

KEYWORDS

KEYWORDS IN AUSTRALIAN POLITICS

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RODNEY SMITH ARIADNE VROMEN IAN COOK

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Ever been confused by the culture wars, flummoxed by factions or addled by the aspirational voter?

Keywords in Australian Politics is much more than a dictionary. It outlines the main meanings of over one hundred words essential to understanding contemporary Australian politics. Political language is often used without explanation in the media, public debate, textbooks and lectures. Here at last is a book that provides Australians with the necessary information to use these terms with confidence in public discussion and debate, from the dinner party to the end-of-semester essay.

The keywords cover the Australian political institutions and processes, practices and behaviour, ideologies and movements, and cultural, social and economic forces that affect politics, Australia's international relations and general frameworks for understanding Australian politics.

This book defines each keyword, highlights links between different keywords, outlines the main debates concerning each keyword and indicates how they came to be part of Australian political language. Although the book is arranged alphabetically, systematic cross-referencing allows readers to follow their own trails of enquiry.

This book is essential reading for everyone who wants to understand Australian political culture and ideas.

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521672832

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First published in print format 2006

ISBN-13 978-0-511-22270-2 eBook (Adobe Reader)

ISBN-10 0-511-22270-X eBook (Adobe Reader)

ISBN-13 978-0-521-67283-2 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-67283-X paperback

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following people for suggesting helpful ideas and sources for the book: David Brown, Katharine Gelber, Darryl Jarvis, Diarmuid Maguire and Michelle Savage. This book is dedicated to M. Don Fletcher, who may recognise in it some of the intellectual and stylistic skills he has directly and indirectly passed on to us.

Introduction: Why and How You Should Use This Book

We wrote this book primarily for tertiary students and other people who want to orient themselves quickly to the keywords necessary for understanding contemporary Australian politics. In a series of short entries, the book outlines the main meanings of 101 of these words, highlights the links between them, outlines the main debates surrounding them, provides brief illustrations of their use, and suggests some further reading for those who want to find out more about them.

Keywords such as bureaucracy, executive, identity politics, liberalism, managerialism, separation of powers, social capital and wedge politics are often mentioned without explanation in lectures, textbooks and other materials encountered by people studying Australian politics. These terms are important to the overall arguments being made by lecturers and writers; however, those lecturers and writers tend not to have the time or space to define or elaborate on them. Some students and readers will be at least passingly familiar with at least some of these terms. They can, however, quickly lose the thread of general arguments when they encounter specific terms with which they are unfamiliar. The same points apply to more general audiences exposed to news reporting and commentary on Australian politics.

This book is designed as a tool for students and other people who find themselves wanting to gain basic knowledge about some keywords so that they can understand wider arguments about Australian politics. It is not a textbook. There are a number of very good textbooks on Australian politics, and new ones continue to emerge (see, for example, Cook 2004; Vromen and Gelber 2005). This book is designed to complement, rather than compete with, the general

and specialised Australian politics texts in the market. *Keywords in Australian Politics* is not a dictionary of politics. There are far fewer entries in this book than in standard comprehensive Australian political dictionaries (see, for example, Henderson 2002; Jaensch 1996; Penguin Macquarie 1988). The terms identified as keywords here are more general than many of the words found in such dictionaries.

The level of generality at which each keyword in this book is pitched and the length of each entry allow the book to do three things that are not possible in more comprehensive dictionaries of politics. The first is to explain more about each keyword than is possible in the context of a shorter dictionary-style entry. The second is to incorporate definition and discussion of some lower-order terms within the treatment of each keyword. Thus for example, the entries on conservatism, feminism, liberalism and socialism identify different strands of thought within these more general theories. The third is to indicate some positive and negative links between the different keywords in the book. Thus the book indicates the link between the way commentators view power in Australia and the way they view institutions like parliament, as well as tensions between ideas like bureaucracy and democracy, or accountability and executive. This book tries to provide readers with a better orientation to relationships between central political terms than do comprehensive dictionaries of politics.

A book about Australian political keywords might be expected to cover different words from a book on Australian sporting keywords, or Australian economic keywords, or Australian religious keywords, although some words such as power might appear in all of them. The next two sections of this introduction explain the approach to identifying political keywords that we have taken in this book, first by discussing the idea of politics and then by explaining what we think differentiates keywords from other words. The final section of this introduction provides some guidance on the different ways of reading the rest of the book.

What is politics?

Politics is a word that most people hear and use every day, but defining what counts as political and what should be excluded from

politics is notoriously difficult. In everyday Australian speech, politics is often used in a negative way, particularly to refer to situations of conflict in which those involved seem unable to look beyond their own interests or advantage. When someone says things like, 'This issue is too important for politics to come into it', or 'There's just too much politics', it is this negative, advantage-seeking idea of politics that they have in mind. In Australia, this view of politics commonly focusses on squabbling between the political parties, so that politics and party become almost synonymous. It carries with it the idea that beyond politics lies some better way of resolving issues.

Such a view of politics carries some important truths. Politics is often about conflict. In political systems like Australia's, much of that conflict is organised around competition between political parties. Parties and other groups in politics are sometimes only concerned about their own interests.

Equally, such a view of politics leaves out a lot. Politics often involves conflict precisely because it describes the way people must attempt to resolve important issues. Important issues are those on which values and opinions differ. They are issues that involve decisions which, no matter how carefully they are made, will leave some of those affected unsatisfied and may even leave them exposed to harm or death. Much as we would wish it were so, there is no way other than politics to resolve important issues.

There are, of course, different ways of doing politics. Conflict is only part of the story. Politics is also about cooperation and compromise in order to achieve outcomes. Without cooperating with others, a single individual cannot achieve much in politics. Cooperation and compromise are different from conflict but not necessarily better ways of doing politics. Some types of cooperation, including behind the scenes bribery to ensure a particular outcome, would be condemned by most Australians. Sometimes Australians want politicians to fight for important values or interests – to engage in conflict – rather than to accept compromises that result in those values and interests being watered down or lost. Moreover, not all conflicts are the same. Killing opponents is not the same as arguing with them. Politics is partly about what forms of conflict, cooperation and compromise are allowed and how these modes of interaction are organised to produce outcomes (see Pringle 1997).

This last point reminds us that politics is about much more than political parties. A few moments' thought will lead to the conclusion that it involves a range of other institutions, actors and practices, including parliaments, governments, elections, bureaucracies, courts, interest groups, the media, protests, voting and other forms of civic participation. A common way of looking at politics is to see these institutions, actors and practices as forming a system characterised by relationships of power or influence. In these power relationships, some actors and institutions bring about effects on other institutions and actors.

These power relationships are rarely simple. Imagine that an interest group representing business convinces the government to try to change an employment law. Other interest groups, such as unions, will try to modify or defeat the proposal; the non-government parties will have to come to positions and act on them; the news media will carry commentary attempting to influence the outcome; the minister and public sector agency responsible for employment will have to oversee the drafting of the new law; the courts may be called upon to adjudicate on the validity of the new law; voters may change their votes on the basis of the new law. The power relations that characterise politics are multiple and inter-connected (see Smith 1997).

The regularity of power relationships in political systems allows us to compare systems and draw distinctions between them. For example, the Australian political system is often seen as part of a group of liberal democratic political systems, in which the exercise of power is channelled through representative democratic institutions and limited by liberal assumptions about individual freedoms (see Tiffen and Gittins 2004). Liberal democratic systems are commonly contrasted with more authoritarian systems like those in Saudi Arabia, Vietnam or Singapore. More narrowly, the Australian political system is sometimes seen as part of a family of Westminster-style systems deriving from British political practice, or as a hybrid 'Washminster' system combining features of the Westminster parliamentary system and American federalism (Thompson 1980). These descriptions allow contrasts to be drawn between Australia and other liberal democracies, such as those of continental Europe, which have different arrangements of political institutions, actors and power relations.

The Australian political system is sometimes depicted more critically as one of a group of capitalist democracies in which the scope for the democratic exercise of power is limited by the power of business. Here contrasts can be drawn between Australia and political systems that either eliminate business or restrict its power, such as the former political system of the Soviet Union.

Thinking about politics as a set of power relationships raises the question of where the boundaries of politics end. If power is understood as a relationship in which an actor has an effect on another, then it is clear that politics extends well beyond the political system discussed above and into arenas like schools, churches, workplaces, sports clubs, community groups, friendships and families. The insight that power is found everywhere in human relationships was captured neatly in the feminist slogan of the 1970s: 'The personal is the political' (Millett 1977: 23–4).

On the one hand, then, people interested in the study of politics are legitimately interested in all aspects of human society. On the other hand, political scientists usually want to focus their attention on a more or less delimited set of power relationships. The focus taken in this book is on words used to describe and analyse the most powerful institutions and actors in Australian society and the relationships between them; that is, the institutions and actors whose interactions affect the largest numbers of Australians across the widest range of issues. Some of these power relationships occur within and around the institutions that make up the Australian Commonwealth, state and territory governments; that is, those institutions that together monopolise the use of legitimate force to uphold their decisions within the territory of Australia. Other power relationships occur in wider struggles between a range of powerful non-government actors and institutions. All these relationships are conditioned by the political ideologies and values found within Australian culture (for further discussion of the nature of politics and political science, see Leftwich 2004; Marsh and Stoker 2002). As well as outlining keywords used to describe, explain and interpret Australian governments, the entries in this book explain keywords that refer to these other political actors, institutions, ideologies and values. Australian politics cannot be understood without an understanding of Australia's place in the world. A number of keywords in this book deal

with the ways in which Australia's relations with other countries have been understood and the international forces that shape Australian politics.

What are keywords?

In describing the words discussed in this book as keywords, we have taken our cue from Raymond Williams's classic book *Keywords* (1976), which describes keywords as being significant in two related ways. First, they are words that bind together other words into particular patterns of interpretation. Second, they are words that crystallise conflicts over different ways of seeing the world. Keywords are always keywords in a particular context. The particular ways in which keywords bind other words and set up contests differ from place to place and from time to time.

In our case, we focus on political words used in Australia that help to organise wider patterns of political thought and activity and/or point to lines of political disagreement. 'Democracy', for example, can be seen as a keyword whose use helps to bind together assumptions about a range of other words, including voting, political parties, parliament and federalism. Two Australians using the term 'democracy' will often disagree about whether a commitment to democracy commits them to supporting a certain level of socio-economic equality, a particular set of civic values and so on.

The keywords cover Australian political institutions and processes (bureaucracy, constitution, ministry etc), practices and behaviour (convention, protest, voting etc), ideologies and movements (feminism, green, liberalism etc), cultural, social and economic forces that affect politics (culture, ethnicity, secularism etc), Australia's international relations (globalisation, terrorism, trade etc) and general frameworks for understanding Australian politics (democracy, federalism, utilitarianism etc).

The emphasis in the selection of keywords is on terms that are relevant to contemporary Australian politics. Some of the keywords included in this book have very long histories. 'Law' comes to us from old Scandinavian words that began to be used in England in the eleventh century. 'Parliament' comes via the thirteenth-century councils of the English king and his great lords. The ancient Greek

word 'democracy' found its way into English use around the sixteenth century, although it only became a keyword in English politics a couple of centuries ago, particularly as a term with negative connotations. These older words are included not because of their historical importance but because they perform the functions of keywords in contemporary Australian discussion. The emphasis in discussing them is on their current usage, although their longer history is briefly outlined. Terms that previously had relevance in Australian politics but are no longer important are not included in the book.

Some keywords included here have not been around for very long but have quickly come to play a role in characterising Australian politics. Examples include aspiration, culture wars, economic rationalism, managerialism, spin and wedge politics. The adoption of most of these terms has been largely driven by popular, party political and media debates, and some have not yet fully seeped into academic discussions of politics. We do not think that this is in itself reason to exclude them. We have not tried to guess too much about the future direction of Australian political language but these keywords seem worth including in a book that maps the contemporary vocabulary of Australian politics. Some of the words included in this book, such as other, difference and discourse, are words whose specific use in political analysis has largely remained confined to academic debates. Despite this comparatively narrow use, these words do perform the function of binding together and interpreting more widely used political terms like power, ideology, ethnicity, religion, sexuality and gender. In this sense, they are keywords.

Words that are crucial to understanding politics outside Australia but that are not important in Australian academic and wider political discussion have been excluded from this book. Careful readers will note that few of the keywords collected here originated in Australia. Most have been imported from other countries. Some readers might think that this tendency to import words points to an absence of a distinctly Australian political theory or a lack of originality in Australian political thought. Before such a view is uncritically accepted, it is worth noting that a good proportion of the keywords have been adapted after their arrival in this country to fit the distinctiveness

of Australian political conditions and the peculiarities of Australia's existing political vocabulary (see Cook 1997).

How to read the rest of this book

The rest of this book contains a list of 101 keywords and their main variants, arranged alphabetically, followed by entries of around 400 to 700 words on each keyword. Each entry begins with a discussion of a term's central meaning or meanings, before elaborating on these meanings, cross-referencing other terms, identifying important issues or arguments surrounding the keyword and providing Australian examples.

Readers who simply want to confirm the basic meanings of a keyword that they have encountered elsewhere can usually do so by looking up the word and reading the first paragraph of the relevant entry. In some cases, however, the explanation of more complex keywords has required more than one paragraph. Readers wanting to increase their understanding of a keyword beyond the level of a basic definition will need to read the entire entry.

A word in **bold** in the text of an entry indicates another keyword that can be followed up. For example, the entry on parliament contains cross-references to law, judiciary, separation of powers, democracy, federalism, responsible government, ministry, committee, party, representation, power and executive. Readers can use the words in bold to trace relationships between different keywords, allowing them to follow more or less complex trails through the book that reflect their own levels and areas of interest.

By their nature, the keywords are comparatively general. Some more specific words and examples appear in the discussion of the keywords that cover them. The entry on parliament, for example, discusses bills, supply, upper and lower houses and deadlocks. Readers who do not find the word they are looking for in the keyword list will often find it listed in the index at the back of the book.

A book like this cannot answer all the questions about the meaning of particular political terms that readers may bring to it. For that reason, each entry ends with a short bibliography of further reading. The first reading listed provides an introductory-level discussion.

The other texts listed provide more advanced discussion, and in some cases include classic writings on a keyword.

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Keywords (and their Variants)

Accountability (*accountable*)

Advocacy (*advocate, advocated, advocates*)

Affirmative action

Agenda setting

Aspiration (*aspirational, aspirations*)

Asylum seeker (*asylum seekers*)

Bureaucracy (*bureaucratic, bureaucrats*)

Business (*businesses*)

Citizenship (*citizen, citizens*)

Class (*classes*)

Colonialism (*colonial, colonies, colonisation, colonisers, colony*)

Committee (*committees*)

Community (*communities*)

Conservatism (*conservative*)

Constitution (*constitutional, constitutionality*)

Conventions (*conventional, conventions*)

Corruption (*corrupt*)

Crisis

Culture (*cultural, culturally, cultures*)

Culture wars

Federalism (*deliberative*)

Democracy (*democracies, democrat, democratic, democrats*)

Differences (*differences, different*)

Discourse

Economic rationalism (*economic rationalist*)

Egalitarianism (*egalitarian*)

Elite (*elites, elitism, elitist*)

Environmentalism (*environment, environmental, environmentalist, environmentalists*)

Equality (*equal, equally, equals, inequalities, inequality*)

Ethics (*ethical*)

Ethnicity (*ethnic*)

Executive (*executives*)

Family (*families*)

Federalism (*federal, federalist, federation*)

Feminism (*feminist*)

Freedom (*free*)

Gender (*gendered*)

Globalisation (*globalised*)

Green

Identity politics (*identity*)

Ideology (*ideological, ideologically, ideologies*)

Indigenous

Individualism (*individualist, individualists*)

Interest groups (*interest groups*)

International relations

Internet

Judiciary (*judicial*)

Law— (*laws*)

Leadership (*leader, leaders*)

Liberalism (*liberal, liberals*)

Managerialism

Mandate

Media

Ministerial advisers (*ministerial advisers*)

Ministry (*minister, ministerial, ministers, ministries*)

Multiculturalism (*multicultural*)

National identity (*nation, nationalism, nationalities, nationality, nations*)

Obligation (*obligations*)

Other (*otherness, others*)

Parliament (*parliamentarian, parliamentarians, parliamentary, parliaments*)

Participation (*participants, participate, participated, participating, participatory*)
Party (*parties*)
Policy (*policies*)
Political socialisation
Populism
Post-modernism (*post-modern*)
Power (*powers, powerful*)
Protest (*protests*)
Public and private
Public opinion
Public sector (*public sectors*)
Race (*racism, racist*)
Radical (*radicals*)
Religion (*religions, religiosity, religious*)
Representations (*represent, representations, representative, representatives, represented, representing, represents*)
Republic
Responsibility (*responsibilities, responsible*)
Rights (*right*)
Secularism (*secularists*)
Security
Self-determination
Separation of powers
Sexuality (*sexual, sexualities*)
Social capital
Federalism (*social democratic, social democrats*)
Social movement (*social movements*)
Socialism (*socialist, socialists*)
Spin
Terrorism (*terrorist*)
Think tanks (*think tanks*)
Third sector
Trade
Traditional (*traditional, traditionally, traditions*)

Treaty (*treaties*)

Union (*unionism, unions*)

Utilitarianism (*utilitarian*)

Values (*value, valued*)

Voting (*vote, voted, voter, voters, votes*)

Federalism

Welfare

Westminster

101 KEYWORDS IN AUSTRALIAN POLITICS

