

Socio-economic cleavages in 2022 federal voting: persistence of economic and ownership inequalities

Anatomy of a Centre-Left Majority, Macquarie University

Shaun Ratcliff

YouGov

University of Sydney

4 August, 2022



Patrick Durkin ✅

@patrickdurkin

...

Politics flipped two weeks ago. The average Labor voter now earns more than the average Coalition voter
@apatrickafr #auspol



afr.com

Reversal of fortune: Labor electorates earn more than Coalition seats

Households in Labor electorates now earn \$8580 more a year than those in

The working poor move right

Mr Metcalfe's main conclusion is that the Coalition is "trending poor".

"The big takeaway is we're seeing a continuation of the trend in the last federal election where the Coalition's support base is shifting towards poorer, less skilled, less educated people born in Australia."

Increasingly the Coalition represents the Australian-born working class, as independents deprive it of its previous base of rich professionals, Mr Metcalfe noted.

"Rich, educated professionals swung 11 to 12 per cent against the Coalition, while the country's working poor swung only 3 to 4 per cent against them."

Figure 1: Luke Metcalfe, quoted in the AFR, 29 May, 2022.

It wasn't just about the teals, either: the Coalition also surrendered these seats variously to Labor and the Greens. The Greens have wound up with four seats, three of which are made up of wealthy people and upwardly mobile students. The irony of this result is that despite progressive politics' rhetorical tendency to rail against the privilege of rich white people, it is precisely these people who delivered this result.

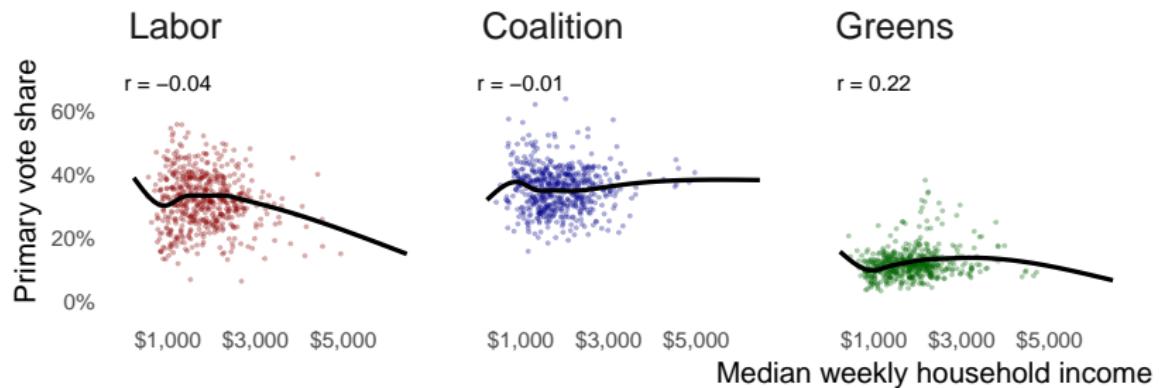
Figure 2: Waleed Aly, Nine-Fairfax papers, June 3, 2022.

Conversely, conservative politics becomes the politics of the struggling. Note, amidst the carnage, where the Coalition continues to gain ground. Seats with the highest levels of mortgage stress swung to the Coalition. So, too, did the most economically-disadvantaged seats in the country. The exception is in Queensland – hardly surprising given the Coalition maxed out its vote there in 2019. Meanwhile, Labor suffered consistent primary-vote swings against it in its safe suburban seats. So, now we have the new Opposition leader making a specific pitch for the suburbs and attacking big business. Once upon a time that would surely have been a Labor leader.

Figure 3: Waleed Aly, Nine-Fairfax papers, June 3, 2022.

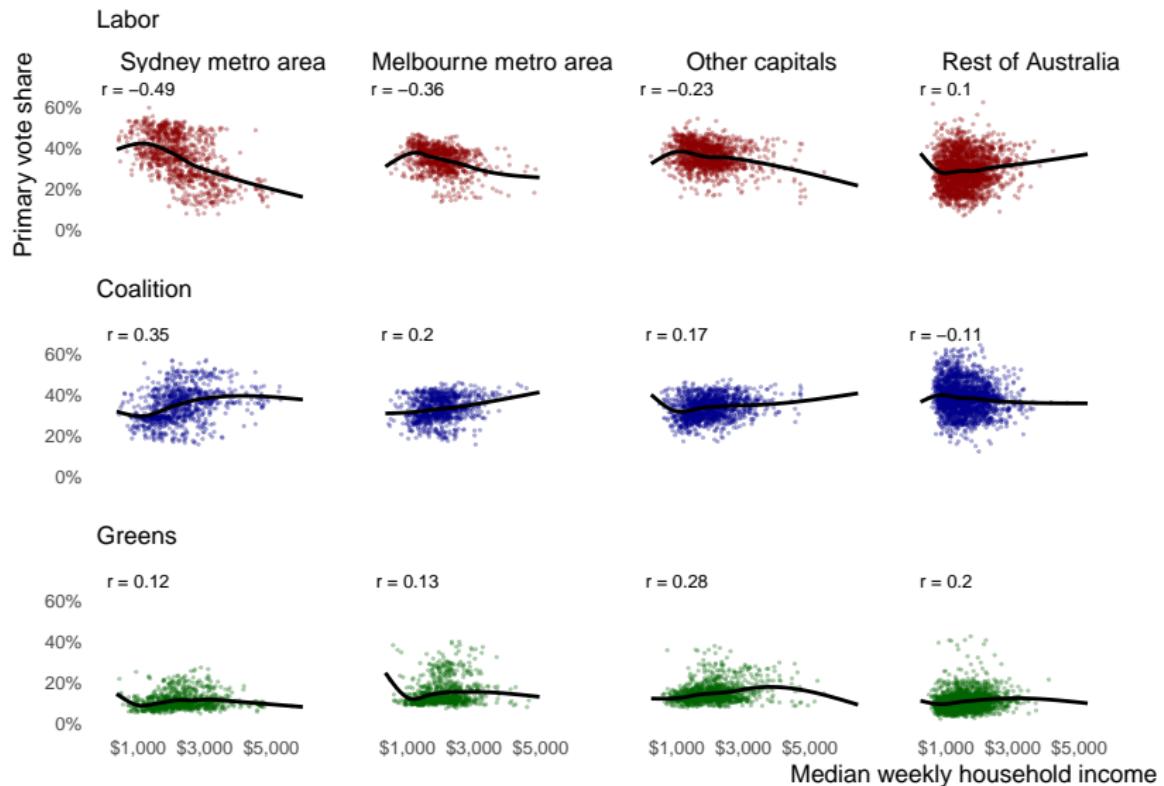
Even on their own terms,
there are problems with
this argument.

Median household income and primary vote



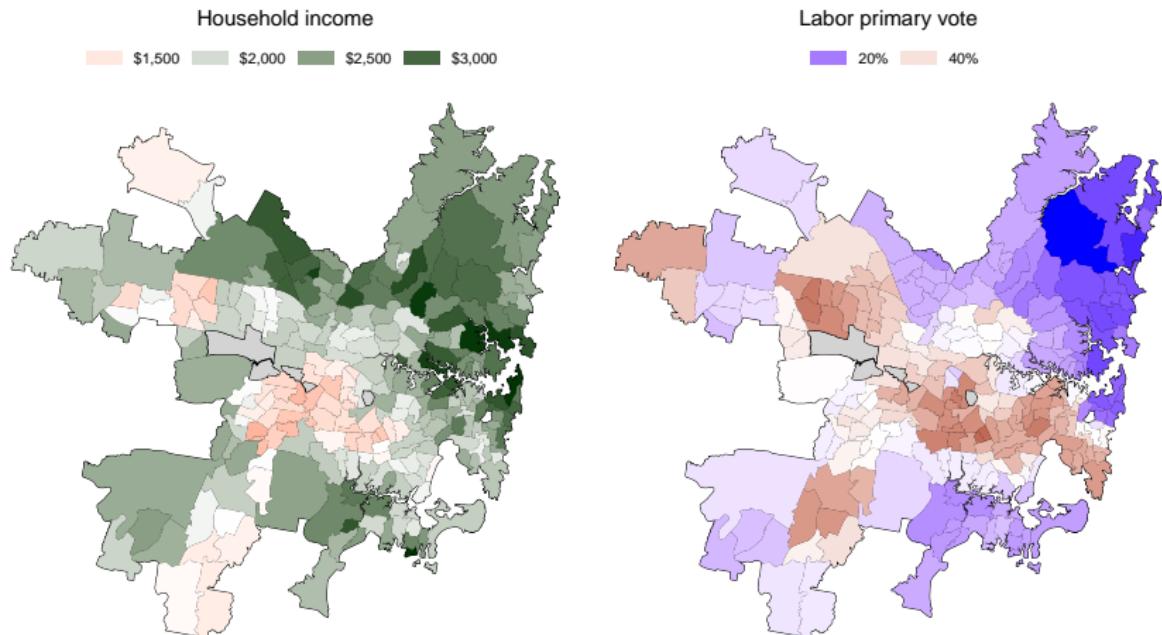
*Data are from the AEC and ABS.
Each point represents an individual SA1 (with only random points shown for clarity).*

Median household income and primary vote by metro



Data are from the AEC and ABS.
Each point represents an individual SA1 (with only random points shown for clarity).

Median household income and vote share in Sydney



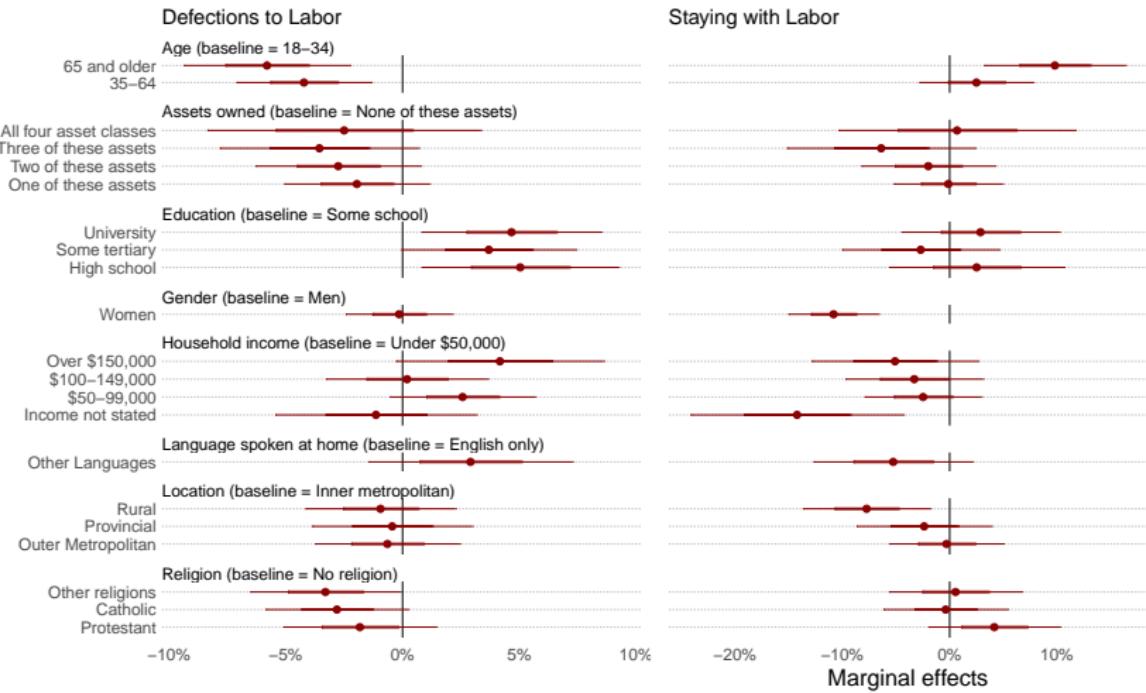
Ecological fallacies and the
need for individual-level
data.

The data

- Australian Cooperative Election Survey.
- Collected by YouGov via online panel during the campaign (02 May to 18 May), nationally representative sample (with small rural oversample), N = 5,978.
- Chief investigators Ariadne Vromen and Darren Halpin (ANU), Campbell White (YouGov) and myself.

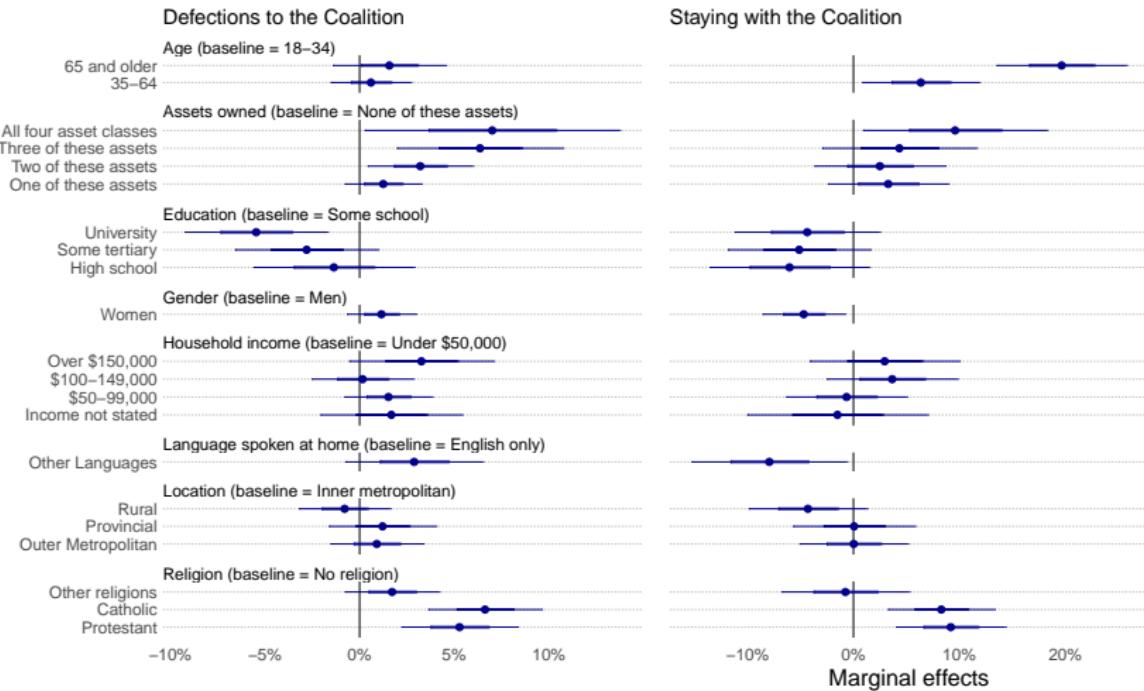
Who shifted their vote?

Marginal effects of voter characteristics on Labor holding existing and winning new voters



Results of logistic regressions fit to data from the Cooperative Election Survey
Sourced from the YouGov panel May 2022

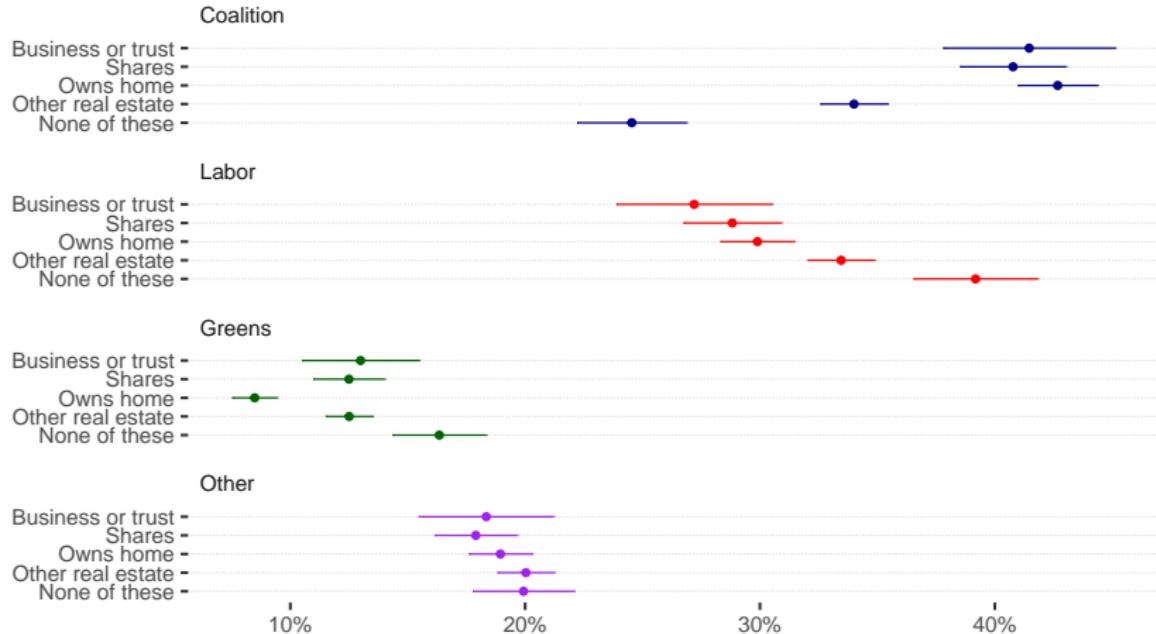
Marginal effects of voter characteristics on the Coalition holding existing and winning new voters



Results of logistic regressions fit to data from the Cooperative Election Survey
Sourced from the YouGov panel May 2022

The persistence of
economic and ownership
inequalities.

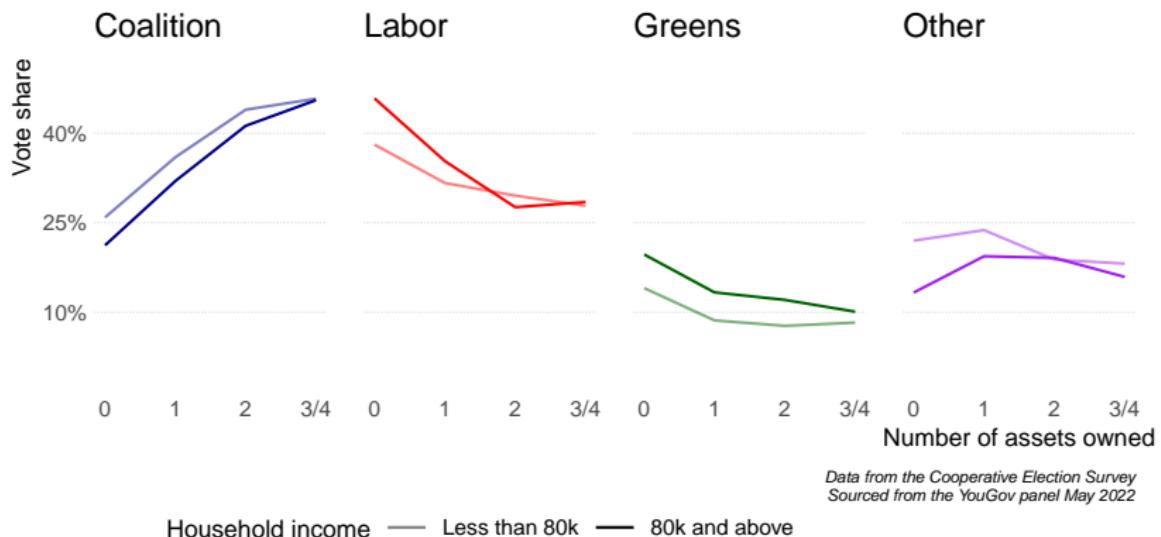
Vote by asset type owned



First preference vote share

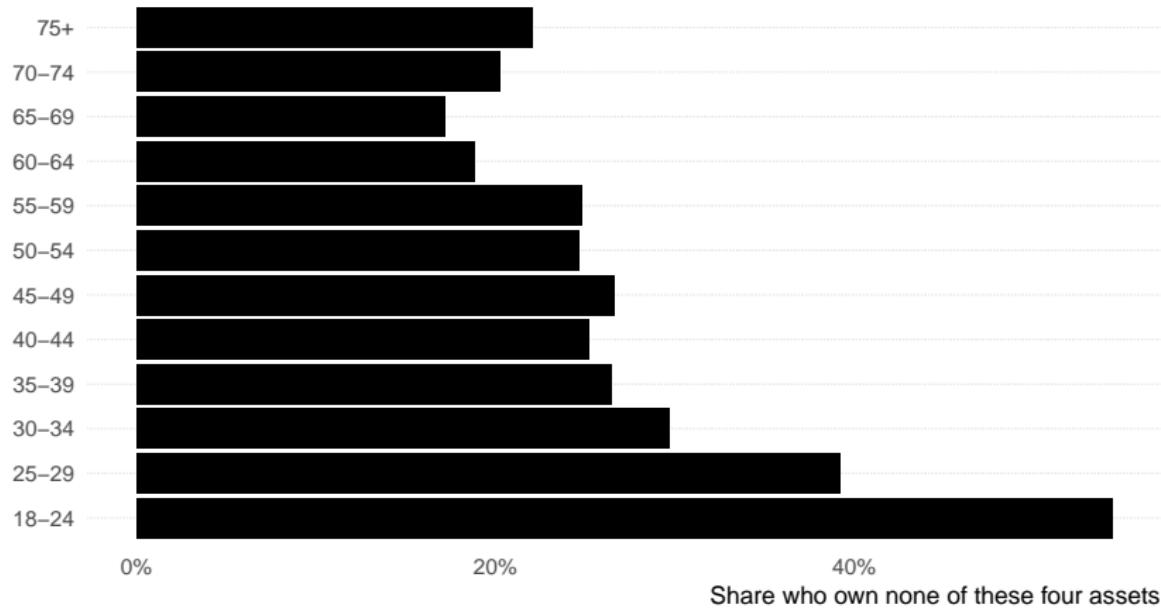
*Data from the Cooperative Election Survey
Sourced from the YouGov panel May 2022*

Vote by asset ownership and income



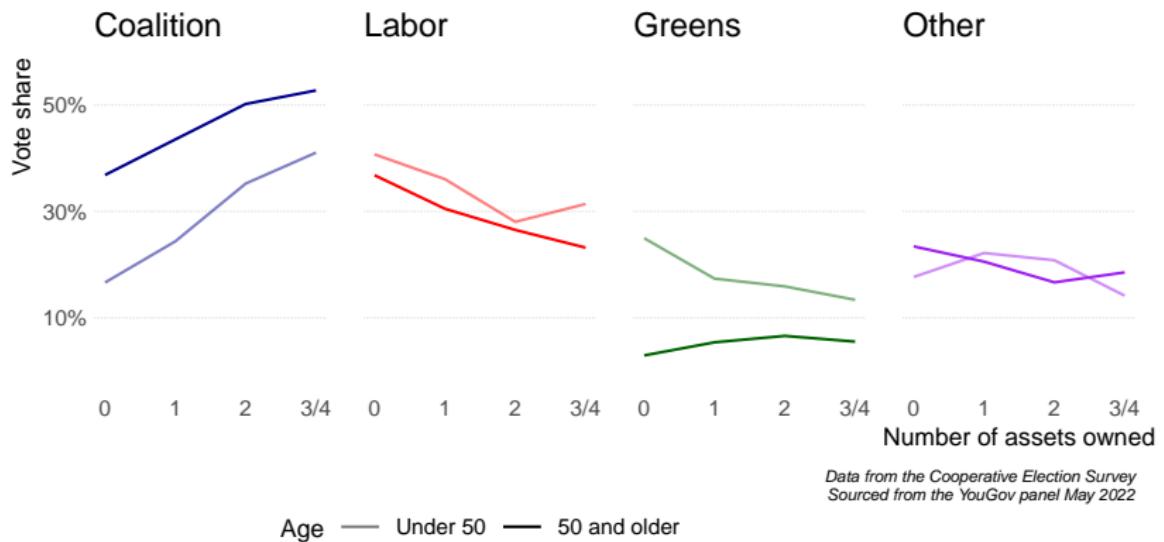
Data from the Cooperative Election Survey
Sourced from the YouGov panel May 2022

Share of respondents who own none of these assets by age



*Data from the Cooperative Election Survey
Sourced from the YouGov panel May 2022*

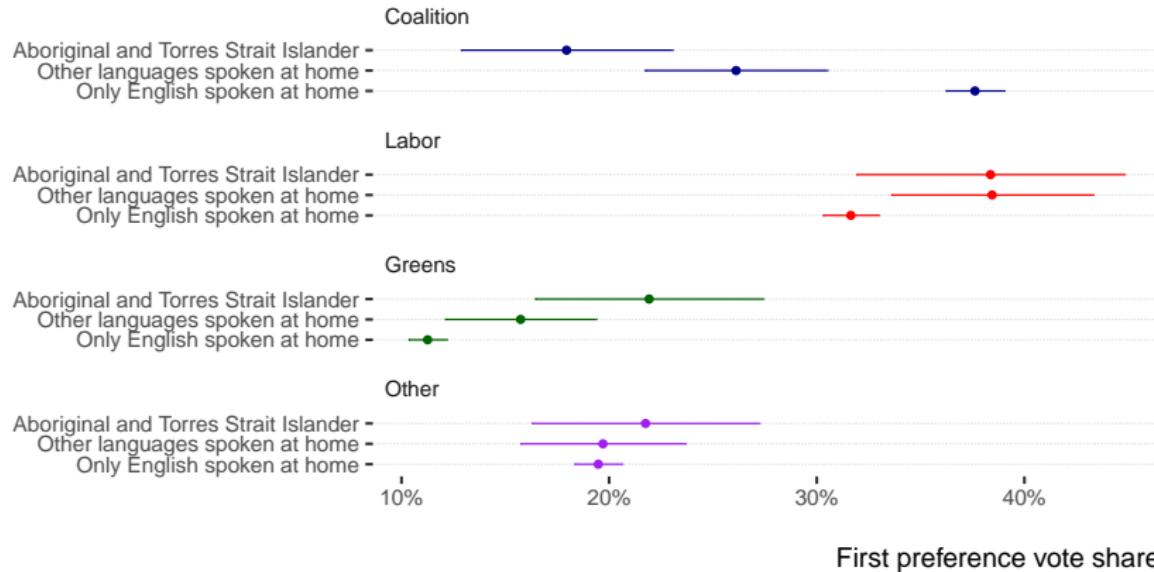
Vote by asset ownership and age



*Data from the Cooperative Election Survey
Sourced from the YouGov panel May 2022*

Not just economic
inequality.

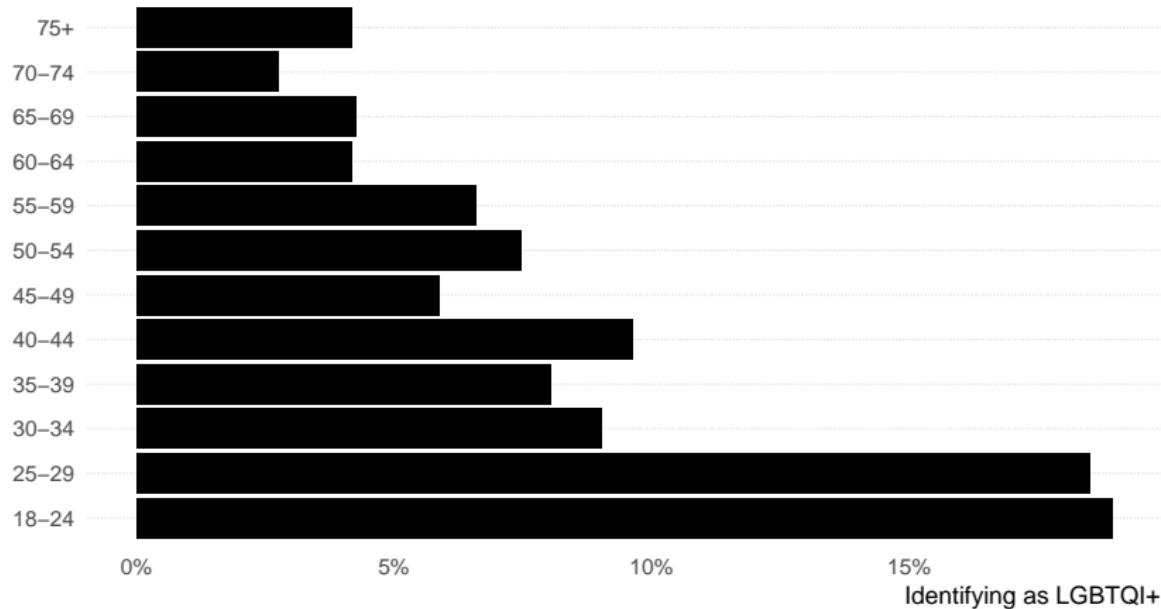
Vote by language and cultural background



First preference vote share

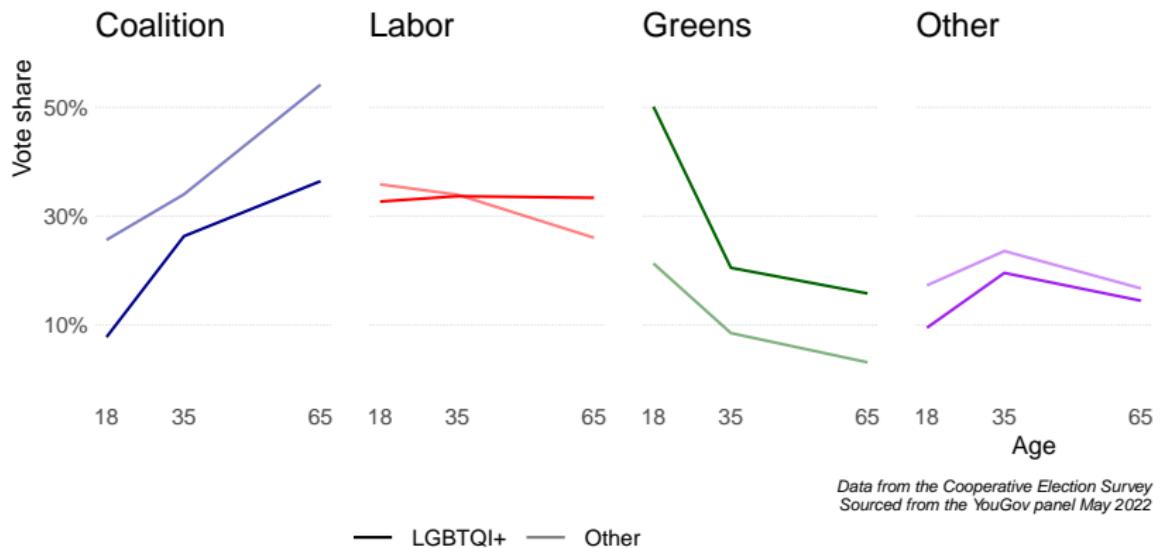
Data from the Cooperative Election Survey
Sourced from the YouGov panel May 2022
All categories are mutually exclusive

Share of respondents identifying as LGBTQI+ by age



*Data from the Cooperative Election Survey
Sourced from the YouGov panel May 2022*

Vote by LGBTQI+ identity and age



Data from the Cooperative Election Survey
Sourced from the YouGov panel May 2022

Conclusion

Conclusion

- It is true that there were large swings at the election.

Conclusion

- It is true that there were large swings at the election.
- Important differences remain in the support bases of the major parties.

Conclusion

- It is true that there were large swings at the election.
- Important differences remain in the support bases of the major parties.
- Parties operate as interest aggregators: the Coalition predominantly owners of wealth/capital, Labor those who rely on earned income (see Ratcliff 2017).

Conclusion

- It is true that there were large swings at the election.
- Important differences remain in the support bases of the major parties.
- Parties operate as interest aggregators: the Coalition predominantly owners of wealth/capital, Labor those who rely on earned income (see Ratcliff 2017).
- A key dimension and constant for political conflict remains hierarchy maintenance (the right) vs levelling (the left).

Conclusion

- It is true that there were large swings at the election.
- Important differences remain in the support bases of the major parties.
- Parties operate as interest aggregators: the Coalition predominantly owners of wealth/capital, Labor those who rely on earned income (see Ratcliff 2017).
- A key dimension and constant for political conflict remains hierarchy maintenance (the right) vs levelling (the left).
- The Greens fit this description as well (human capital rich, asset poor younger professionals). 'Teal' community independents perhaps story of high income professional labour splitting with capital.