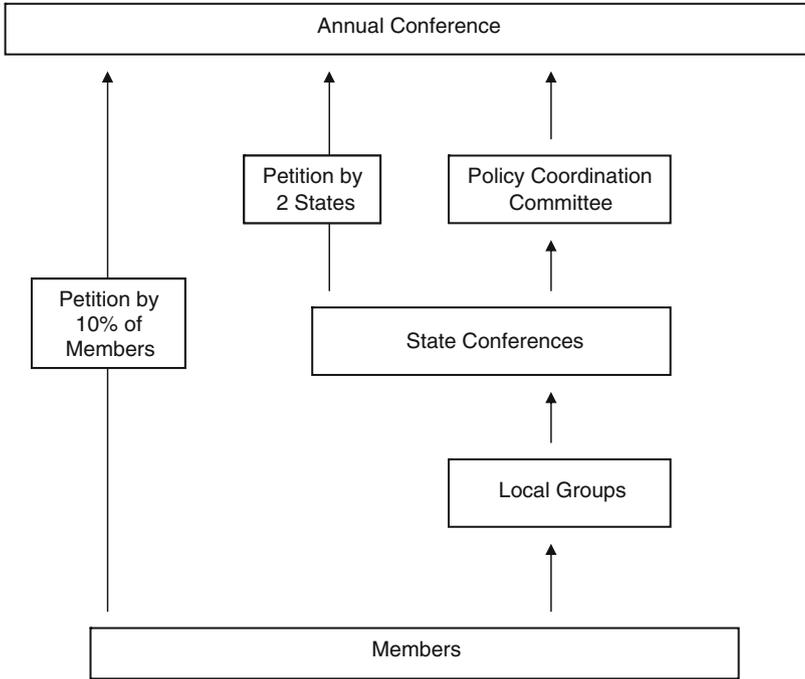
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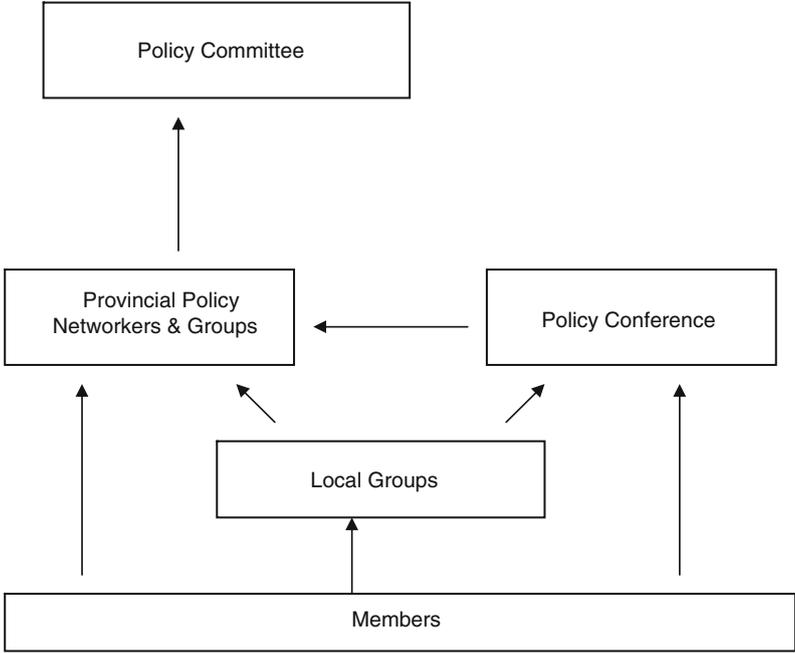
Green Party of England and Wales

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Australian Democrats

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Liberal Democrats
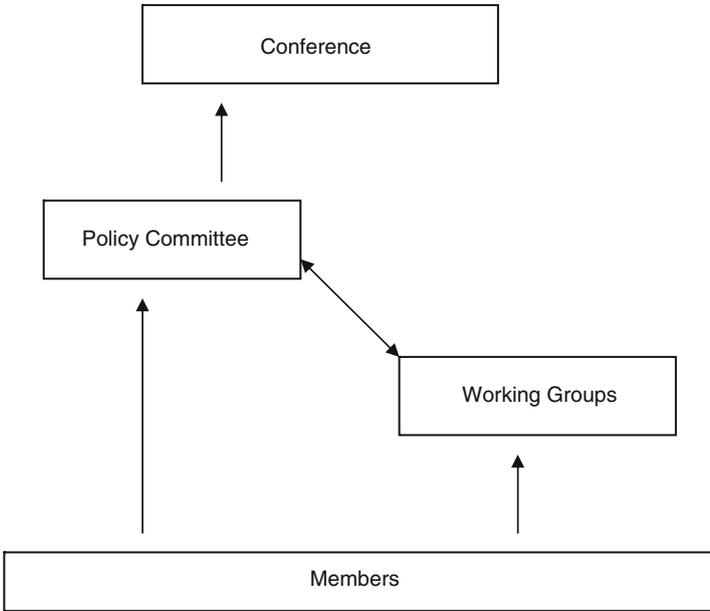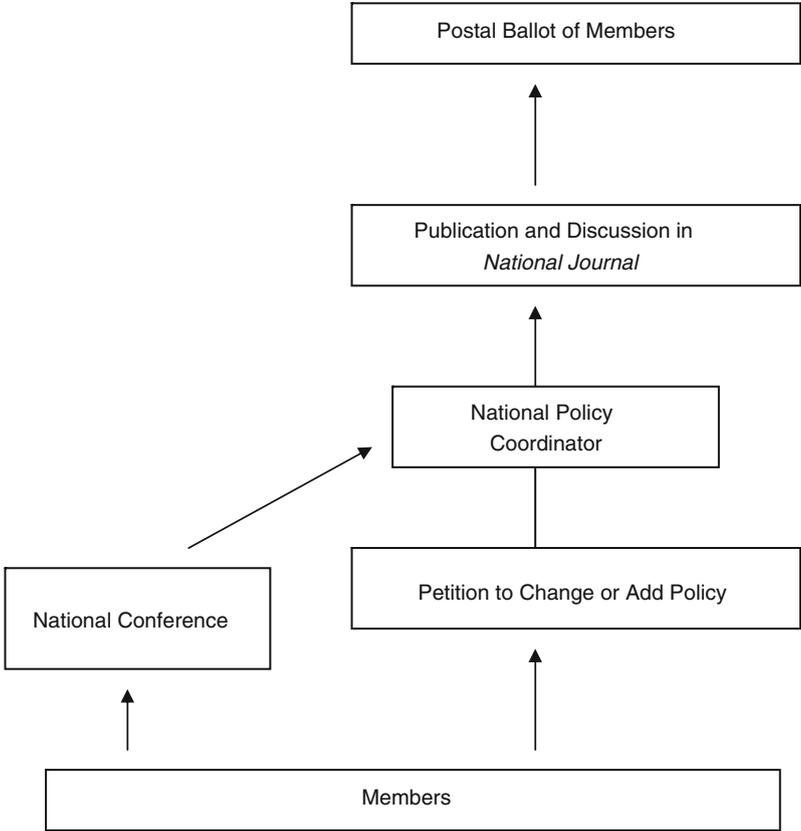
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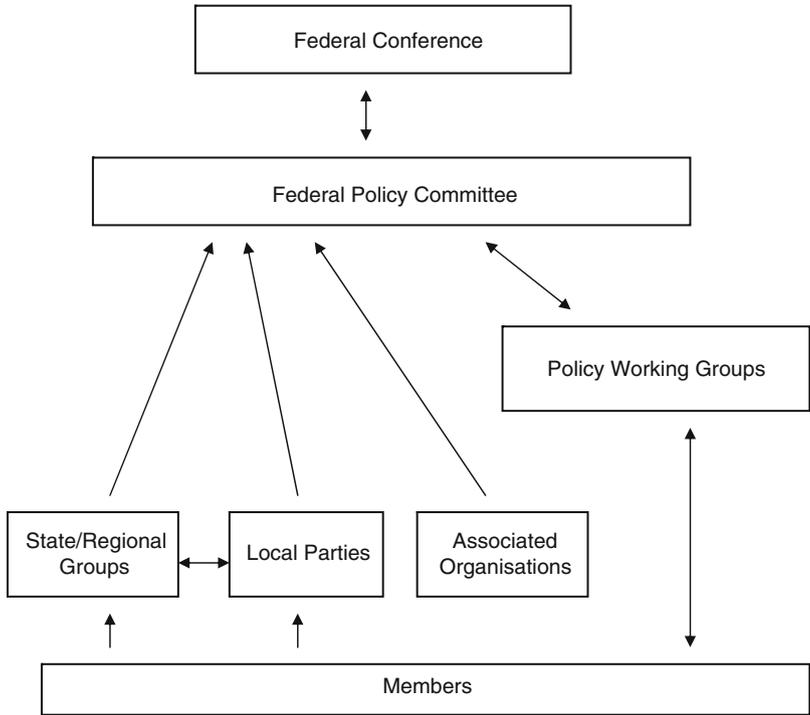
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