William (00:00)
one nation I think are almost certainly going to hold the balance of power in the upper house. And maybe

this is something Labor should be halfing on about more. You know, they should be, you know, saying, you this coalition government, if it that's what it is, even if they

do win a majority in the lower house, they're not going to be able to sneeze without the permission of one nation.

Rachel Withers (00:17)
Hello and welcome to Cut Through Crikey's spin-free analysis of Australian news, politics, and power. I am your host, Rachel Withers, and today we are bringing you a special Victorian election data edition ahead of this Saturday's vote, which is expected to be a wipeout for the 12 year old Labour government.

I am thrilled to be joined by Crikey contributor, William Bowe, a Perth based election analyst and occasional teacher of political science.

And the man behind the Pole Bludger, one of the most heavily trafficked online forums for discussion of Australian politics. William, although I am tempted to call you Pole Bludger, welcome to Cut Through.

William (00:56)
Great pleasure to be here. Thank you.

Rachel Withers (00:58)
So before we get stuck into what we're going to be looking at on Saturday night, I thought we could give listeners a quick crash course on the Victorian system. know, we'll have listeners outside Victoria, even some Victorians might need refresh. very basically bicameral system, lower house of 88 seats, upper house of 40 seats, made up of eight, five member districts. what are the numbers that we're currently sitting on in those houses?

William (01:23)
the electoral system is familiar to anyone who's familiar with federal elections, so you know, I could get technical, but the the broad outline of it is much the same. You've got single membered districts in the lower house, preferential voting, everything exactly as it is in the House of Representatives election. Eighty eight seats rather than a hundred and fifty is you get in the House of Representatives, so the magic number is forty five for a party to win an absolute majority.

The upper house, as you say, is forty members. The system, now that we've had some l long overdue reform to the electoral system for the upper house, is very similar to that for the Senate. The state is broken up into eight regions, each of which returns five members, using broadly the

same system for the Senate, a proportional representation of seats. Those five seats in each region are divided up roughly into

portion of each party's share of the vote. And that makes it easier for small parties to win seats and next to impossible for the big parties to win majorities in the upper house. So you have what's familiar from federal politics. The government tends to dominate the lower house, but it has to negotiate with smaller parties in the upper house to get its legislation.

Rachel Withers (02:35)
Yes, and that's what we've been looking at for the last few years, even though Labour's been dominant. very, very mixed upper house. Labour with fifteen, coalition fourteen, Greens on four, and then just so many other parties with one animal justice, Liberal Democrats, One Nation. I I'm not gonna go through them all, but we have had this very, very mixed upper house. Yes, they do tend to change their labels.

William (02:53)
But they may have changed since I last looked. These are small Yes, they

they're fractious communities, these small parties, and often people get elected with one party and come out the other end as independents and uh then

Rachel Withers (03:09)
Yes.

William (03:09)
they lose their seats and you never hear from them again. But as we will discuss,

Rachel Withers (03:12)
Yes.

William (03:13)
things will be different at this election in the Upper House. There has been a very momentous reform to the way the Upper House election is going to be conducted.

Rachel Withers (03:21)
And thank God for that. But before we get there, let's take a look at what's gonna happen. it's pretty clear at this point. I mean, the votes haven't been cast and counted. Some of them have been cast when we're recording, but essentially

Just how bad is this going to be for Labour, according to the latest data?

William (03:45)
Well, maybe too early to say because I think with every day that passes, the expectation is that the Labour wipeout's going to be worse than it was expected the day before.

you know, if you look at betting markets, that's borne out every time you look, the Liberals have moved ahead in seats that they were behind in previously. And if if you look at the polling trend,

it really is quite striking that Labour has absolutely tanked over the last month or two.

And it is the Liberal Party that have gained momentum. it is also the Greens who have gained momentum.

If you

look at a at a poll tracker, there are several of them out there, including on my own website, PaulBludger.net, you will see that One Nation have been tracking pretty consistently in the sort of twenty two to twenty three percent range. Uh there may have been a view that one nation were going to, you know, tail off as the election nears. There's no sign in that from the polling.

It may be that the polling, you know, will be wrong and that it's systematically got one nation too high. But if the polls are right and I would make the point that they were correct in South Australia, when which is the only general election we've had since one nation, you know, really exploded into a major force about a year ago. The polls did very well then. might be different this time, but if they do as well in Vic as they did in South Australia

then Labour will be struggling to get as much of the vote share as one nation. Labour about where one nation is now and falling, one nation a level. The Greens are trending upwards and uh the coalition are trending upwards quite forcefully,

which is the reason that, you know, with every day that passes, I think, you know, Labour gets into a deeper and deeper panic.

Rachel Withers (05:28)
I should clarify for listeners we're recording this on Monday. So, you know, by Thursday,

William (05:33)
Labour may have turned it around or maybe we may be in a different world by Wednesday, but I doubt it.

Rachel Withers (05:38)
thinking of where we could be by Wednesday and by Saturday, what would be, do you think, the worst case scenario for Labour here? Like really how catastrophic could this wipeout be? They currently have fifty six seats out of eighty-eight.

William (05:50)
we live in an age of weak political loyalties. That means that when the swing is on, you get election results such as you have never seen before.

There have been two elections in Western Australia where Labour won on a scale that no one has ever won in Western Australia before. There was a result like that in

Queensland in twenty twelve, when Labour got absolutely routed, reduced to seven seats in a chamber of ninety-three, I think. And in New South Wales in twenty eleven, the Labour Party was reduced to twenty seats out of ninety something. Uh I think that that process has only continued since then, so that it's entirely possible that everyone's imagination might be failing them as to exactly how badly Labour.

might do. They might get cleaned up in every direction. they might be losing seats in the inner city to the Greens. They could be losing their what were formerly their strongholds in northern and western Melbourne. They could be falling to one nation. I think it's pretty clear they're going to lose a swath of seats in eastern suburbs. What does that leave? Customaris, the you know

High profile opinion Polster could only identify one seat that he felt certain that Labor was going to win, and Ben Carroll was campaigning there yesterday. I'm talking

Rachel Withers (07:15)
Mm.

William (07:16)
about Dandenong. Ben Carroll was in the a week out from an election that was campaigning in the only seat that's one of the foremost analysts of these things thought was The only seat they were sure.

So I hesitate to draw a a line underneath which Labor won't go.

I would be surprised if they end up in single digits, but I wouldn't remember.

Rachel Withers (07:37)
Fascinating for Ben Carroll to be campaigning in the only safe Labour seat because you'd think that's truly the only one he doesn't need to be in at this point. But there you go, that's where we're

William (07:47)
Clearly Labour don't think it's safe. Labor don't even think Dandenog is safe. No.

Rachel Withers (07:52)
Ben Carroll's own seat of Nidri in the West, not safe either. Hmm.

William (07:53)
I I could name a couple of states. Not at all. In fact

I would be surprised if he held his

Rachel Withers (07:59)
there's clearly enemies on all sides, coming from all directions, from all parties coming for Labour's seats. Let's turn to One Nation for a moment, because I think that is, for a lot of people, the outcome they will be most watching in this vote. You know, we've had this Ascendant One Nation led by Warren Pickering, who's running in the Labour-held seat of

Pakkenham, that's Southeast. and yet most analysts aren't actually giving One Nation much chance in the lower house. it looks more and more like it's going to be an LNP majority and a comfortable one. is it that the better things get for the liberals, the harder they get for one nation? is my read on the situation correct?

William (08:38)
the issue is that a couple of months ago it was extr highly plausible to talk about one nation winning enough seats that they hold the balance of power. The issue now is that I think it's pretty clear that the coalition are going to win so many seats that while one nation may well win a swath of seats, they're going to be marginalized. We're going to be dealing with a a m majority coalition government.

You know, it'll be a great morale burster for one nation if they are able to win substantial number of seats in the lower house. But that is a radically different proposition from actually holding the balance of power and

Rachel Withers (09:14)
Mm.

William (09:14)
have it having the the fate of the government in your hands on a day to day basis.

The circumstance in which one nation are going to win seats is that they finish ahead of the Liberal Party, because Liberal Party preferences will flow to one nation ahead of Labour. So if one nation can get ahead of the Liberal Party, they're probably going to win that seat. As the Liberal Party vote increases, though, that hurdle gets higher and higher to overcome, and they will do that in fewer and fewer seats. It's probably no good one nation getting ahead of the Labour Party.

Because Labour preferences are going to favor the Liberals over one nation. So Labour sinking, the One Nation might get to second place as their vote tanks, but that won't do them any good because Labour preferences will flow to the Liberals.

yeah, the the the hurdle that they need to overcome to win seats on liberal preferences gets higher. So they're getting sort squeezed at both ends. They're less and less likely to be holding the balance of.

power which is what they'd really love and also their representation is gonna be lower.

Rachel Withers (10:15)
Labour down here has not let up on the claim that, you know, don't risk a a coalition one nation coalition,

even as that gets

William (10:26)
that that is

Rachel Withers (10:27)
more and more remote.

William (10:28)
Well, that is an important point because over the weekend we saw the national party spruking internal polling, saying that they're confident that they're going to hold all their seats. And this is an interestingly different situation from New South Wales, where, we're in a state election here where the coalition vote looks like it's gonna be in the thirties.

But in March the New South Wales goes to the polls, the coalition's vote's going to be in the low twenties, and that is a radically different proposition.

it may not play out exactly this way, but to cut a long story short, the Nationals are confident of holding everything in Victoria and fearful of losing everything in New South Wales. But the the point of them coming out with that, I think, was to rebut the only card that Labour really got to play, which is vote for us.

Because a coalition government will be propped up by one nation. That argument loses credibility if one nation are not winning seats in the rural areas, which is where their vote is traditionally strongest. in in n New South Wales, that's probably what what looks like it's gonna happen. That undercuts Labour's argument that you must vote for us, however disaffected you may be with this, because the alternative of having

One nation holding the balance of power doesn't bear thinking about. So the nationals have been going public with their polling to say, look, that's not going to happen. We're going to hold all our seats. And a couple of hours later later, Labour were out spruking their polling, saying, No, that's not what our polling's showing. The nationals are going to lose seats to one nation. It is absolutely possible that one nation are going to hold the balance of power. Vote Labour. We're the only chance of stability in keeping the extremists out of a

crucially important balance with our position.

Rachel Withers (12:11)
whether or not they have a chance, one thing about that argument that strikes me as unhelpful is if you are concerned about a one nation coalition government, it almost encourages people to vote for the coalition to make sure that the coalition get that majority. But that's the way I read that

William (12:25)
Yeah.

Rachel Withers (12:26)
piece of campaigning.

William (12:27)
Yeah, it's it's

not it's not an argument you make from a position of strength. And uh

Rachel Withers (12:31)
No.

William (12:32)
I would note that that polling that Labour were sprooking to rebut the nationals message that we're fine in our seats, th these are rural seats, they're not good seats for Labour. But Labour were on five or six percent in these seats. And Labour s waving this polling around.

Rachel Withers (12:49)
Uh

William (12:50)
Which shows an absolutely catastrophic performance for them. You'd think normally you'd keep that under wraps. that's a sort of hint of the the straw's labourer having to grasp at to, you know, mount some sort of an argument to keep labourers on board.

Rachel Withers (13:06)
yeah. And it's also relying on on the thought that anybody is actually listening to them, waving around that that polling. But I digress. Let's talk about where One Nation might win those seats, if they win any at all in the lower house. What are you gonna be looking at as the results come in? Where are you gonna be watching? What kind of primaries are you gonna be looking for to know if One Nation are in with, a shot at anything?

William (13:29)
there is a huge amount of difference between one nation getting twenty percent statewide and one nation getting twenty-five percent statewide. They

could get twenty percent and win absolutely nothing, but if they're

on twenty-five, they are sweeping seats, particularly in this election of Labor.

I suspect that, you know, the nationals well, maybe they'll drop a seat or two, but I I think that their general message

that you know they're in a they're in a good position, I broadly believe. Uh this is very different from the situation again I go back to New South Wales where I think they're going to be taking seats off the nationals. They're going to

be taking seats off Labour if they win seats at all. And those seats are going to be on the urban fringes. you can imagine one nation as a kind of wave sweeping into the metropolitan area.

And the question is how high does the tide go?

if the one nation vote is twenty-five percent, then they're winning seats not just on the very urban fringe, but you know, a little bit closer to the city. There's a point where they're not going to be competitive. There are s no one votes one nation in the inner city, the middle suburbs they're not going to do well. The question is, are they going to extend beyond the outer urban fringe and into, you know, outer suburbia?

And that's a function of, you know, whether they're they're on twenty, twenty-three, twenty-five percent. So I'd be looking at seats like Sunbury, we've mentioned

Packenham, which is where the prospective One Nation leader, Warren Pickering, is running. That's a Labor held seat. I'm absolutely certain Labour aren't going to hold that seat. The question is who are they losing it to? So there's some seats where it's going to be, you know, that are Labor held, particularly out in the south east.

where one where the coalition are going to be competitive, where the Liberals are going to be competitive. But on the other hand, you've got seats in the north and west of Melbourne, which are seats that Labour have been to a fault taking for granted.

And

you know, this is the election where that, you know, really is clearly going to bite them. There's been talk about this for a long time that, seats like Melton and Sunbury, right out

on the urban fringes, have been neglected for infrastructure. And, you know, it's an absolute nightmare if you're a commuter.

And there are all sorts of infrastructure problems and a feeling that promises haven't been delivered. Labor's primary vote has been falling over elections there without them being in trouble, but this is the time where the elastic snaps.

I don't think that the Liberals are strong enough or have ever been strong enough to be competitive in those seats.

They might surprise us, but I think that's where that one nation's best opportunities lie.

Rachel Withers (16:12)
Yeah, and it as you were saying at the start, I guess it really depends on a situation where Labour's primary stays high enough that it's the Liberals who end up in third. So that it's a Labour One

William (16:22)
Yeah, because

Rachel Withers (16:22)
Nation contest so that they can one nation get those liberal preferences.

William (16:26)
the the risk for one nation is that Labour do so badly that they drop to third. So, you know, one nation are actually going to be if they don't actually understand the situation themselves, are going to be slight silently cheering on Labour and silently hoping that they don't collapse that hard th they do want Labour finishing second and you know, in these urban friends seats if they collapse hard enough

They're going to be third and liberal preferences might be saving Labour.

Rachel Withers (16:54)
yeah. I'd be fascinated to know if if Warren Pickering is across that dynamic. I imagine he might be.

William (16:59)
I don't want

to be too h harsh about Warren Pickering's mental faculties, I I it's one nation have undoubtedly gotten a lot more sophisticated. And uh,

Rachel Withers (17:07)
Mm. uh

William (17:08)

you know, that that that's an important thing to consider. That, you know, we've we've seen this movie before to the extent that, you know, one nation won el eleven seats in Queensland in nineteen ninety eight.

and, you collapse like a house of cards immediately afterwards. is that going to happen again? I doubt on the same scale because, they do seem in various ways a much more professional outfit than they were when they first emerged in the late nineties.

Rachel Withers (17:35)
thinking about those liberal preferences that may be essential to getting One Nation over the line in these Labour-held outer suburban seats. The Liberals have announced in recent weeks that they are going to be

Following their friends in the nationals in preferencing one nation above Labour as a general rule, though with some exceptions where necessary, you actually wrote a piece for Crikey just before they made that announcement titled This Victorian Election The Liberals Preference Deal is the only one that matters. Why was this the preference deal that everyone was waiting for?

William (18:12)
I was actually referring to whether or not they were going to put the Greens or Labour last and I was kind of I w I was saying there was going to be too much focus on what they were going to do in terms of one nation because I never doubted that they were going to direct their preferences to one nation. You know, I recognised that when the announcement was going to be made there was going to be a splash about it, but I never ever doubted that they were not going to put Labour ahead of one nation.

going back to the the late nineties and early two thousands. There was a bit of a culture war within the Liberal Party. Uh you had people like Peter Costello, who represented that kind of inner metropolitan strand of the Liberal Party, which it has been gravely weakened since then. Uh as well as that I think that

At the time the Liberal Party did make the decision that they were going to put one nation last. They did that at the nineteen ninety eight federal election, when One Nation not long after that Queensland election I just mentioned, where they shocked the nation by winning eleven seats. Everyone was gearing up for something similar to happen at the federal election. It didn't happen. Pauline Hansen lost her seat. They only won one seat in the Senate. They didn't win any seats in the House, so that election was a big fizzzer and that was

It seemed that the One Nation phenomenon had sputtered out very quickly. Part of that was that the Liberal Party made that decision, which I don't think they'd make today. the whole culture of the party has moved to the right. And uh I also think that they've lost the hope that One Nation can be snuffed out if they, you

know.

do what they did in nineteen ninety eight. I think that the perception now is that one nation is something we have to live with. We can't, you know, make a pariah of them and drive them out of the system altogether. And as well as that, culturally, I don't think the party would wear it now. So because I never doubted that that was what they do, I didn't think it was particularly big news. What I did think was particularly big news was who they were going to put last out of Labour on the green.

Because that could be really decisive in the dimension of the contest that we have here. We've got four different elections going on here. One election is the inner city zone where Labour and fighting it out with the Greens. Liberal aren't going to make the final count. One nation ain't going to make the final count. What matters is how preferences are flying between Liberal and the Greens. That's where it matters and that's where the Liberal Party had to make a decision where they could conceivably have jumped either way.

This time they have jumped Labor's way. Last time by which I mean in 2022 they put Labor last on their how to vote cards. This time they've put the grains last. Usually these

days that they put the grains last. This time they're doing that again. That means that the Greens face a tougher preference environment at this election than they did in twenty twenty two. They are going to have to hike their primary vote.

in order to hold what they've already got, never mind wind new seats.

Which is not to say that's not going to happen, but the hurdle has been raised for them by that liberal decision to put the Greens rather than Labour last in most places. They've made a couple of exceptions here and there, but I think they're mostly cosmetic.

Rachel Withers (21:26)
those contests you're talking about, it's very, very much the inner city. it's Northcourt and Pasco Vale in the north, Foots Gray in the west, Albert Park in the south. These are these Greens target seats beyond what they've already got. the polling is showing that the Greens vote is up, but as you say, the preference situation is not as good for them this time.

Do you believe that the greens will pick up any of those seats, or was that preferred steel really the nail in the coffin for those chances?

William (21:55)
I would not go so far as to say that. like I said, if you look at the polling trends, one of the things that's happening is that the Greens have got momentum. That disaffection with Labour is multifaceted. they are losing votes not just to the Liberals, they're also losing votes to the Greens. And I think their gains have been impressive enough that I feel just about certain they're going to hold what they've already got.

So the question is, do they win back Peran? Peran is an interesting contest in that it's the one Greens contest where their rivals are liberal rather than Labour. So Labour, because Labour are tanking, like they can be confident that Labour are going to come third and that Labour's preferences will flow heavily to the Greens. Now, one qualification to that is that Labour are not making a preference recommendation to Peran.

They uh tried to lure the Liberals in and maybe successfully, maybe the reason that Labor, the Liberals are putting the greens last this time. I'm not sure what went on at the behind those closed door meetings,

but Labour were able to offer something to them. They were able to say, look, you want to keep Peran, which you wanted the midterm by election. We can help you do that by not actively recommending anything on our vote cards. Labor would never go so far as

the Liberals ahead of the Greens, that they can say vote one Labour and after that make up your mind. That will reduce the flow of preferences that the Greens will receive from Labor and it raises the bar for them in Paran. Elsewhere the question is, is the Greens vote rising high enough that they overcome the fact that they're going to have to do sort of four to five percent better than they did last time merely in order to threater?

in the seats that they didn't win last time, and there we're talking Pascovale, Preston and Footsgrade. They made the the final count in those seats for the first time in twenty twenty two, as a result of the fact that the Liberals did that unusual thing on preferences. This time, if they're going to be competitive in those seats, they're going to have to do it through an increased primary vote. I do not doubt that their primary vote will increase. It's an open question as to whether it increases enough to cancel out that effect.

of having less favourable liberal preferences this time. time will tell that's one of the many things I'm going to be keeping my eye out on the night. Normal in in the good old days at elections it was a question and focusing on ten seats and wondering what was going on there. This time it's hard to work out what seats you don't need to be looking at going in.

Rachel Withers (24:24)
yeah. I've been thinking of myself the three Ps this week. Peran, Packenham and Pasco Vale, all totally different contests. One Labour Greens,

William (24:31)
Yeah.

Rachel Withers (24:34)
one Greens Liberal, one Labour, one nation. you almost need sock puppets for all these different types of of cont finger puppets, maybe because we've got so

William (24:42)

Yeah.

Rachel Withers (24:42)
many parties. Are there other preference deals or potential interesting preference flows that

are catching your eye or will be catching your eye on the night.

William (24:52)
I I will be interested to see where the Liberals do drop out, assuming that there are such places, that this isn't such a strong election for the Liberals that they're simply not dropping out anywhere. And that's something you need to keep in mind when you hear all the clamour about what the Liberals are doing on with their preferences.

Liberal preferences are not even counted where they make the final count.

You know, no one will ever know what liberal preferences are going to do unless they drop out of the count and are not one of the last two candidates in the count. The at a strong election for the Liberals like this, and this is very different from South Australia, where the Liberals did very poorly and were eternally coming third and fourth, so we knew what their preferences were doing there. Where they make the final count, no one will ever know how well their preferences went. So if they do drop out though, will be really important.

For sort of setting the mood for how federal Labour are going.

Because at the moment you've got like opinion polls coming out where our Labour are doing terribly on the primary vote. They're as low as twenty four percent in some polls. And yet when they break that out into the old fashioned Labour versus Coalition Tea Party preferred, Labour are still competitive if not slightly in front. That assumes that one nation preferences are splitting about seventy thirty in favor of the coalition.

It could be that what we're going to see on Saturday is that they're actually splitting more in favour of the coalition than that. You know, if they're actually

getting more like seventy five, twenty five and eighty twenty, and that is relevant to the federal situation as well as the state one, then co what the Albanese government's in even bigger trouble than it looks.

having said that, if we do see a stronger flow of l liberal preferences to one nation than we saw in South Australia, you can easily explain that as a function of the unpopularity of Labour in Victoria relative to South Australia where they were very popular. You could argue that it's Victoria specific. But on the other hand, you equally might argue that the structure of the one nation vote has changed, it's become more

ideologically focused and ideologically aware, has a clearer sense that the enemy are on the left. And, you know, whereas a lot of people who vote for one nation are from the kind of white working class that used to be Labour's bedrock, there

was always a pretty big section of the One Nation vote that did actually favour Labour on preferences. To a much greater extent, for example, than the Greens vote. The Greens vote massively favours the Labour over the

coalition, and I'm absolutely sure it will continue to do so. But the One Nation preference flow is a lot more volatile, it seems to me, you know, and it's not as strong for the coalition as the Greens flow is for Labour, which is why Labour ends up looking not so bad on two party preferred when a poll comes out compared to their primary vote.

If the One Nation preference flow does actually start looking more like the Greens preference flow under the other way around, Labour are in a world ahead.

Rachel Withers (27:54)
you can see why the uh Victorian coalition did not want to put Victorian One Nation offside when those are potentially so important, I wanted to talk about the upper house. As you flagged, we are going to be having our first election here in Victoria without the wretched group voting ticket system, uh, which we were the last state to get rid of.

Give us a very, very quick explanation of what was wrong with the old system, and then I'd like to know if this change is actually making the legislative council outcome easier to predict for you.

William (28:26)
Uh under the old system, it was the system we had in the Senate until twenty sixteen. You could either vote one number above the line or practically a hundred numbers below the line. You could either

Rachel Withers (28:37)
Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

William (28:39)
vo you could either vote for a party and accept the entirety of their preferred preference order.

Or you could take matters into your own hands and spend five minutes in the polling both numbering eighty different

Rachel Withers (28:51)
Fifteen minutes more like.

William (28:54)

I uh I'm I'm a I'm a fast scribbler. Uh I I dare say I've had an informal vote or two over the years from scribbling too fast. i that meant that, you know, the barrier uh to make your own mind up was far too much for most people. Ninety-five percent of people were voting above the line, and that led to the awful situation where you are handing your preference decision over to the party administration.

You know, the the the party is deciding for you where your preferences go in minute detail from you know number one to number seventy. And uh that seemed like a good idea at the time because most people were following the how to vote card back in the day. But over time, as the major party vote diminished, more and more people were voting for practically anyone whose name they liked the look of in the upper house. You've had ever proliferating numbers of parties.

These parties were forming networks with each other, making arrangements with each other to preference each other, and then it became a lottery where one of those parties ended up sucking all up the votes of the entirety of the micro party network complex. I wish there was an easier way to explain that, but you had fifteen percent of the vote divided between fifteen different parties. One of them would emerge top of the field with all that fifteen percent of the vote, and that's enough to win a state.

So because it had evolved in that way, we saw uh, you know, we've seen very peculiar little parties in the Victorian upper house, especially the Transport Matters Party, which were, you know, there to advocate for the taxi industry, where had a few seats in the previous

Rachel Withers (30:27)
yeah.

William (30:28)
parliament. Um, who's there now? I I've you've got the DLP and the DLP

Rachel Withers (30:31)
You've got the DLP, we we g we got a shooters and fishers, we got animal justice.

William (30:36)
Yeah, the DLP will never admit it, but they survive off confused Labour voters who are numbering the wrong party with Labour in their name. two, three percent of the vote, that's you know, that was enough when you hoovered up all of the preferences of the micro parties.

So now that we've gotten rid of that system, we've moved towards the Senate system, we have moved away from people's preference ordering being determined by a backroom deal to it will be the conscious decision of people voting

Mo in most cases people will number five boxes above the line. That's what the ballot paper will tell them to do. They'll pick their five favourite parties and they'll number them in order and their brains will be switched on while they're doing it. They're not just going to be numbering one

party and handing it over to the party to decide how their preferences go and never having any idea where what what ends up happening. Now uh the problem with that is that there was actually a silver lining in the old system.

it did mean that small parties were winning seats and there was arguably something to be said for that in an age where f twenty percent of people are indeed voting for small parties. I think it is unfortunate that they have abolished group voting tickets, but they have kept the system of eight regions electing five members each.

That is going to make it next to impossible for anyone other than Labour, the Coalition, the Greens, and One Nation to win seats.

Rachel Withers (32:01)
we can assume most of those regions will elect one of each and then the fifth will go to one of them again.

William (32:08)
that if you'd asked me this question a couple of weeks ago, that's what of what I would have said. Now you can entertain scenarios where labels lose so badly that they don't win any seats in rural regions.

in which case, how many seats are one nation winning?

You know, a couple of weeks ago maybe I'd have thought, well they'll win one seat in every region. Maybe they they're with one with Labour out of the picture altogether in rural regions, they're winning two.

my point would be though that it is going to be a four horse race.

You know, uh you know, you've got quite a high profile animal justice member in uh Georgia Purcell. I think she's got buckleys. You know, she would need to get ten percent of the vote to be competitive and these small parties aren't going to do that. What I think the shame is, because exactly the same thing happened in Western Australia and the previous parliament.

They got rid of group voting tickets, but they also got rid of the regional system where seats are divided up into eight groups of five. To win one of five seats, you need a big chunk of the vote. But in Western Australia, they abolish the regions. The entire state is voting for thirty seven members. To win one

Rachel Withers (33:11)
And then it's proportional.

William (33:13)
and it's proportional, so you only need

Rachel Withers (33:14)
Mm-hmm.

William (33:15)
two to three percent of the vote to win a seat. It's like the

system that we've had up until now in Victoria, except that who wins the seat is who actually does poll three percent of the vote. It's not who

Rachel Withers (33:28)
Mm, mm.

William (33:29)
wins some lottery on preferences.

So if you really want to burrow into the weeds of this, I'd invite people to look at the Western Australian Legislative Council election result. You know, Animal Justice won a couple of seats. Legalised cannabis won a couple of seats. Transport Matters didn't win seats.

You know, parties with absolutely no electoral support at all, but who just got lucky in the preference shuffle, that's gone, but we still have a representative upper house where parties who do have enough of the constituency to get two to three percent of the vote have a say in the parliament and you know uh are there and aren't squeezed out of the system.

I think we've got an unfortunate state of affairs in Victoria where we're going to move back to an oligopoly.

It will be an oligopoly with one nation in it

Rachel Withers (34:16)
I hadn't realized that about WA having a superior upper house to us. um

William (34:21)
Well, I

I as a Western Australian and myself, that's mostly chauvinistic, but where Western Australia followed the lead of New South Wales and South Australia.

I think the problem with Victoria was that the government absolutely left it to the last minute to do this.

And left it with so little time that they couldn't make too radical a change.

The reason they did that was that they were relying on the votes of these micro parties to win votes in parliament and they didn't want to alienate them any earlier than they had to. So they

left it to the last minute and didn't plan it out in in the way that a good electoral reform should be done. Whereas in Western Australia, Labour had a majority in both houses and did not have that problem. Labor was

able to do the job properly, to have a good consultation process.

Conduct it over a long period and do it the right way. Whereas in Victoria it was just a m last minute scramble to put this in place uh without alienating all of those crossbench members of the upper house any sooner than they had.

Rachel Withers (35:25)
we got a little bit more democratic in Victoria, but not enough clearly.

William (35:28)
I I I

I hope that in the next parliament this is something the coalition addresses, but the coalition's record on electoral reform is not.

Rachel Withers (35:36)
with the system we now have, what sort of upper house is it going to be? Presumably we are having a Wilson government, a liberal national majority government in the lower house. Is it going to be an upper house that is workable for Jess Wilson?

William (35:50)
I think almost certainly she's going to have to rely on one nation in the upper house. As I said, we're w I think we're looking at a four horse race and we're

looking at an election that is swinging heavily to the right here. So, you know, you can conceive in the current environment who's gonna have the majority. Is it gonna be a Labour Greens left majority or a coalition one nation right majority?

Unless a party is, you know

pushing fifty percent of the vote, which is practically inconceivable in this day and age. Although, you know, Labor did it in Western Australia a couple of times, but that's not what we're looking at here. They're gonna be r the one nation I think are almost certainly going to hold the balance of power in the upper house. And maybe

this is something Labor should be halfing on about more. You know, they should be, you know, saying, you this coalition government, if it that's what it is, even if they

do win a majority in the lower house, they're not going to be able to sneeze without the permission of one nation.

I I I I I I think that the the power of the upper house is, you know, sometimes overlooked, particularly on election night when all anyone can think of is who's getting a majority and who's going to form government. you want your legislative agenda to get through, then you know, the situation has suited the Labour government for the last few terms because they haven't been completely reliant on the Greens.

When the Greens were being intransigent there were other parties in the mix who they could go to to get votes to you know, there were lots of different things they could do. But I think what we're looking at at the next parliament is that one nation will have an absolute veto over coalition legislation, at least obviously, you know, when Labor supports legislation that then, you know, they'll have the numbers. But can contested legislation between the major parties, they're going to be going cap in hand.

to one nation, even if one nation has a broadly disappointing revolt on Saturday night. And you know, we do indeed get that scenario we talked about where they win twenty percent but don't win any any high house seats. They're going to lose loom large in the next parliament.

And maybe that's a problem for the coalition going forward. It may be when they're going back to the voters in four years time, they're going to have to be answering to the fact that, you know, uh they were being dragged to the right by one nation.

Rachel Withers (37:56)
then we'll have an even more complicated election in twenty thirty. you've touched on this a little bit throughout your answers, but I wanted to finish by talking about the implications of what happens in Victoria for the rest of the country. you spoke a little bit about what Federal Labour will be watching, uh, and about how the situation will be flipped in New South Wales, where one nation will be doing better off the nationals than off Labour.

If you were Anthony Albanese watching the Victorian election results come in on Saturday night, what do you think you would be looking out for? What would be ringing alarm bells for you

William (38:30)
I don't know where to begin because I I I'm pretty certain that he's going to be looking at the sort of result where alarm bells are going off left, right, and center. I have touched on that point that it will be particularly alarming for him if One Nation preferences start behaving more like Green's preferences than the sort of 70-30 split that we're familiar with.

I don't think much of the commentary has really been focusing on federal election implications for the election, but I'm sure that that's going to start happening on Sunday. you know, one of the blocks of lead in Labour's saddlebag was the unpopularity of the Albanese government.

We're on very familiar territory here. it's a lot more difficult for a state government when you've got a party of the same stripe in Canberra.

You know, by the time Howard left office, Labour controlled every state and territory government. were we actually at that situation by the end of the Morrison years? Um, if not, we were very close to it.

Tasmania held out, I think. So uh and uh the sort of cycle swept the other way while Labour were in power for it, really, from two thousand and seven to twenty thirteen. That's sort of cold comfort for you, you know, when you

Some poor minister has to appear on Insiders on Sunday morning and deny that there are any federal implications to this result. One how it did keep winning elections though, you know, I back in the the two thousands, Steve Brax would have smashed his way to get another win in Victoria, Peter Beatty had one landslide after another.

John Howard appear before the media and say, this was overwhelmingly decided on state factors, it doesn't affect us and people who've mock him and rubbish him, but then a year later he was he win an election.

that cuts both ways. You know, I think being a federal government, it's helpful to you that state governments are on the other side. a certain amount of voters want balance.

I I I really don't know where to begin answering your question, but one thing I will throw in there is that one element of this will be relief that Labor no longer has the Victorian Labor government weighing it down.

Labour won't be cheering publicly about the demises of the Victorian government on Saturday, but

it will be bad optics to see a Labour government get absolutely smashed. But it's going to be one mild improvement in the atmosphere for Labor is that the sort of running saw of the Victorian government will, you know, be out of the new style.

Rachel Withers (40:53)
they'll rid themselves of their naughty child, the Victorian Labour government. thank you so, so much, William Pole Bledger. It's been an honor talking politics and preferences with you. and hopefully we can get you back on sometime after the election to dig through the results.

William (41:09)
Certainly, great pleasure. Thank you very much.

Rachel Withers (41:11)
Thanks.