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**THOUGHTS ON 2001 ELECTION**  
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I followed the 2001 election with interest, and had plenty of thoughts on it. Hence I decided to write this piece with some of my thoughts on the election, specifically the subject of Senate voting and parties leapfrogging with preferences to win seats, which should be prevented. This happened at not just the 2001 election, but at the previous election, in 1998, as well.

I write this piece as a person who has keenly followed elections, both Federal and State, for several years. I enjoy looking at parliamentary pendulums and election statistics, and collating them. I have no tertiary qualifications, but I often read newspaper articles and books, and look at statistics on various electoral sites on the Internet. In short, I am what ABC election analyst Antony Green would describe as an 'election junkie' – I remember him using that term in a newspaper article once. I am not a member of any political party, but I am interested in politics and current affairs.

My immediate interest in the election relates to voting for the Senate. The election of 2001 saw, in some cases, some parties winning Senate seats despite winning fewer votes than other parties. In those cases, the parties that won the third-highest share of the vote failed to win a Senate seat, yet were beaten to a seat by parties with fewer votes but with preferences from other parties – I call this 'leapfrogging'. Thus parties finishing fourth or fifth were winning seats, and parties finishing third missed out. While legal, this is unjust, and should be stopped. There were cases of leapfrogging in New South Wales, Western Australia, and Queensland. Thus my piece focuses on these States.

I have ignored the other States and Territories because there is no evidence of leapfrogging having occurred in them. Figures show, shall we say, a clean bill of health in Victoria, South Australia, and Tasmania. When minor parties won seats in those States, they had won the third-highest share of the vote behind the major parties – in other words, they won their seats on merit.

Some Senate seats in NSW, WA, and Queensland were not really won on merit. Figures indicate leapfrogging having occurred to the benefit of the Greens in NSW, and the Democrats in both WA and Queensland. The Nationals also benefited from leapfrogging, to a point, in Queensland. These cases should be looked at, one State at a time.

In New South Wales, the Senate contest saw the Greens win a Senate seat by leapfrogging both the Democrats and One Nation. The following figures show the Senate vote in NSW.

**2001 SENATE VOTE IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Party	Votes	PC	Quota
HAN	216522	5.58	0.3907
CTA	72697	1.87	0.1312
PLP	68483	1.77	0.1236
DEM	240867	6.21	0.4346
ACL	1299488	33.50	2.3448
LNP	1620235	41.76	2.9235
GRN	169139	4.36	0.3052

**SOURCE:** [http://www.aec.gov.au/\\_content/when/past/2001/results/index.html](http://www.aec.gov.au/_content/when/past/2001/results/index.html)

These figures show that the Liberal-National Coalition (LNP) finished ahead of Labor (ACL), the Democrats (DEM), One Nation (HAN), and the Greens (GRN). The Democrats thus won the third-highest share of the vote. Yet a Senate seat went to the Greens, with the fifth-highest share of the

vote – in other words, the Greens leapfrogged the fourth-placed One Nation and the third-placed Democrats, not one party but two. This is extremely unjust.

Many observers would wonder, as I have, how this happened. It would seem clear that preferences were directed to the Greens, at the expense of both the Democrats and One Nation. The idea that the party finishing fourth could, and does, win a Senate seat ahead of the party finishing third, is unjust. But for the party finishing fifth to win a seat ahead of the parties finishing third and fourth, is an utter travesty. Kerry Nettle, the successful candidate for the Greens, is extremely lucky to be in Parliament. The defeated Senator Vicki Bourne, of the Democrats, should not have lost her seat.

A similar story emerges from the Senate contest in Western Australia. There the Democrats won a Senate seat by leapfrogging One Nation. The following figures show the Senate vote in WA.

**2001 SENATE VOTE IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

<b>Party</b>	<b>Votes</b>	<b>PC</b>	<b>Quota</b>
CTA	13809	1.25	0.0874
LP	443597	40.13	2.8088
NP	26015	2.35	0.1647
HAN	77757	7.03	0.4923
LFF	15646	1.42	0.0991
DEM	64773	5.86	0.4101
ALP	377547	34.15	2.3906
GWA	64736	5.86	0.4099

**SOURCE:** [http://www.aec.gov.au/\\_content/when/past/2001/results/index.html](http://www.aec.gov.au/_content/when/past/2001/results/index.html)

According to the figures, the Liberals (LP) finished ahead of Labor (ALP), and One Nation (HAN). Then the Democrats (DEM) and the Greens (GWA) won 5.86% each, though the Democrats won slightly more votes than the Greens (64773 to 64736 – around 40 votes’ difference!). Nevertheless, One Nation won more votes than both the Democrats and the Greens – but it was the Democrats who came away with a Senate seat. It is apparent that preferences were directed to the Democrats, at the expense of One Nation. Senator Andrew Murray of the Democrats is lucky to have held his seat – it should have gone to One Nation candidate Graeme Campbell.

A similar story also emerges from Queensland. Only on this occasion, both the Nationals and the Democrats won Senate seats, despite the fact that One Nation, with Pauline Hanson leading the party, finished ahead of both of them. The following figures show the Senate vote in Queensland.

**2001 SENATE VOTE IN QUEENSLAND**

<b>Party</b>	<b>Votes</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Quota</b>
ALP	682239	31.73	2.2212
NP	196845	9.16	0.6409
CTA	22703	1.06	0.0739
GRN	71102	3.31	0.2315
HMP	28122	1.31	0.0916
HAN	215400	10.02	0.7013
LP	750416	34.90	2.4431
ACS	24319	1.13	0.0792
DEM	143942	6.69	0.4686

**SOURCE:** [http://www.aec.gov.au/\\_content/when/past/2001/results/index.html](http://www.aec.gov.au/_content/when/past/2001/results/index.html)

These figures indicate that the Liberals (LP) won 34.90% of the vote (and a quota of 2.4431), Labor (ALP) 31.73% (2.2212), One Nation (HAN) 10.02 (0.7013), the Nationals (NP) 9.16% (0.6409), the Democrats (DEM) 6.69% (0.4686), and the Greens (GRN) 3.31% (0.2315). As in WA, One Nation won the third-highest share of the vote. But it was the Nationals and the Democrats who were both able to leapfrog One Nation and come away with a Senate seat each.

It is obvious that preferences were being directed away from One Nation. Admittedly, preferences from the Liberals would almost definitely have gone to the Nationals, being partners in Coalition, and the Nationals were only narrowly behind One Nation in the count, so perhaps the Nationals can be excused from criticism in this respect. But the Democrats were some distance behind both, some 7% of the vote compared to 10% for One Nation and 9% for the Nationals – and they leapfrogged One Nation to a seat. Like Murray in WA, Senator Andrew Bartlett of the Democrats is lucky to still be in Parliament – his seat should have gone to Hanson.

We can see from these examples how parties win Senate seats through leapfrogging. It is a rather unpleasant blight on the system. If Senate seats are to be won by minor parties, behind Labor and the Coalition, surely the party that wins the third-highest share of the vote is more entitled to win seats than the parties that finish fourth or fifth. Yet at the last election the Democrats, with the third-highest share of the vote in NSW, were beaten to a Senate seat by the Greens, with the fifth-highest share. At the same time One Nation won the third-highest share of the vote in both Western Australia and Queensland, but failed to win seats in either State – parties with fewer votes came away with those seats. Unless proven otherwise, it seems clear that preferences are being directed to some parties and away from others (especially One Nation), and leapfrogging is taking place.

One might ask where the voters come into this. After all, they should, at least in theory, decide who gets their preferences if their first choice of candidate or party is unsuccessful. However, in voting for the Senate, this is only really possible if electors vote ‘below the line’ on their ballot paper, so they must number the box of every single candidate. The bulk of electors, therefore, do not do this. Fair though it may be, it is simply too time-consuming. Most electors vote above the line on their Senate ballot papers, where they just vote ‘1’ for the party of their choice and nothing more.

Unfortunately, in voting above the line, electors cannot state second preferences. Labor voters, for example, who prefer One Nation as their second choice ahead of the Democrats or the Greens, can only vote that way below the line. By voting above the line, their preferences would be directed to the Democrats or the Greens ahead of One Nation, because Labor has always rejected One Nation as illegitimate. In effect, electors who vote above the line seem to be letting the party decide who gets their preferences. The parties actually have to state where they will direct their preferences, but most electors either are unaware, or take no notice, of this. Therefore, as the bulk of electors vote above the line, their message seems to be that they do not care where their preferences go, and the parties direct preferences to whoever they choose, whether their voters like it or not. And as many Senate seats are filled with preferences, some parties can get elected with fewer votes than other parties, simply because they got the preferences. That is why we have leapfrogging, and the last election is evidence of it.

The cases of leapfrogging in Senate contests is not, however, confined to the last election. There were also cases of leapfrogging in the previous election, in 1998. They occurred in New South Wales, Western Australia, and Queensland – the same states where leapfrogging occurred in 2001. There were, however, some variations. In both NSW and WA, the Democrats came away with Senate seats despite winning fewer votes than One Nation, while in Queensland, they won a Senate

seat despite winning fewer votes than the Nationals. I should add that I have found other figures that illustrate the extent of leapfrogging.

In New South Wales, the Democrats beat One Nation to a Senate seat despite fewer votes. The Senate vote in NSW was as follows.

**1998 SENATE VOTE IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Group	Votes	%	Quota
LNP	1375563	36.63	2.56
ALP	1452560	38.68	2.71
DEM	275910	7.35	0.51
GRN	81612	2.17	0.15
HAN	361009	9.61	0.67
CDP	58079	1.55	0.11
UNI	61607	1.64	0.11

**SOURCE:** [http://www.aec.gov.au/\\_content/when/past/1998/senate/fp\\_state.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/_content/when/past/1998/senate/fp_state.htm)

These figures show that One Nation received the third-highest share of the Senate vote, with the Democrats fourth. If a minor party was going to get a Senate seat, it should have been One Nation, by virtue of being the ‘best of the rest’. However, the Democrats beat One Nation to a seat with preferences from other parties and candidates. The following figures show where preferences went, and illustrates how close each party came to filling a quota and where the surplus votes went after either a party was excluded or a quota were filled.

**FLOW OF PREFERENCES – 1998 SENATE ELECTION IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Party	Count 1	189-193	194-198	199-203	204-208	209
Labor	2.71	2.73	2.84	2.87	2.88	3.24
Coalition	2.56	2.67	2.67	2.68	2.00	2.00
One Nation	0.67	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.76	0.76
Democrats	0.51	0.53	0.53	0.70	1.36	1.00
Greens	0.15	0.21	0.21			
Unity	0.11	0.12				
Others	0.29					

**SOURCE:** <http://abc.net.au/public/elections/2001fed/electorates/snsw.htm>

As most minor parties were excluded through progressive counts, One Nation was still the third-best performer behind the major parties with a quota of 0.75. At this point the Democrats (0.53) were some way behind, with Labor on 2.73 and the Coalition on 2.67. This would suggest that the majority of those excluded parties and candidates gave preferences to the Coalition and One Nation.

But with the Unity Party (0.12) and then the Greens (0.21) being excluded, their preferences were directed away from One Nation (still on 0.75). When it came down to the final four parties, the Democrats were still fourth, but were now right behind One Nation with 0.70 against 0.75. Then the Coalition’s preferences were distributed, and they went overwhelmingly to the Democrats, who thus rose to 1.36 over 0.76 for One Nation. The Democrats thus leapfrogged One Nation to win a Senate seat. Surplus votes from the Democrats went to Labor, giving Labor a third seat.

This shows the extent to which parties control preference flows. Clearly, the major parties and the larger of the minor parties directed preferences away from One Nation, and the Democrats, who won fewer votes, came away with a seat. This is clearly unjust. Aden Ridgeway, the successful

candidate for the Democrats, is lucky to be in Parliament today. If a Senate seat in NSW was going to go to a minor party candidate, it should have gone to One Nation candidate David Oldfield. It should be noted that Oldfield is now a member of the Upper House in the NSW Parliament, and has also fallen out with Hanson.

There was a similar occurrence in Western Australia. Again the Democrats beat One Nation to a Senate seat despite fewer votes. The Senate vote in WA.

#### 1998 SENATE VOTE IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Group	Votes	%	Quota
LP	408748	38.41	2.69
NP	13429	1.26	0.09
ALP	368878	34.67	2.43
DEM	68095	6.40	0.45
GWA	61063	5.74	0.40
HAN	110294	10.37	0.73

**SOURCE:** [http://www.aec.gov.au/\\_content/when/past/1998/senate/fp\\_state.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/_content/when/past/1998/senate/fp_state.htm)

The figures show One Nation finishing third behind the Liberals and Labor, and ahead of both the Democrats and the Greens (as happened in NSW), and by some distance. But like in NSW, the Democrats came away with a seat, as indicated in the following figures.

#### FLOW OF PREFERENCES – 1998 SENATE ELECTION IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

	Count 1	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26
Liberal Party	2.69	2.70	2.78	2.79	2.79	3.15
Labor Party	2.43	2.49	2.49	2.53	2.00	2.00
One Nation	0.73	0.78	0.78	0.78	0.85	0.85
Australian Democrats	0.45	0.49	0.50	0.89	1.36	1.00
Greens	0.40	0.45	0.46			
National Party	0.09	0.09				
Christian Democrats	0.07					
Others	0.14					

**SOURCE:** <http://abc.net.au/public/elections/2001fed/electorates/swa.htm>

As in NSW, One Nation came third in the quota count behind the Liberals and Labor, with the Democrats fourth and the Greens fifth. Exclusions over progressive counts of most minor parties left the Liberals (2.70) leading Labor (2.49), One Nation (0.78), the Democrats (0.45), and the Greens (0.40). Preferences were seemingly distributed across a broad range up to that point. But with the Nationals and then (especially) the Greens excluded, the Democrats were suddenly ahead of One Nation by 0.89 to 0.79. Clearly, preferences went to the Democrats and away from One Nation. Then Labor preferences were distributed, mostly to the Democrats, and the Democrats grabbed a Senate seat. Surplus votes from the Democrats went to the Liberals, who got a third seat.

Once again, the major parties and the larger of the minors directed their preferences away from One Nation, who clearly did better than all but the major parties. One Nation got over 10% of the vote against over 6% for the Democrats, but the Democrats came away with a Senate seat. Brian Greig, the successful candidate for the Democrats, is lucky to be in Parliament – his seat should have gone to One Nation candidate John Fischer.

In Queensland, a similar thing happened. Only this time the Nationals were the victims, while One Nation won a seat by filling a quota. The Senate vote in Queensland was as follows.

**1998 SENATE VOTE IN QUEENSLAND**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Votes</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Quota</b>
LP	570692	28.48	1.99
NP	190662	9.52	0.67
ALP	654623	32.67	2.29
DEM	156451	7.81	0.55
GRN	42264	2.11	0.15
HAN	297245	14.83	1.04
CDP	28826	1.44	0.10

**SOURCE:** [http://www.aec.gov.au/\\_content/when/past/1998/senate/fp\\_state.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/_content/when/past/1998/senate/fp_state.htm)

The figures show the finishing order as Labor, the Liberals, One Nation, the Nationals, then the Democrats. One Nation actually won a seat by filling a quota at first count, while the Nationals were some way behind and the Democrats further back. Yet the Democrats came away with a seat by leapfrogging the Nationals, despite fewer votes than them. Clearly, the other parties directed their preferences to the Democrats and away from the Nationals. Senator John Woodley of the Democrats (who has since resigned from Parliament) was lucky to retain his seat. The defeated Senator Bill O'Chee, of the Nationals, should still be in Parliament today.

These cases in 1998 illustrate, as in 2001, the existence of leapfrogging in Senate contests. In 1998 the Democrats won three seats, in different States, that should not have been theirs. In New South Wales and Western Australia, they won fewer votes than One Nation but still won seats, while in Queensland they won a seat despite fewer votes than the Nationals. Clearly then the other political parties were spooked by One Nation so much that they directed their preferences away, to keep One Nation out. That is still happening now.

At this point, I consider it appropriate to compare the performances of some of the minor parties in 2001 with those in 1998. I have made comparisons on a state-by-state basis, because this seems the most appropriate means. Although the performance of each political party across the nation as a whole certainly draws much comment in the media, it is realistically neither here nor there in Senate contests. Again, these comparisons only relate to NSW, WA, and Queensland because leapfrogging occurred in these States only.

The Democrats won 7.35% of the vote in 1998, falling to 6.21% in 2001. While it is thus certainly true that the Democrats lost votes at the last election, they still did better than both One Nation, down from 9.61% to 5.58%, and the Greens, up from 2.17% to 4.36% (thus double the vote from 1998). From these figures, it is pretty clear that, even allowing for the lower vote, Bourne lost her seat because of other parties directing preferences away from her. She has clearly been cheated by the system. Whatever may be said about the performance of the Democrats in Australia as a whole (and I note that there has been much criticism of late), the loss of their seat in NSW almost certainly had more to do with preferences being directed away from them.

It has to be said too, that things could have worse for the Democrats. In Queensland and WA they won less votes than One Nation, but both Bartlett (Queensland) and Murray (WA) retained their seats. However, I remember in the immediate wake of the election hearing speculation that they would both lose their seats – not to One Nation, but to the Greens. This speculation was also in Victoria, where Lyn Allison was fighting to retain her seat, and in NSW with Bourne. Had all four

Democrats lost their Senate seats to the Greens, it would have been an absolute travesty. In the end, Bourne was the only casualty here (and indeed across Australia – the major parties neither gained nor lost seats in the Senate). But Bourne's defeat is still an injustice, as the Democrats won more votes in NSW than the Greens.

As mentioned earlier, the Greens in NSW improved their vote. It went up from 2.17% in 1998 to 4.36% in 2001, almost double. But it was still nowhere near enough to win a Senate seat, and they were still behind both One Nation and the Democrats. Yet they leapfrogged both parties and came away with a Senate seat, because preferences were directed to them. They were very lucky to win. Their vote also went up in WA and Queensland, but they were still behind both the Democrats and One Nation. As well, their vote went up in the other States, but nowhere did they win enough votes on merit to deserve Senate seats.

Despite a declining vote, One Nation has generally won more votes than both the Democrats and the Greens, but failed to win Senate seats. In NSW, One Nation won 9.61% of the vote in 1998 and fell to 5.58% in 2001. In WA it fell from 10.37% to 7.03%. In Queensland it fell from 14.83% to 10.02%. In 1998, the party won the third-highest share of the vote in those States, but only won a seat in Queensland. In 2001 it fell from third to fourth in NSW, but stayed where it was in WA and Queensland – yet failed to win seats. Clearly, the other parties have been so terrified by One Nation that they have done whatever they could to starve it of votes. In a sense, One Nation has exposed the fact that parties can direct preferences where they decide, not where electors decide, and thus leapfrogging. One Nation has made people aware of a flaw in our election system that they did not know about before.

I believe that the election system needs to be changed to prevent leapfrogging. It is unjust that a minor political party can win a Senate seat with fewer votes than other minor parties, with the help of preferences from others holding vendettas of some kind. For instance, if One Nation wins much more votes than the Democrats, it should not be possible for the Democrats to beat One Nation to Senate seats – as has happened at this election and the one before that.

What am I thus suggesting? There should be changes in the way that preferences are distributed. The parties should be taken out of the equation. One option could be preferential voting above the line. This enables voters to decide which parties get their second and third preferences and so on. This is how it is when voting below the line, but not above the line. And if leapfrogging did occur, it would at least result from voters deciding where their preferences go. This happens in voting for the House of Representatives, where the candidate with the largest share of the vote does not always win. This sounds, to me, the fairest way of voting. Those who vote below the line at least decide where their preferences go – those who vote above the line should also be able to do so.

In conclusion, the 2001 election has shown, as has the 1998 election, that parties can win Senate seats, with a smaller share of votes but a greater share of preferences, through leapfrogging. This has cost One Nation and the Nationals seats that should have been theirs, and undeservedly given the Greens a seat, while the Democrats have both won and lost seats undeservedly. The system needs to be changed to prevent leapfrogging, which is a bad blight on elections.

**SOURCES OF INFO:** [www.abc.net.au](http://www.abc.net.au), [www.aec.gov.au](http://www.aec.gov.au), countless newspaper articles and books

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