

The organisational success and political impact of the Australian Christian Lobby

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Abstract

Since its formation in 1995, the Australian Christian Lobby (ACL), has become a high-profile political organisation, able to exert impact over Australian politics. Across the ensuing 25 years the organisation has appeared at the centre of Australia's most contentious social policy debates, demonstrated an unprecedented ability to determine the trajectory of media coverage and shape policy outcomes. Its continued rise is both reminiscent of the US Christian Right and indicative of recent salient political ideologies such as paleoconservatism. These underpinnings are crucial to understanding the organisation and its impact on Australia politics, though have been paid little attention. This thesis aims to examine the organisational success and political impact of the ACL on Australian politics. It engages with existing theories of interest group power and political impact and uses agenda setting analysis and evaluation of policy enactment to illuminate the lobbying efforts of the ACL. The primary methods implemented are case studies, content analysis and assessing the degree of preference attainment. It will examine the ACL's impact on the high-profile public policy debates of Safe Schools, same-sex marriage, and religious discrimination. It subsequently intends to contextualise this impact in terms of the ACL's organisational and ideological objectives to demonstrate the ultimate success of the organisation. It finds that the ACL's impact on policy is significant yet contingent, though its ability to survive and grow as an organisation has been noteworthy. Ultimately this thesis demonstrates that a pure focus on policy change fails to capture the multitude of ways in which the ACL is succeeding in shifting Australian political discourse in its desired, conservative direction.

Statement of Authorship

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

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Introduction

The Australian Christian Lobby (ACL) is a conservative advocacy organisation that formed in 1995 with the goal of bringing a Christian influence to politics (ACL 2020). Since then, it has established itself as a prominent contributor to public debate over a variety of social issues. The ACL leadership has met with every Australian Prime Minister over this period, whilst senior figures within the organisation have played a leading role in recent debates over the issues of Safe Schools, same-sex marriage and religious freedoms. Despite the profile of the organisation and the fact that it has been in existence for twenty-five years, there has not been any systematic review of the ACL or its impact on Australian politics. This thesis aims to fill this gap in the literature by examining the impact of the ACL on Australian policy debates and its organisational success between 2009 and 2021, focusing on its capacity to shape the media and political agendas, achieve its policy preferences, and survive as an organisation.

In considering the political impact and organisational success of the ACL, this thesis will firstly reassess the goals and ideology of the organisation. I will argue that its leadership has in recent years steered the organisation towards a paleoconservative position. Paleoconservatism is an ideology which has emerged since the 1980s and advocates against neoliberalism, economic globalisation and what it perceives as the breakdown of cultural lines in order to protect an 'historic' Judeo-Christian, primarily white, western culture (Drolet & Williams 2020). This is crucial to understanding the political impact of the organisation both on public policy and the media landscape, as well as its primary organisational aims.

The thesis will assess the impact of the organisation by examining its agenda-setting capacity, focusing on its ability to shape the salience of the key issues on the media agenda and how these issues are framed in the media and parliament. It will also assess impact by examining the extent to which the ACL is able to achieve its preferred policy outcomes. The success of the organisation will be assessed

through the lens of organisational survival. The ACL is aiming not just to shape policy through its political campaigns but also to create and maintain the conditions necessary for its continued existence. To analyse these dimensions of political impact and organisational success, the thesis will focus on case studies of three high-profile national policy issues on which the ACL campaigned, namely the Safe Schools program, same-sex marriage and religious discrimination.

In examining the ACL, this thesis makes three central arguments. It firstly argues that the ideology of the ACL has markedly shifted under its most recent managing director and now meets the definition of a paleoconservative organisation. Secondly, the case studies under examination will serve to demonstrate that the ACL has had a substantial impact on Australian politics and has become a prominent organisation in Australia's social policy arena. Finally, when considered in terms of organisational success, which encompasses ideological progress and sustained access to key organisational resources, the accomplishments of the ACL are extensive.

This thesis makes a number of original contributions, firstly drawing attention to the policy impact of an under-explored advocacy group. This thesis discusses the re-emergent ideology of paleoconservatism and collates existing literature on how it differs from conservative Christianity. It then considers how the ACL presently adheres to a number of the core tenets of the ideology and argues why the organisation should be considered ideologically paleoconservative. It contributes to theories of advocacy influence by considering the impact of lobbying on Australia's media and political landscape as well as the impact of such lobbying on an organisation's resources and political position. The method applies commonly used techniques to examine how an understanding of the ACL might contribute to an understanding of lobbying more broadly, though looks to re-contextualise these findings. It demonstrates that lobbying impact is often contingent and considers what several the most important contingent factors are. In doing so, it demonstrates how organisational success can occur outside the policy arena and shows the under-appreciated significance of the ACL in Australian politics.

The first chapter will provide background on the ACL and assess the current literature on interest groups. It will also outline the theoretical framework and methods used in the thesis. The second chapter will provide an in-depth history of the ACL and consider how its ideological perspectives and ambitions have shifted since its formation. It will argue that the organisation has adopted key elements of paleoconservatism, which is crucial to understanding its ability to survive as an organisation and its political objectives. The third chapter presents the first case study, which focuses on the debate over the Safe Schools program in Australia between 2010 and 2017, analysing the role of the ACL and its impact on Australian politics. Chapter four presents the case study of same-sex marriage in Australia, with a specific focus on the 2017 Marriage Equality plebiscite and the campaign period which preceded it. Chapter five presents the final case study of religious discrimination in Australia, primarily involving analysis of the 2019 Religious Discrimination bill which is currently being considered by parliament and the factors that precipitated its creation. Chapter six discusses the key findings of this thesis, including the organisation's impact on Australian politics, the contingency of this impact and the success of the ACL from an organisational perspective.

Chapter 1: Literature and Method

1.1 Introduction

The Australian Christian Lobby arose in a formative period for religious politics in Australia and whilst there is a substantial body of scholarship which contributes to understanding it, considerable shifts in the organisation necessitate a new approach. This chapter will provide an outline of the existing literature on the ACL and religious interest groups and discuss the contribution of this thesis to the literature. The first section of this chapter will briefly outline the existing research on attempts to assess interest group power and influence. The second section will seek to outline the current understanding of the Christian Right's emergence in Australia, in addition to discussing broader issues related to Australia's religious and organisational composition. The third section will review the literature specifically discussing the ACL and identify the gaps in the existing scholarship. The final section will outline the theoretical frameworks which will be applied throughout the thesis along with the research methods that will be used.

1.2 Interest Groups

Broadly, as Hojnacki (et. al 2012) notes, studies of interest group power predominantly fall into three categories. Some studies examine how these groups mobilise their supporters (Vromen & Coleman 2011), other studies focus on the tactics and processes by which they attempt to achieve influence over policy (Sheingate 2001; Mahoney 2008), while others try to measure the extent of this influence (Schneider and Baltz 2005; Dur 2008; Gilens & Page 2014). This thesis primarily intends to focus on determining the impact of interest groups, though this poses a significant challenge.

The first key question considered in interest group literature, is whether interest groups have a noteworthy impact on politics, and as Anzia (2019) suggest, there is a widely held assessment that

they do, though little understanding of exactly how this occurs. Hojnacki (et al. 2012) found in their significant literature review of interest group studies that the field predominantly consists of discrete, contextual research with few shared theoretical frameworks, meaning there are few consistent explanations. Extensive work by Baumgartner (et al. 2009) has suggested little correlation between interest group policy resources and their capacity to influence policies in line with their preferences. Others, however, have utilised similar data and analysis to assert that interest groups often see policies created in line with their preferences and that in fact the contemporary US exhibits indicators of an 'Economic-Elite Dominated' society, in which economic elites have a disproportionate sway on policy due to significant wealth. Or a 'Biased Pluralist Democracy' where a large number of interested parties compete to shape policy, though outcomes are heavily biased towards those with the most resources (Gilens & Page 2014). Andrews and Edwards (2004) note that whilst achieving favourable policies is the most celebrated and widely regarded indicator of impact, prior studies of interest group influence on the US congress presented interest groups as only moderately impactful compared to numerous non-academic case studies which have suggested the significance of organised interest impact.

Of course, there clearly is a reasonable body of academic literature which observes interest group impact, including the early work of Schattschneider (1935) and research which has built on his early theories (Hacker & Pierson 2014; Anzia & Moe 2017) which depict the policy arena as a fight between organised interests. Recent research continues to demonstrate the impact of both business interest groups (Franko, Nelly & Witko 2016; Grumbach 2020) and religious groups alike (DiMauro & Joffe 2009; Hunt 2014) though these will be considered further in the next section of the chapter.

The second key question is if interest groups do have impact, under which conditions are they most likely to see it occur and again this often poses a challenge for research. Lowery (2007) cites a number of works which demonstrate an issue he terms the 'paradox of lobbying'. He notes that quantitative analysis of a significant number of lobbying efforts have found that when interest groups attempt to

oppose public opinion, the likelihood of lobbying success decreases (Kollman 1998); when organisations attempt to use the media to gain public support, the chances of success decrease (Page, Shapiro & Dempsey 1987) and in a number of instances, the more an organisation spends on a campaign, the lower their chance of success (Gerber 1999).

There are a number of studies which have been able to locate certain factors and conditions which increase the chances of lobbying impact, whilst acknowledging the inherent difficulties in the task. Firstly, it is noted that a positive government predisposition towards policy change can significantly increase the chance of success, and the same is true for limited competition and opposition in the policy arena (Mahoney 2008; Baumgartner et. al 2009). The stance of the government has also been found to shape the ways in which interest groups lobby, as is the case when governments seek to regulate interest group spending (Malbin & Gais 1998). Hogan (2005) notes that governmental restrictions on interest groups donations to political candidates often leads to increased spending on advertising, contributions to political parties and subsequent lobbying activities. Interest groups also have a notable capacity to influence individual politicians under the right conditions. Witko (2006) found in his study of twenty issues in the US congress, that Political Action Committees (PAC) have a strong capacity to influence politicians' roll call voting behaviour on non-ideological issues, and in instances when a member is not required to go against core beliefs. They also have an ability to influence the amount of time and effort a member expends on more distinctly ideological issues.

Baumgartner (et. al 2009) find the issue of interest group impact to be more systemic and argues that interest group success is fundamentally a matter of overcoming the established status quo. In *Lobbying and Policy Change: Who Wins, Who Loses, and Why*, Baumgartner (et. al 2009) evaluated a sample of politicians and 98 issues they had recently been involved in. They argue that this data suggests interest groups are only able to affect policies when they are able to alter the way these policies are framed in public discussion. A change in the way these policies are framed is most likely to occur when multiple organisations are able to generate significant public interest which pushes the

issue to the top of the national agenda. This results in what Mahoney (2008) also describes as a feedback loop in which the lobbying efforts of multiple groups create salience around a particular issue, which in turn leads to a further amplification as more interests become involved. Rose and Baumgartner (2013) later observed similarly that the key shifts in public policies, such as those regarding poverty, were associated with major ideological shifts over a forty-eight-year period and the significant re-problematisation of the issue. It emerges then that interest groups are rarely consistently successful, though certain factors, such as governmental support, can increase the chances of success, whilst political reframing and the creation of feedback loops are perhaps the greatest indicators of policy change.

Though the interest group theory this thesis adopts is primarily derived from the US context, there is a relevant body of literature which considers interest groups in Australia. Research in Australia has considered the still complex commercial lobbying landscape and the issues it poses (Halpin & Warhurst 2015), the instances in which controversies over lobbying have become salient on the national agenda (Warhurst 1998) and attempts to regulate the lobbying industry (Warhurst 2007). Crepaz (2021) considers the ways in which lobbyists were able to successfully exclude themselves from such regulation, whilst Edwards (2019) argues that corporate lobbyists in Australia are often able to exert more influence over both the Coalition and the Labor than its voters are. Such literature provides a strong basis upon which to build further theories of interest group impact in Australian politics.

1.3 Religious Lobbying

There is a substantial body of literature which considers religious lobbying in Australia. Existing studies have firstly, identified an array of different religious groups attempting to shape the political process, including agencies associated with different churches and dedicated religious lobbyists. Studies have also focused on how the religious beliefs of politicians and voters shape the polity (Warhurst 2007;

Warhurst 2008; Smith 1998). Warhurst (2007) notes that organised Christianity in Australia is largely pluralist, both due to the involvement of groups from different denominations and the rise of evangelism (Warhurst 2008). A more recent comparative study from Malloy (2017) on evangelical political structures in Australia, Canada and New-Zealand confirms this view. He argues that Australia's conservative Christian constituency is also largely pluralistic but is still an influential political force. This research also suggests that such a force is often more beneficial to ideologically conservative parties, particularly in periods of election when moral issues are salient on the agenda.

Smith (2009) contends that religious voters are as pluralist in their ideological preferences as they are in their religious affiliations, citing the substantial levels of support for the Labor Party among religious voters at the 2007 election as evidence of this. It is noteworthy however, that in 2007 the Labor party and the Coalition were both opposed to the salient moral issue of same-sex marriage, whilst questions of religious freedoms predominantly began to arise following the election of the Rudd Government. Donovan's (2014) study of the 2013 election provides a contrast to Smith's. First, he notes that Christian conservatives are a shrinking population whose impact exists at the margins and does not ultimately shape broad policy outcomes. Yet religion also has a renewed centrality to parties on the political right, as moral issues such as same-sex marriage can galvanise Christian support for these parties that is of significant strategic value, renewing religious cleavages in the polity that were historically important. Donovan (2014, p. 641-642) points to the role of issues such as same-sex marriage and abortion in the 2013 federal election in Australia whereby voters, divided by religious cleavages on issues of morality, can provide support and votes to right-wing parties when galvanised effectively. Ultimately, the religious groups which make up the Christian Right in Australia still represent a large constituency which can become politically influential under the necessary conditions.

Finally, literature on the Christian Right in Australia examines its impact on moral policy. Studies have primarily focussed on case study analysis of specific policy areas rather than reaching conclusions

about its more general influence across a range of areas. Examples of this include discussion of Christian opposition to Euthanasia policy (Sikora 2009) and the tendency of the media to construe this as more rigid than it necessarily is (Dutney 1997); Christian opposition to sexual health and relationships education (Gibson 2007; Peppard 2008); the Christian opposition to broad human rights legislation alongside an emphasis on the importance of religious freedoms as an issue (Nelson et al. 2012; Poulos 2019); and the rejection of greater rights for the LGBTIQ+ community, particularly the legalisation of same-sex marriage (Edwards 2007). There is existing literature which considers the ACL specifically and this will be considered in the following section.

1.4 Australian Christian Lobby

The ACL is arguably the most prominent conservative Christian lobby group in Australia. However, it has been under-explored in the existing literature. The studies that do exist tend to focus on the ACL in the context of a broader discussion of particular social issues in which the ACL has involved itself. This includes analysis of Australian censorship laws (Simpson 2008) and the historical and social context of marriage (Frew 2008). There are also a number of studies which demonstrate how Christian anti-sexualisation policies are embedded within the broader polity and discuss the role of the ACL in promoting these policies. These studies include discussions of the ACL's opposition to the Safe School coalition (Shannon 2016) and same-sex advertising, which the ACL has claimed reflect a broader social trend towards the sexualisation of children (Jacques 2013). The first article, however, focusses on neoliberal principles in LGBTIQ+ education and not the ACL, whilst the latter is primarily a discrete case study in issue activism. There are also studies which consider the ACL as part of a broader discussion of Australia's human rights policy (Ball 2013; Crosthwaite 2013).

A small number of studies focusing on religion and politics in Australia in recent years include detailed discussions of the ACL. Maddox (2014) provides a significant overview of the organisation's structure

and relationship with political institutions up until 2014, though this prefaces her evaluation of whether the ACL meets the criteria to be considered a right-wing extremist organisation. Smith (2009) includes a general discussion of the ACL's influence in the political arena, utilising electoral analysis to review 15 key ACL targeted electorates during the 2007 election. This analysis also indicated the advocacy tactics of the ACL had a minimal impact on public policy, though these implications have been contested by the ACL.

There is also scholarship analysing the external and self-characterisation of the ACL and how this informs a greater understanding of Christian institutions in Australian politics. Whitaker (2018) asserts that the ACL have attempted to portray Christians as a marginalised and derided group, whose size has subsided. Mullins (2012) argues that the ACL's increased lobbying in recent years is an attempt to regain the institutional legitimacy it feels has been lost because of the increasing secularisation of Australian society.

Whilst there is notable body of literature that considers, though does not focus on the ACL, it is evident that there have been no broad studies of the ACL's influence on Australian politics since the discussion in Maddox's work (2014), which was part of a broader study on the ACL as a right-wing extremist organisation. There has been no systematic attempt to understand the development of the ACL across the 2010s or its impact on Australian policy over this period. This gap in the literature is surprising as the ACL has been very active over this time, involving itself in some of Australia's major public policy debates and demonstrating an increasing prominence that has gone mostly unnoticed in academic discussion of the organisation. This thesis aims to fill this gap by firstly identifying and examining the significant shifts which have taken place in the organisation and showing how these shifts have altered the organisation's political aspirations. This thesis will also systematically examine the impact of the organisation on three key public policy debates from the 2010s -- Safe Schools, same-sex marriage and religious discrimination, demonstrating how it used these campaigns to strengthen its position as an organisation. This thesis will aim to provide a deeper understanding of the ACL's present political

ideology, its impact on Australian politics, how this has contributed to organisational success, and a greater knowledge of religious interest groups in Australian politics.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

This thesis uses a number of theoretical frameworks to analyse the success and impact of the ACL. These theoretical frameworks function both to guide the methodology and structure of the thesis, as well as to contextualise the findings of the analysis conducted. The first theoretical framework is Andrews and Edwards' (2004) synthesis of advocacy impact theories. This informs the structure of the case study analysis and provides a coherent framework for evaluating the effectiveness of the ACL's advocacy, through identifying some commonly used methods for assessing advocacy impact. Furthermore, it will evaluate organisational success through examining the extent to which the ACL has been able to continue to exist as an organisation, using niche theory, which considers survival to be the fundamental goal of organised interests (Lowery & Gray 1996).

Andrews and Edwards' (2004) synthesis of literature on interest group influence is a simple, though effective theoretical framework used to guide the case study analysis in this thesis. Their conceptualisation considers the existing literature and identifies the most widely implemented theories for understanding advocacy impact as agenda setting, and policy enactment and implementation. Agenda setting is defined as the ability of an organisation to "bring greater attention to, raise awareness and create urgency around claims" (Andrews & Edwards 2004, p. 439). Policy enactment and implementation is the ability of an organisation to lobby for its preferred policies to be adopted and implemented and is considered the most significant indication of an organisation's impact (Andrews & Edwards 2004). This theoretical framework is useful as it allows for the compartmentalisation of advocacy impact into distinct areas of study which can each provide an

indication of the power of an organisation. The thesis applies this framework to each of the case studies, focusing on the capacity of the ACL to shape the agenda and influence policy.

Agenda setting is an area with half a century of dedicated scholarship and warrants some further discussion in the context of interest and advocacy analysis. The popularisation of agenda setting as an area of study within the broader academic literature is widely attributed to McCombs and Shaw who in 1972 published 'The Agenda Setting Function of Mass Media'. This initial work sought to examine how the media influenced voters in their perceptions of the most important issues during the 1968 presidential election. It found that there did indeed exist some diffusion of issue emphasis between the mass media and voters (McCombs & Shaw 1972), paving the way for agenda setting theory. The agenda setting literature has subsequently served to investigate the ability of the mass media and politicians to shape the issues that the public consider to be important. McCombs notes that this issue involves multiple levels of analysis. The first is an examination of the extent to which public salience of prominent issues is determined by media discussion, whilst the second and subsequent levels of framing analysis seek to understand how the media influences the public's perceptions of the different characteristics and attributes of different issues (Trigueros & Lacasa-Mas 2018).

At the core of agenda setting theory is the notion that the way issues are framed and understood by both politicians and the public, is crucial to understanding how policies are created around them. As Andrews and Edwards (2004) note, the ability to agenda set is perhaps the most significant in understanding how interest groups impact policy and it is the venue where interest groups compete against one another for the right to define which issues are salient on the public agenda and how they are understood. Theories of agenda setting suggest that policy change often results from the cultivation of disruptive framings which are dispersed throughout the polity by interest groups (Rochon 1998). They suggest that the types of frames themselves, and whether they direct blame or assign solutions, determine how policies are created (Cress & Snow 2000). As noted in 1.2, Baumgartner (et. al 2009) argue that reframing policy issues is key to overcoming the status quo and

shaping policy outcomes. Rose and Baumgartner (2013) furthermore, find that changes in key frames have a strong association with major ideological shifts over substantial periods of time. In their study of how poverty was framed in the US between 1960 and 2008, they found that the media's portrayal of the poor as responsible for their own conditions, was one aspect of a greater push for increased scepticism over government social intervention. They argue that such framings and ideological shifts, precipitate both a change in public opinions and policy outcomes. Agenda setting is crucial for advocacy organisations to have an impact, and analysis of it provides a further means of understanding the reasons why particular policies are adopted.

The thesis contextualises the findings of agenda setting and policy impact analysis with a consideration of organisational success. Niche theory was developed by Lowery and Gray (1996), initially as a way to bridge the divide between research on how interest groups are able to mobilise and sustain support and research on how they implement different strategies to influence policy. In ecology, niche theory is an attempt to explain the features of the ecosystem that enables a particular species to survive. Lowery and Gray (1996) extend this idea to interest groups. They argue that the fundamental goal of interest groups is to survive, and they do this by maintaining their access to different types of resources, which enable them to carve out a niche for themselves in the political ecosystem.

Although it is acknowledged that there are potentially numerous resource dimensions which an organisation might seek to access, Lowery and Gray (1996) identify five as a baseline hypothesis. The first resource dimension is a membership base. An organisation needs this to survive so must maintain it, even if it is small and comprised of wealthy individuals. Secondly, organisations must be able to offer this membership certain 'selective benefits' (Lowery & Gray 1996). Whether these are based on promoting members' beliefs or on the promotion of financial advantages, these benefits allow the organisation to mobilise its base. Organisations must then have access to finances and to the policy arena itself in order to demonstrate that it has the prospective ability to shape policy. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, organisations must have a reason to lobby, which legitimises the group,

giving it a purpose. This purpose could be to fight government action or proposed government action, or it could be to prevent broader perceived threats to the organisation's support base. Lowery (2007, p. 42) contends that niche theory is particularly useful in untangling the complex activities of modern interest groups. For instance, it is asserted that,

When Christian Right organizations lobby Congress in support of President Bush's plan to privatize Social Security, it is likely less a consequence of any deep commitment to dismantling the New Deal program than in exchange for more energetic support by the Bush Administration of proposals to limit abortion and restrict gay rights, a type of relationship between the White House and organized interests observed in previous administrations.

Lowery's contention here is that actual advocacy processes are much more complex than simple attempts to achieve policy success linked to clear ideological objectives. Often advocacy organisations lobby on issues which aren't important to the organisation and on which they know they are likely to lose out. Why then do organisations invest significant time and money campaigning on issues on these issues? Lowery contends that lobbying on one issue can support policy objectives in a separate area, facilitating beneficial relationships, demonstrating its power, or more broadly contributing to the organisation's survival (Lowery 2007, pp. 42-43). Often, then, what is construed as advocacy failure in one area, can represent success in another if it meaningfully contributes to organisational survival.

Niche theory is a useful framework to use to understand the ACL and its attempt to shape policy in Australia. Although seeing its preferred policy positions adopted is a key motivation for the ACL, ensuring its survival is another key organisational objective that shapes its lobbying activities alongside its ideological motivations. Niche theory may also help to explain the ambiguity and malleability of the ACL's policy goals. Whilst the organisation seeks to 'bring a Christian influence to Australian politics', the exact meaning of this objective can and does change with the leadership of the organisation. This thesis will thus seek to construe the specific niche of the organisation in order to consider how successful it has been in its advocacy activities.

1.6 Method

This thesis firstly uses case study analysis to examine the most important ACL campaigns. In each case study it analyses the ACL's capacity to shape the agenda, achieve its policy preferences, and use its campaigning on the issue to promote its organisational survival. The three case studies are the Safe Schools program, the same-sex marriage plebiscite, and the religious discrimination bill which is still being considered by Parliament. These case studies have been selected as they are the most central to the ACL's advocacy activities, have had the most impact on the Australian political arena and essentially encompass a significant portion of the ACL's lobbying efforts. There is also thematic continuity across the ACL's campaigns in these three cases. The issues identified during the ACL's campaign against the Safe Schools program precipitate many of those evident in the debate over same-sex marriage. The ACL's campaign against same-sex marriage was then one of the catalysts for the 2019 Religious Discrimination Bill.

This thesis will analyse agenda setting efforts in each of the three case studies. It will firstly identify the ACL's stance on the issue and when its interest in it first developed. It will then discuss the tactics and framings the ACL attempted to use in its campaign on the issue. In order to consider the ACL's campaign, content analysis will be used to quantitatively analyse the salience of the issue over time and how it has been framed in the media and in the federal parliament. This will show whether the issues central to the ACL were on the agenda, and, if so, whether its preferred ways of framing these issues were widely used. This provides a strong indication of the ACL's ability to shape the agenda, although the complexities involved in establishing causal influence mean that it falls short of conclusive proof.

In order to conduct this analysis, the work of Rose and Baumgartner (2013) – who coded positive and negative framings of poverty in US media using ProQuest and compared the results to government

spending – will be used as a reference point. This thesis will create search parameters for news articles that discuss the issues of Safe Schools, Same-Sex Marriage and Religious Freedoms using the search program Factiva. A sample of these articles will be read to identify the major frames put forward by prominent advocates on either side of the debates. Keywords associated with each frame will then be identified, and another Factiva search will be conducted to identify how frequently these keywords are used in articles discussing the issue in question. This will then enable conclusions to be reached about which frames are most dominant in media coverage of the issue.

A similar process will be undertaken to examine debates in Australian Parliament, with content analysis of the Australian Hansard. The chapter on same-sex marriage will examine all second reading speeches on same-sex marriage bills between 2010 and 2016, searching for the same keywords used in the media analysis to compare the frequency of different frames. The chapter on Safe Schools will go through the same process, although in this case the focus will be on all speeches that involve substantive discussion of the Safe Schools, which will be identified through a keyword search and manual sorting of the results. Hansard analysis will not be conducted on religious discrimination as the identifying terms are too broad and there are not enough parliamentary speeches available for analysis at the time of writing.

Following this, the success of the ACL in affecting policy in each case study will be considered. This will occur using Dur's (2008) approach, which focuses on assessing the degree of preference attainment. This method considers the distance between an organisation's policy position and the eventual outcome of that policy, an indication of the organisation's ability to shape it. This can then be compared to the positions of other participants in the policy contest to determine which group had this most success. Essentially the method considers how close an organisation comes to achieving its policy aims an indication of impact. The use of this method will involve comparing the ACL's policy preferences to the policy ultimately adopted by the parliament or the government in each case study. Informed by niche theory, the thesis will also investigate how the ACL's campaign activities have

affected its organisational success. In each case study, the thesis will focus how the ACL's key organisational resources, including its membership, finances and its justification for continued lobbying, changed over the duration of each debate. Content analysis will also be used to comparatively determine the salience of actors and organisations in each debate. This will involve specifying a period of interest and searching for articles which specifically mention both an actor's name and the debate in question. This will provide a strong indication of the ACL's ability to compete in the interest arena and provide a further point of comparison to consider organisational success.

Chapter 2: Background and Ideology

This chapter will outline the emergence of the ACL as a force in Australian politics and explain the key characteristics of the organisation. This chapter will firstly discuss the history of the organisation and the political perspectives of its founders, followed by an outline of the organisation in its current form. This will be followed by a discussion of the Christian Right and the concept of paleoconservatism, primarily in the context of the US where these ideas first rose to prominence. This section will also invoke the concept of 'moral panic' which I argue should be seen as fundamental to the ACL's advocacy and the political perspectives which have informed it. The final section of this chapter will analyse the ideology of the organisation in recent years by focusing on broadcasts by its current managing director Martyn Iles. It will demonstrate a clear shift in the ideological perspectives and objectives of the ACL, from a conservative Christian group to a patently paleoconservative organisation. Such a reframing is crucial in understanding the organisation's political position, objectives, and success in its advocacy activities.

2.1 Origins

The aims and ideology of the ACL have shifted significantly since its creation. The ACL was formed in 1995 by John Gagliardi, John McNicol, John Miller and John Murphy, and was initially known as the Australian Christian Coalition (ACC). Its stated goals were to bring a Christian influence to politics and combat 'Humanistic legislation' and 'Minority Organisations' (Ranganui 2009). The founders came from different denominational and political backgrounds. Gagliardi was previously the leader of a Pentecostal outreach centre in Brisbane and a journalist. John McNicol was a former Baptist Minister whilst John Miller was also a Baptist and lay leader. John Murphy's denominational affiliation was to the Church of Christ, and he had been a member of a variety of political parties, including the Liberal Party and the Christian Democrats, as well as running as an independent. The *Christian Research*

Association found that monetary and membership support was predominantly provided by members of the Pentecostal community, despite the fact the ACC had an interdenominational structure (Ranganui 2009).

Of the ACL's founding members, McNicol and Gagliardi were particularly prominent in media coverage and research of the organisation. McNicol had a history in Christian Lobbying, previously running the Network for Christian Values, whilst also writing for the Journal 'The Strategy'. McNicol's first appearances in the Australian media as a representative of the ACC came in the lead up to the 1996 Federal election, as he outlined its plan to target certain marginal seats through newspaper advertisements and pamphlets. This was in response to what he saw as a concerted effort by the Keating Labor government to undermine the family by "allowing the homosexual to promote his sodomy and other perversions" (Brough 1995).

Before founding the ACC, Gagliardi published a book entitled *The Marketplace: Our Mission* in which he outlined his perspective that Christians working in business, whom he termed 'kings', have the right and responsibility to rule and reign the earth, in anticipation of the 'end of times' and facilitated by a 'great transfer of wealth'. The book additionally advocates for the 'seven mountains strategy' and re-establishing Christian values through 'Christian Kings' who would re-claim the spheres of politics, media, arts, entertainment the church and family (Maddox 2014).

A number of the organisations' initial members had significant ties to both the Australian Liberal Party and Australian businesses. As noted, John Murphy was a former Liberal Party member and Gagliardi worked as an advisor under Liberal Prime Minister John Gorton (Sparrow 2016). Former Chairman Tony McLellan was a director for Liberal think-tank, the Menzies Institute and board member of a number of mining companies, whilst the ACC board was also comprised of PricewaterhouseCoopers senior executive, Mark Allaby and the founder and former CEO of Optus, Terry Winters (Taylor 2016).

In 2000, former brigadier Jim Wallace became managing director of the newly named Australian Christian Lobby and began to steer the organisation towards its current form (Ranganui 2009). Over the next decade Wallace sought to legitimise the ACL and cement its place as a prominent organisation in Australia politics. Under Wallace, the organisation developed relationships with Prime Ministers John Howard, Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard, and it was claimed to have been regarded highly by all three (Maddox 2014). The organisation campaigned on a number of issues including euthanasia and human rights legislation, although it focused a significant amount of effort on campaigning against LGBTIQ+ rights, and sexuality in the media, while campaigning for internet censorship and for greater protections for Christians, whom they claimed were subject to discrimination in contemporary Australia (Whitaker 2018). Wallace's tendency towards patently homophobic rhetoric, including a frequent assertion that the 'homosexual lifestyle' was more dangerous than smoking (Carroll 2012), ultimately, however, significantly damaged his public image and led to the ceding of his position as managing director (McKenzie-Murray 2013). In 2013, Lyle Shelton took over as managing director of the ACL and sought to similarly campaign against LGBTIQ+ rights, though to also protect himself and the organisation from accusations of homophobia. Shelton did so by using the language of rights rather than absolute Christian morality to defend what remained patently homophobic positions. Whilst Wallace compared the 'homosexual lifestyle' to smoking, Shelton asserted that it would create another 'stolen generation'. He claimed in 2016 that if same-sex marriage were legalised, children would be taken away from their biological parents in the same manner as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were by the Australian government throughout a significant period of the 1900s (Davidson 2016). Under Shelton, the ACL predominantly focused its efforts on public campaigns against LGBTIQ+ rights, affirmative education in schools, same-sex marriage, gambling and euthanasia, until he left to join the Australian Conservative Party in 2018 (Gribbin 2018).

The ACL today is a self-described 'grassroots movement' which seeks to represent a reported membership base of over 175,000 people (ACL 2021). The organisation presents itself as non-partisan, non-denominational and as seeking to protect the 'greatest stronghold of truth – Classical Christianity'

(ACL 2020). The organisation conducts political advocacy in a variety of ways, including through direct private lobbying of politicians (Delbridge 2018), hosting public political forums, and running targeted election campaigns (ACL 2021). It also broadly attempts to shift public discourse through leveraging its position as a 'peak Christian body' within the Australian media and through producing a Newscast discussion channel, 'The Truth of It'. It additionally conducts its activities through a range of programs including ACL training program 'The Download,' which is promoted as a Christian guide for university students. In conjunction with the Lachlan Macquarie Institute, a Christian leadership training organisation, 'The Download' is outlined by the ACL as an eight-day residential training program for Christian people aged 18-25 which aims to provide attendees with training for, and direction in, the 'post-Christian world'. The program teaches attendees about the 'big issues' including "scripture, science, gender & sexuality, cultural Marxism & critical theory, feminism and much more" (The Download 2021).

The ACL is now led by managing director Martyn Iles at the national level, whilst state directors operate throughout all Australian states. The ACL's board of directors was made anonymous in 2017 and the ACL attributed this to a 'merciless campaign to silence its views' (Maddox 2021). The organisation claims it is primarily funded by small individual donors, although large companies such as Gloria Jeans have been identified as past contributors (Ireland 2016). It currently has an annual income of \$5.8 million, 91 per cent of which is from donations, whilst just over 4 per cent is from government grants (ACNC 2021), meaning it is a 'large' advocacy group, according to the Australian Charities and Not-for Profits Commission (2021) definition. It has also been able to raise significant funds in short periods of time for specific causes, such as the \$2.1 million it raised over a matter of days for Israel Folau's legal challenge against Rugby Australia. It also aimed to raise an additional \$1.6 million to fight similar cases of religious discrimination (Martin 2019).

2.2 The Religious Right

This section of the chapter will examine the contemporary ideology of the ACL and discuss how this informs its policy objectives. In order to do this, the section will draw on the two organisational theories that are most relevant to understanding the ACL, the Christian Right and paleoconservatism. After explaining these ideologies, and the historical and theoretical context in which they emerged, the section will then apply them to the ACL. I will argue that although the ACL, in its infancy, was clearly a Christian Right organisation, over time, it has changed in its orientation and now has the characteristics of a predominantly paleoconservative organisation.

In 1973, the USA Supreme Court outcome of *Roe v Wade* galvanised an emergent wave of predominantly evangelical Christians to become more involved in politics. This was followed by the HIV/AIDS pandemic of the 1980s which brought the issue of same-sex relationships and sexual education to the forefront of national politics in the US (DiMauro & Joffe 2009). These decades paved the way for the development of a 'Christian Right' movement, comprised of numerous groups who were focused on moral politics and wanted to shape US policies in a more conservative direction. Two of the most salient groups included *Focus on the Family*, a fundamentalist Christian advocacy organisation, and the *Family Research Council*, a conservative protestant advocacy group, with both groups perceiving a mandate to protect the increasingly endangered American Family value system (Dowland 2009). These organisations sought to combat 'progressivism', primarily relating to matters of sexual and reproductive health, and to the growth of LGBTIQ+ rights. They perceived these developments to be corrosive to the moral fibre of the nation. Some groups went further and thought these cultural shifts constituted a deliberate attempt to weaken the US in anticipation of an eventual communist takeover (DiMauro & Joffe 2009). The broad Christian Right understood that a place in mainstream politics was essential to achieving substantive policy outcomes, and for this reason, it courted both the Republicans and Democratic parties (Lyons 2017).

Over the past 50 years the Christian Right has been a constant presence in American politics, attained significant electoral influence. Its rise during the 1970s was perceived to have precipitated Ronald Reagan's election in 1980, although this has been disputed (Lienesch 2016). By the end of the 1990s, the movement had succeeded in obtaining a number of its policy goals, including, for instance stripping back access to abortion in a number of state legislatures including in states such as Arkansas, Idaho and Kentucky (Castle 2011), ensuring that same-sex marriage remained illegal (until this changed in 2015), and winning funding for 'abstinence only' sex-education under both the Clinton and Bush administrations (Gibson 2007).

The Christian Right continues to be a prominent force in American politics and has achieved significant success by reframing its concerns in terms of individual rights and the traditional nuclear family. This success largely originated from its initial ability to overcome conservative opposition to encroachment on individual lives, through asserting that a 'nuclear family' and its supposedly fundamental opposition to abortion, feminism and gay rights, is fundamental to the integrity and success of the nation. This allowed it to traverse denominational lines and effectively form a new religious and ideological standing, the impact of which is still felt in contemporary America (Dowland 2009). More recently, it has shifted to strategies focused on using the language of liberal rights and the power of the courts, to have a substantial impact on the issues of abortion, gay rights and religious freedoms, including in such landmark cases as *National Institute of Family Life Advocates (NIFLA) v. Becerra* (2018) and *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission* (2018) (Lewis 2019). The language of rights is also used to mobilise significant public support, both from a predisposed Christian public and the Republican voting base, of which there is overlap, to protest salient national agenda issues, and vote for candidates in key elections (McGreal 2020). Using these techniques and having been emboldened by the Trump presidency (Long 2020), the Christian Right has successfully instituted and continues to maintain, the protection of the traditional family as one of the staples of US. political discourse.

2.3 Paleoconservatism

The paleoconservative movement arose during broadly the same period as the Christian Right and shared a number of its core values. The term 'paleoconservatism' was coined in the 1980s, and the intellectual wing of the movement was developed primarily by conservative scholars such as Paul Gottfried, Sam Francis and Mel Bradford throughout the '80s and '90s in response to the rise of neoconservatism in the US. Gottfried and Francis were conservative academics who both worked as advisers for Presidential candidate, Pat Buchanan, and their academic work helped to cultivate the rise of the movement. The term 'paleoconservatism' means 'old conservatism,' in reference to the 'old' staunchly anti-communist and anti-economic globalisation right in the US. The movement rallied against key aspects of neoconservatism, including its support for free market capitalism and foreign interventionism, and it asserted the need for governments to maintain enduring cultural, spiritual and ethnic values (Drolet & Williams 2020). The values paleoconservatives had in mind were the values they considered to belong to the 'superior', white, and Judaeo-Christian, American culture. Whilst paleoconservatism is sympathetic to certain European cultures, it places a strong emphasis on ethnocentricity and the preservation of the white race that it asserts to be the core of American culture. For this reason, it is strongly opposed to multiculturalism and the supposed dilution of white American culture (Ashbee 2000). Bobrowicz and Nowak (2021, p. 9) note that paleoconservatism considers Christianity to be a fundamental pillar of western culture, which should serve as the basis for laws and governance. They state that for this ideological position,

The role of a good government is to introduce good laws, which ought to be based on Judeo-Christian understanding of the natural law. This way of thinking embraces the notion of 'moral politics', which leaves little space for ideological compromises. A nation's identity and culture are not seen as changeable and contextual. Instead, they are primarily viewed in terms of natural/moral versus unnatural/immoral. In this

context, matters such as LGBTQ+ rights, abortion, national identity, family values and/or multiculturalism are simultaneously politicized and moralized.

Key to paleoconservatism is the concept of 'the new managerial class'. Francis, among other paleo-conservative writers, contended that throughout the world there was an emerging new class of managerial elites who had embedded themselves within government, the media and academia. They had portrayed themselves as committed to the redistribution of social resources, though acted with the primary intention of displacing existing elites. This managerial class was thought to be part of an 'interdependent global complex' which, "under the guise of various 'modernization', 'development' and 'good governance' programmes, led to the evisceration of traditional cultures and modes of social organization" (Drolet & Williams 2020, p. 34). Such a perception informs the ostensibly racist politics of the movement.

A key critique of the paleoconservative movement is in fact the assertion that paleoconservatism cannot translate into practical politics, nor governance (Woltermann 1993). Paleoconservatives, such as Francis, advocate for an economically left, though socially right leaning society, which redistributes wealth in support of the white middle-American, whilst also respecting the rights of the private, individual citizen, governed by Judeo-Christian values (Woltermann 1993). The relatively ambiguous 'managerial elite', as previously noted, enabled by neoliberal and neoconservative global economic reforms, seek the slow breakdown of global cultural barriers and the commodification of the person. They represent the "hedonistic ethics, relativist values, and therapeutic social practices" indicative of modernity (Drolet & Williams 2019, p. 24). Klingenstein (2003) notes that paleoconservatives consider 'modernity' a revolutionary movement intended to breakdown cultural value systems, the notion of God itself, and which eventually leads to totalitarianism. Within this struggle, paleoconservatives argue that contemporary conservative ideologies are formed within modernity, embodying radical revolutionary ideals, and thus are no different from the far left.

Paleoconservatives often rally against 'Cultural Marxism'. This is the term paleoconservatives use to describe a 'global systemic conspiracy' which essentially connects 'political correctness' with an insidious agenda to erode the fabric of western society. Political correctness can be seen to encompass feminism, LGBTQ+ sex-education, climate protests, the Black Lives Matter movement and more. Initially it arose as a critique of the work of Antonio Gramsci and similar post-Marxist philosophers and has since snowballed in its use and application. (Busbridge, Moffitt & Thorburn 2020). Paleoconservative figures such as Pat Buchanan have criticised Cultural Marxism for endorsing feminism and gay activism, while contemporary commentators who are often classified as paleoconservatives, such as Jordan Peterson, have contributed to the current popularity of the term (Sharpe 2020).

Interestingly, although paleoconservatives deride those they deem to be Cultural Marxists, paleoconservatives actually share significant similarities with Marxist theorists. First, both ideologies see the commodification of labour for exploitation and neoliberal globalization, as the core of society's ills (Drolet & Williams 2020). Secondly, both schools of thought suggest that a cure lies in the unification of certain groups to reclaim the value they produce, though for Marxists this unification is of the working class, whilst for paleoconservatives it is an ethnic and religious unification (Ashbee 2000). Again, in rallying against such a distinct ruling class, Sam Francis drew on the work of Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, writing,

The main focus should be the reclamation of cultural power, the patient elaboration of an alternative culture within but against the regime – within the belly of the beast but indigestible by it... A Middle American Right should begin working in and with schools, churches, clubs, women's groups, youth organizations, civic and professional associations, the military and police forces, and even in the much-dreaded labor unions to create a radicalized Middle American consciousness that can

perceive the ways in which exploitation of the middle classes is institutionalized and understand how it can be resisted. (Drolet & Williams 2020, p. 39).

The result of this paleoconservative societal thesis is the necessity and inevitability of a 'culture war' within the west. Emphasis on the values which hold a nation together leads to the moralization and the politicization of social issues based on conservative, white, Judeo-Christian values. Subsequently 'cultural warfare' is often waged over supposedly anti-religious, progressive social policies such as abortion and rights for the LGBTIQ+ community (Bobrowicz & Nowak 2021). As Francis declared in 1993:

The first thing we have to learn about fighting and winning a cultural war is that we are not fighting to 'conserve' something; we are fighting to overthrow something. Obviously, we do want to conserve something – our culture, our way of life, the set of institutions and beliefs that distinguish us as Americans. But we must understand clearly and firmly that the dominant authorities in the United States – in the federal government and often in state and local government as well, in the two major political parties, the major foundations, the media, the schools, the universities, big business, and most of the system of organized culture, including the arts and entertainment – not only do nothing to conserve what most of us regard as our traditional way of life but actually seek its destruction or are indifferent to its survival (Francis 1993).

A year earlier Pat Buchanan had spoken at the Republican National Convention campaigning for the presidency of George Bush Senior. He spoke of the threats to 'God's Country' and its Judeo-Christian values, the threats being 'homosexual rights', abortion, radical feminism and discrimination against Christian schools. Buchanan exaggerated the threat to American ways of life, and invoked pre-existing anxieties within the polity, such as fears of communism in the wake of the cold war. Buchannan (1992) stated,

My friends, this election is about more than who gets what. It is about who we are. It is about what we believe, and what we stand for as Americans. There is a religious war going on in this country. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as was the Cold War itself, for this war is for the soul of America.

An incumbent cultural war brought on by the global managerial elite is subsequently a primary concern of paleoconservatism and one it looks to combat through, insidious, almost Gramscian revolution. Francis's 1997 book was entitled 'Revolution from the Middle' (Ashbee 2000) and as noted he argues the need for middle America to begin to reclaim cultural power through, at times patient, but fundamentally revolutionary means. The 'revolution from the middle' is about the patient elaboration of a 'radicalised middle-American consciousness'. In his 1997 Essay, 'From Household to Nation', Francis criticised Pat Buchanan's Presidential campaign for conceding too much to the Republican establishment and its voters. He argued that the Republican voter and party "only dilutes and deflects the radicalism of the message he [Buchanan] and his Middle American Revolution have to offer" (Francis 1997, p. 16). The movement is emphasised again by both Francis and Gottfried as a populist revolt against the forces which erode cultural lines and disenfranchise middle, white Americans who are the 'real America' (Drolet & Williams 2020).

Paleoconservatism, though sharing some similarities to the Christian Right, also differs in a number of major ways. For the Christian Right, Christianity serves as the basis for its moral and political perspectives, whilst Christianity for paleoconservatives is an essential component of the ethnocentric, western value system it seeks to protect, or in other readings, reinstate (Ashbee 2000). Writing on the Christian Right, Sam Francis (Ashbee 2000, p. 80) asserted that,

If they ever ended abortion, restored school prayer, outlawed sodomy and banned pornography, I suspect, most of its followers would simply declare victory and retire. But having accomplished all of that, the Christian right would have done nothing to strip the federal government of the power it has seized throughout this century...to stop the cultural

and racial dispossession of the historic American people or resist the absorption of the American nation into a multicultural and multiracial globalist regime.

From this perspective, the Christian Right is primarily focused on policies that shape the nature of western society. For advocates, whilst detrimental policies might be reflective of broader social ills, they might also be resolved through effective action within the policy arena. However, for paleoconservatives, this is not the case. Woltermann (1993) asserts that the two groups also differ in their understandings of morality and social change. For paleoconservatives, Judeo-Christian morality is significant as it is deeply embedded within the cultural history of the west, whilst for the Christian Right, it is a universal truth derived from God. On matters of social change, paleoconservatives are instinctively compelled towards destabilising the established elite order and overthrowing the existing elites, whilst for the Christian Right, conservation is often preferred if social policy already reflects Judeo-Christian values. Historically, this has meant that the Christian Right has often had a greater alignment with, and policy influence on, the Republican Party, and it has sought to distance itself from paleoconservatism when in conflicts with Republican policies, particularly on issues such as foreign intervention, which paleoconservatives fundamentally oppose (Lyons 2017).

In summary, paleoconservatism shares a number of similarities with the Christian Right. It considers Judeo-Christian morality as central to the functioning of western culture and expresses deep anxieties around the forces of modernity. Paleoconservatism, more specifically, emerged as a reaction to neoconservatism and its advocacy for foreign interventionism, neoliberalism and economic globalisation. It stresses the dangers around the power of the managerial elite, a global power which seeks the erosion of cultural lines and which paleoconservatism seek to combat through cultural warfare and revolutionary means.

2.3.1 Moral Panic

The concept of moral panic is also important in understanding paleoconservatism and how it compares to the Christian Right. As it was initially conceptualised, a moral panic is the process through which an emergent figure, group or event, comes to be defined as a significant social threat. In accordance with the theory of moral panic, the emergent idea is firstly 'stylised', exaggerated and then dispersed throughout the polity by the mass media. Prominent actors such as politicians then stand strongly against the threat, which is diagnosed and pathologized before an eventual cure is presented (Cohen 1972). The central actors in this process are the mass media, moral entrepreneurs -- who advocate against the immorality of the present threat, social control culture -- the politicians and political institutions capable of regulating the deviance, and finally, public opinion (Cricher 2008). The issue causing the moral panic is then presented by these actors as symptomatic of broader social ills and linked with existing anxieties about social deviancy. Such a presentation suggests the issue is a significant threat to existing ways of life and indeed the present system of social values which precipitates an eventual disproportionate and overreaching response from government (Garland 2008).

Scholarship on the concept suggests the significance of the media in producing the conditions necessary for moral panics. Studies note that the media facilitates a closed circle between itself, official sources of information and political elites. Cricher (2008, p. 1131) argues that,

First, the media are dependent on official sources of news, so act as secondary definers of such primary definers. Second, the media translate the statements of the powerful into a 'public idiom', familiar to their readers. Third, the media feed back to primary definers their own reactions as if they were public opinion. Fourth, the media overemphasise violence in order to justify the extent of reaction.

This essentially suggests that public opinion can often be incidental to the whole process, as the occurrence of the media feedback loop perpetuates outrage which is then used to justify policy without public consultation. Within this theory, the scale of the response is often disproportionate to the amount of actual public concern it receives, and to the issue itself. As Ashbee notes 'violence', or the extent of this issue, is exaggerated by the media to warrant a response. Moral panic then becomes a useful tool for both political elites and interest groups who seek to mould events in their best interest. One of the earliest conceptions of a moral panic is that of 'muggings' in Britain in 1972, outlined by Hall (1978). Hall noted that increasing media coverage of 'muggings', which evoked the notion a threat from young, primarily black males, was used by politicians to justify overreaching measures from law-enforcement and extended campaigns against violent crime, despite the fact street robberies had statistically not increased (Cricher 2008).

There is a strong connection between both paleoconservative and Christian Right movements and moral panic. Both movements use the language of moral panics, invoking deep, ingrained anxieties with the public and in mobilising support against the institutions which seek the destruction of western society. As Francis outlines, paleoconservatism seeks to legitimise within the broad consciousness the notion that managerial elites facilitated the destruction of traditional cultures in place of a collectivist society. The solution to this was considered to be the galvanisation of middle, white America to re-embrace nationalist and class identities through populism (Drolet & Williams 2019). Such galvanisation frequently, if not almost always, invoked fears of the 'other', threats to children and the threat of a non-heterosexual lifestyle, all of which suggest the imminent destruction of the Judeo-Christian values upon which they claim western society rested. For the Christian Right, the process is the same, only the ultimate aims of this are to see religious values re-instated through legislative, rather than necessarily revolutionary means.

This is important for this thesis as it broadens the understanding of paleoconservative advocacy activities and contextualises them. As Francis suggests, paleoconservatives are not seeking specific

policy change, but to in fact to cultivate a significant moral panic around society's ills. These ills include the supposedly increasingly morally relativistic culture, indicative of modernity, which is pursued at the behest of elite, global organisations which seek to erode cultural and racial lines and ultimately destroy western society.

2.4 The Evolving Ideology of the ACL

The early ideology of the ACL was strongly associated with neoliberalism as a result of both its leaders' religious beliefs and the period in which it arose, though this shifted significantly over the past two decades. John Gagliardi considered neoliberalism a religiously ordained path towards great wealth. As he notes in his book, *The Marketplace: Our Mission*, Christianity, in line with specifically neo-Pentecostal traditions, advocates for Christian businesspeople to generate enormous wealth and guide others towards Christ (Maddox 2014). Burchardt (2020) notes the Pentecostal Christianity with which Gagliardi was associated, stresses the importance of the 'saved' individual, whose personal agency is emphasised and whose wealth and consumerism are viewed positively, enabling cohesion between its proponents and neoliberal ideology. This initial stance was then further supported by the attempts of the Howard government in the late 90s and early 2000's to implement a neoliberal economic agenda through the re-introduction of Christian language and policies. The government asserted that Judaeo-Christian values, and indeed language, were a necessary guide for social and political developments in Australia (Stratton 2016) and facilitated a number of large welfare services being outsourced to religious organisations (Randell-Moon 2013). In its initial iteration, the ACL wasn't a neoliberal organisation but was ideologically aligned with neoliberalism.

Following the appointment of Jim Wallace as managing director in 2000 however, the organisation primarily eschewed engagement with economic policy. Although its social conservatism saw it primarily aligned with the Coalition in the early 2000s, this did not extend to other policy areas. In fact,

towards the end of the 2000s, the organisation began to align itself with the Labor party on a number of issues, most notably climate change. In 2006 and 2007, the organisation sought to challenge the Liberal Party's climate policies and it strongly endorsed Labor on what Jim Wallace asserted was a moral issue pertaining to the obligation of Christians as stewards of the earth (ACL 2006). In 2006 it also announced that it would be adding the issue of climate change to its election guides, stressing its importance in Australian politics (Minchin 2006). Additionally, the ACL and the Coalition differed often in their positions on refugees. The ACL, in the early days of Wallace's tenure, sought to advocate for compassion and acceptance regarding refugees, in contrast to the Howard Government's focus on border control through turnback policies and mandatory detention. For instance, in 2006, the ACL, alongside a number of other religious organisations, advocated against legislation which would ensure that refugee claims were processed offshore. In condemning this policy, Wallace asserted the need to protect the fundamental principles of "mercy, compassion and hospitality" (Harvey 2006). Whilst Christian Right groups might support a more humanitarian approach towards refugees, recent research has suggested that a relatively small portion of its constituency and indeed its leadership, support further action on climate change (Bardon 2020).

Maddox (2014) provides a comprehensive review of the ACL's activities and ideological positions prior to 2014, suggesting that its claims to be as non-partisan and politically centrist were intended to hide a predominantly conservative and, in some cases, 'extreme right-wing' policy agenda. Nonetheless, she argues that the ACL are not advocates of a violent or forceful transition to theocratic rule, but rather a neoliberal and market-based shift of wealth and power to Christian individuals. Following the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Australia however, and the introduction of a bill proposing new religious discrimination protection, the ACL now operates in an evolved, or in the ACL's terms "post-Christian age" (ACL 2021) with a new direction.

Although the ACL still claims to be non-partisan, its present model of operation seems to indicate exclusive allegiance to conservative parties and a paleoconservative ideological position. Firstly, over

the course of former managing director Lyle Shelton's tenure, the policy issues of the ACL were seemingly on a path of convergence with parties to the right of the Liberal Party, particularly the Australian Conservative Party and One Nation. In 2018, Shelton announced that he was leaving the organisation to join the Australian Conservatives as their new communications manager. Shelton announced that he intended to run at the next federal election on a platform of opposition to "political correctness, gender ideology and social Marxism" (AAP 2018). Following Shelton's departure, the new managing director, Martin Iles, announced that the ACL would disperse how to vote cards during the 2019 federal election which strongly reflected this political preference. The issues the ACL presented to voters on its how to vote cards were limited to 'keeping the lord's prayer in parliament', 'opposing the legalisation of assisted suicide', 'opposing the public funding of abortion', 'opposing radical gay sex and gender programs in schools' and 'supporting faith-based schools' ability to uphold their values and ethos' (Campbell 2019). Absent from these how to vote cards were the many issues the ACL also lists on their website as central to their lobbying activities including 'homelessness', 'refugees', 'overseas aid' and 'human rights'. On the card, the ACL primarily endorsed the Australian Conservatives, who ticked all the ACL's boxes, and then secondly the One Nation Party followed by the Liberal National Party. Labor was third last – not receiving a single tick -- whilst The Greens were last with all crosses on the important issues (Campbell 2019).

This analysis suggests that these issues virtually define the political allegiances of the ACL as they have exclusively informed which parties the ACL endorses. This also consolidates the notion that politically, the ACL is almost entirely a conservative organisation, as it no longer seems to campaign on its extended agenda. Even in regard to issues such as refugee intake, the ACL promotes conservatism over compassion, Iles writing in a 2018 article in Catholic Weekly that in regard to refugee intake, "Wisdom is every bit as much a Christian virtue as compassion. We are called to know both... If a seemingly compassionate policy undermines national sovereignty, then one must pause for thought" (Iles 2018).

The ACL's current website references targeted, political campaigning efforts only since 2018, and of the political campaigning it openly advertises, there is little to suggest it has ever endorsed a Labor, or progressive candidate or government (ACL 2021). Recounting its campaigning efforts briefly over this period, the ACL campaigned against Labor during the 2018 Tasmanian state election. This was according to its Tasmanian state director, Mark Brown, on account of Labor's 'dangerous social policies'. Such 'dangerous' policies included funding for the Safe Schools program, legalising euthanasia, 'progressing a charter of rights' and the "Establishment of a so-called 'Equality' portfolio". He commented that, "You could be forgiven for thinking they have been copied from the Greens Party platform" (Brown 2018). In 2019 it tacitly endorsed the NSW Liberal party during the state election, though interestingly also campaigned against the Nationals with it being asserted that the NSW party had become 'just as radical as The Greens' regarding social issues such as same-sex marriage, euthanasia and Safe Schools (ACL 2019). At the 2019 Federal Election, it again campaigned against Labor and for the Coalition, in order to promote the issue of religious freedoms, whilst doing the same during the 2020 Eden-Monaro by-election. During the 2020 Queensland state election it endorsed the Coalition, the Katter Australian Party, One Nation and the Democratic Labor Party on the basis of their positions on abortion and euthanasia. Finally, during the 2021 Western Australia and Tasmanian elections it again endorsed Liberal and un-specified Christian candidates against Labor. Subsequently it could be reasonably asserted that the ACL's political affiliations have become primarily and almost exclusively conservative.

The significant shift in the ACL's ideology since Maddox's analysis is exemplified by recent comments made by its current managing director. At the recent 'Church and State' conference in Brisbane, Iles remarked that his father often said, "we need a good war" to sort this out and "there's a little bit of truth in that, because society would not be so concerned about climate change or gender identity if we were at war with China". Then in response to the conference convener's interjection that this was not an advocacy for violence or revolution, Iles responded "Not yet, that's down the line" (Koziol 2021). Whilst previously the ACL could clearly be identified as a Christian Right organisation, these

more recent comments hint at a potentially revolutionary disposition in its future, indicating a more ideologically paleoconservative position.

2.5 The ACL and Paleoconservatism

2.5.1 The ACL and globalization/ international institutions

It is important to note that it seems unlikely the ACL's management had completely adopted paleoconservatism prior to the appointment of Martyn Iles as managing director, though Iles' rhetoric seems supportive of the ideology. First, Iles and the ACL now display a clear antipathy towards the international institutions which make up Francis' conception of the 'managerial elite'. In episode 57 of the ACL's news cast 'The Truth of It', Iles discusses the World Economic Forum's 'Great Reset' initiative, which purportedly seeks to address the significant inefficiencies and inequalities made clear by the Covid-19 Pandemic (World Economic Forum 2021). Iles' overall contention in the video is essentially that the plans of the Great Reset are to implement global communism, which is utopian and may only be defeated by the word of God. In discussion of the World Economic Forum's concern for the estimated 1 billion people who will be displaced by climate change in the near future, Iles strongly evokes paleoconservative rhetoric with the idea that global elites are seeking to destroy western culture by overwhelming western nations with refugees. He states, again in response to the prospect of climate refugees,

No They say instead we're going to have to welcome and integrate refugees. And what this is based on effectively, and frankly a lot of countries do a great job welcoming and integrating refugees – they just do it in a sustainable way. But of course this is based on the idea that all cultures are relative – a relativistic view of culture, that there's no culture that's better than another. There's no values that are better than others. No country has gotten further ahead

because of its values and its culture which are good – and therefore to dilute that – doesn't matter, doesn't matter. And you'll go on to see that they don't believe in Western Values and so that's really what they're after. They want the western world to be overwhelmed by cultures from the developing world – quickly so that they no longer exist...This is pure Communism.

This antipathy extends to other agencies, such as the World Health Organization. In episode 36 of the ACL's Newscast 'The Truth of It', Iles attempts to substantiate former US President Donald Trump's criticisms of the international agency which proceeded a cessation of funding from the US. As Iles reaches his concluding remarks, he summarises with the statement "Moral of the story, the WHO actually is a threat to world health in many ways, and it's certainly a communist puppet" (ACL 2020). The notion of moral panic is clearly central to the ACL's political leanings, with the organization attempting to agitate existing anxieties concerning multiculturalism and immigration within the Australian polity.

Iles frequently condemns both communism itself and the associated paleoconservative concept of Cultural Marxism. Iles asserts that Cultural Marxism is 'fundamentally anti-Christ' and in his discussion of it in 'Unmasking Cultural Marxism', he spends a significant period of time attributing it to the Black Lives Matter movement. Cultural Marxism has become a term that is regularly employed by the ACL in its public statements and online advocacy.

Iles is additionally critical of the broader climate-change movement, suggesting those involved, particularly in movements such as Extinction Rebellion, are Cultural Marxists (ACL 2020). This is an important demonstration of the shift which has taken place at the ACL under Iles. The organization under Wallace previously noted the 'moral duty' of Christians to address climate change and their obligations as stewards of the earth (ACL 2006). Iles now suggests that this interpretation is incorrect and that the only obligation of Christians as stewards is to obey god's law.

Iles is also critical of the U.N., notably in episode 23 of 'The Truth of it' in which he suggests the science of climate change is consistently incorrect, encouraging and fomenting skepticism over the issue. Within the episode, Iles invokes the Safe Schools Coalition among other organizations and suggests all are ultimately driven by the destructive force of post-modernism in the form of Marxism. Again, in accordance with paleoconservative thought, the ACL has become highly critical of the concept of post-modernism and its supposedly corrosive impact on western culture. In a segment directed at discussing climate change, Iles summarises a view that is opposed to both local and international bureaucratic institutions, which seems drawn almost verbatim from paleoconservative literature. In attributing anti-climate change movements to Marxist thought, Iles asserts,

Marxism is in fact a cloak, a suit of clothes that is worn by post-modernism when post-modernism becomes political... Jacques Derrida actually said that... his idea was post-modernism and he said look when this becomes political and starts to filter through society, it'll be taken on by Marxism, that's what it'll look like and he admits himself that the crux of his whole philosophy was destruction. That's what it's all about, that's the core of post-modernism, that's the core of Marxism, to destroy (ACL 2019).

These arguments, and the broad antipathy of the organisation towards international institutions clearly reflects a paleoconservative position.

2.5.2 The ACL and Ethnocentricity

It is next important to consider if the ACL demonstrates an ethnocentric philosophy in accordance with paleoconservative thought. The answer to this seems to be that the ACL represents a religious and culturally centric philosophy, which is to an extent rooted in ethnicity. That is to say the organisation does not explicitly promote ethno-centricity, however it does seemingly advocate for the assimilation of non-western individuals and the promotion of western Judeo-Christian values over

others. As previously noted, Iles puts forth a Judeo-Christian-centric viewpoint, advocating against any form of moral or cultural relativism. Regarding refugees, the ACL advocates ensuring national sovereignty over compassion, though it is noted that the organization does often still support an increased refugee intake.

More broadly the ACL seems to confirm that it supports an assimilationist approach, notably for instance, in discussions of race relations and the Australia day debate. In episode 40 of 'The Truth of It,' there is a segment succinctly entitled 'Race Relations: Solved'. In this segment, Iles suggest that Christianity is the ultimate uniting force, the embrace of which will eventually bring people together and in essence facilitate a solution to race relations. Also in episode 40, Iles frequently and strongly condemns the Black Lives Matter movement, which he asserts is an openly Marxist organization. In episode 29 Iles suggests that controversy over Australia Day and its colonial implications, might be resolved through embracing the Judeo-Christian tradition of forgiveness.

The ACL also acknowledged the connection between culture, religion and ethnicity in a 2019 parliamentary submission regarding the proposed *Elimination of Vilification Bill 2019*. In the submission, ACL chief political officer Dan Flynn, asserts that race and religion are essential indicators of culture just as, he asserts, western culture is a product of Christianity (ACL 2019). The fact that the organisation clearly promotes Judaeo-Christian religiosity, and its aligned culture, as morally superior to others, indicates to a certain extent, that the ACL adheres to ethno-centric values in accordance with paleoconservative theory.

2.5.3 The ACL and countercultural warfare

In consideration of the ACL, an uncontroversial assertion is that the ACL is an organization which primarily advocates on matters of Christian society and western culture. There has been no point in the ACL's history at which it has attempted to eschew the notion that it an organization waging

'cultural warfare' for the soul of the west, nurturing religious anxieties indicative of moral panics. Whilst some Christian organizations might divide their time between purely charitable endeavors and public policy, the ACL is almost exclusively concerned with the latter. Former managing director Lyle Shelton, in fact recently released a book discussing his experiences at the helm of the ACL. The book is titled *'I Kid You Not: Notes From 20 Years in the Trenches of The Culture Wars'*. Conservative commentator Miranda Divine provides a memorable endorsement of the book, describing Shelton as a 'Christian Warrior', fighting against 'rainbow fascism' (Lyle Shelton 2021). Under Iles, it has cemented this mission statement, presenting most of the issues it advocates on as central to the cohesion of western culture. Episode 66 of the 'The Truth of It' outlines the issues the ACL considers the 'top three threats to the west', 'which are 'therapeutic totalitarianism', 'identity politics' and 'self-love'. Virtually the entirety of the ACL's media presence concerns issues which it perceives to be corrosive to society, from Black Lives Matter activists to climate change protesters, encompassing those who advocate for gender quotas in workplaces and the transgender rights movement. Iles describes 2021 Victorian laws to ban LGBTIQ+ conversion therapy practices as one 'to make the soviets blush' and which will destroy all hopes for the 'tsunami' of people regretting stages of gender transition for instance. The ACL is evidently deeply entrenched in a process of galvanizing public and Christian discontent within the polity and proving the assertion that that there is indeed a significant threat which requires a response. The ACL are frequently active in lobbying activities and protests, for instance being involved in the 2021 Walk for Life protests against abortion, Iles himself making a speech during this event. There is a clear belief in the necessity of cultural warfare, in Australia and in the US, reference point for the ACL's discussions.

This body of work also demonstrates the differences between the ACL and the broader Christian Right movement. Whilst the organization is frequently concerned with policy, it is often more interested in the deviance of general popular culture. In accordance with Francis' conception of the division between paleoconservatism and the religious right, it might be legitimately inferred that should Safe Schools be banned, and abortion criminalized, the ACL might not disappear, having not completed its

ideological mission of eradicating deviant culture and halting the plans of the managerial elite. The ACL, rather, is in a continual process of examining emergent cultural phenomenon to discern the moral from immoral. A further notable point of differences is that the Christian Right in the 1990's sought to move away from explicitly Christian language in the pursuit of Christian policies (Lewis 2019). With the ACL however, the reverse appears to be true as the primary justification it provides for present policy positions is scripture. For instance, Iles argues in episode 23 of the Truth of It, that the climate change movement is fundamentally anti-Christ and cites 2 Corinthians 6 as his justification for this belief. The ACL is presently in the process of galvanizing an audience around the importance of Judeo-Christian values in the midst of the continuous and insidious erosion of such values by the forces of post-modernism, clearly demonstrating the ACL is now a paleoconservative interest group.

2.6 Organisational aims and objectives.

This thesis considers the organisational goals of the ACL to be defined by the need for organisational survival and paleoconservative ideology. Organisational survival is maintained through consistent access to the five key resource dimensions, the last of which is a reason to lobby, defined as "authoritative action or proposed action by government of concern to the interest group" (Lowery & Gray 1996, p. 96), though this is defined slightly differently in this thesis. This thesis argues that a reason to lobby is an essential aspect of organisational survival, however this reason does not necessarily require the material threat of governmental action, instead it is the perception of a social threat that is most important. At this point a reason to lobby is significantly informed by paleoconservatism. If it is accepted that the ACL is in fact a paleoconservative organisation, then its objectives are seen as both accordance with this ideological position and in ensuring that its constituency perceives the fear central to this ideology. That is to say, there are presently no prospective government actions which propose to breakdown western culture and cede power to a

managerial elite. Thus, it is crucial for the ACL as an organisation to interpret the government actions that might constitute such cultural breakdowns, translate these for their constituency and ultimately utilise such events to create a moral panic. A reason to lobby is not, in terms of the ACL, indicative of material external government action, but rather an intrinsic quality which requires justification to the Australian public.

The outcome of this, then, is that the ACL is looking to shape policy, public sentiment, and conceptions of cultural and political events around paleoconservative objectives, which are either genuine ideological beliefs, or organisational strategies that serve to justify the ACL's existence within Australian politics. The paramount objective of paleoconservatism, and subsequently, for the ACL, is to preserve the institutions of western culture as defined by Judeo-Christian laws. From this come the equally important objectives of dismantling the hold global, managerial elites have on cultural institutions and preserving Judeo-Christian laws by clearly delineating the natural from the unnatural, and the moral from the immoral (Bobrowicz & Nowak 2021) and legislating protection for those who fit the natural and moral. These aims are all intended to be achieved through the creation of moral panic, which invokes deep anxieties, through exaggerating banal occurrences which are construed as a threat to western culture. Moral panic allows for the dissemination of fear around emergent, corrosive forces and primes the 'historic' western people for the final goal of paleoconservatism which is revolution, though perhaps in terms of the ACL as Iles himself suggest, 'that comes later'.

2.7 Conclusion

Whilst the origins of the ACL are as a conservative Christian organisation influenced by Gagliardi's Pentecostalism and with similarities to Christian Right organisations in the US, in more recent years, its ideological perspective has significantly shifted. Strong affiliations with both neoliberal political actors and policy positions are attributable both to the concerted efforts of the Howard government

to ensure this association and as well to their intrinsic compatibility. During the early 2000s, however, the organisation was largely concerned with purely social issues rather than economic issues, whilst in recent years the organisation has many of the characteristics of a paleoconservative organisation. From a strong antipathy towards a 'managerial elite', to an emphasis on cultivating a cultural war and instilling a moral panic within society, the ACL should be understood and examined through the lens of paleoconservatism. Following the application of this lens it becomes clear that the primary objective of the ACL is to utilise moral panics to create fear around that western culture is eroding because of the actions of the managerial elite. In the context of niche theory's fifth dimension, this objective provides a justification for the organisation's existence and a reason for it to continuously lobby. This analysis provides a unique insight into understanding the ACL and provides a basis for further analysis. This analysis is conducted in the following chapters which consider three case studies of the ACL's lobbying and examine its ability to shape Australian politics.

Chapter 3: Safe Schools

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the impact of the ACL on the debate over the Safe Schools Coalition in Australia, examining the extent to which it has been able to set the agenda and ensure successful policy outcomes. The aim of this chapter is to investigate how advocacy organisations are able to shape public and political agendas, the impact of such advocacy on the policies themselves, and finally the contributions of these activities towards the organisation's survival.

This chapter will first outline the background of Christian opposition to, and the creation of moral panic around, education. The impact of the ACL on Australia's political agenda will then be examined, firstly through a discussion of its campaigning efforts and secondly through quantitative content analysis of media and parliamentary agendas. Quantitative analysis will firstly consider the salience of the issue over time, followed by an evaluation of how the ACL contributed to the framings used in discussion of the issue. Following this, the chapter will consider success in terms of the ACL's ability to shape policy and achieve its organisational goals. Ultimately the ACL was moderately successful in all these areas.

The ACL has been one of the most prominent organisations to advocate against the Safe Schools Coalition. In doing so it succeeded to an extent in legitimising anti-LGBTIQ+ sentiment and engendering concerns over religious freedoms. By framing Safe Schools as part of a broader agenda that was detrimental to children and the traditional family, the ACL contributed to a framing that became deeply embedded within Australia's same-sex marriage debate and precipitated the 2019 Religious Discrimination Bill, which is soon to be before parliament again. Its efforts also substantially contributed to its organisational success and facilitated a justification for its continued lobbying.

3.2 Background

The Safe Schools program was created in 2010 with funding from the Victorian Government and was intended to “ensure schools are safe places for all students, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) students, and are free of discrimination” (Department of Education and Training 2010). The program functioned by providing schools with training and resources to ensure they were effectively equipped to deal with incidences of bullying and harassment, particularly directed at LGTBIQ+ students. In 2014, the program began to receive federal funding and was made accessible, though not compulsory, in schools across Australia. Although the program initially generated little controversy, this changed following the introduction of the ‘All of Us’ teaching program, which attracted significant public criticism (Thompson 2019) as media attention grew predominantly because of this program. The ‘All of Us’ teaching kit provided an eight-part lesson plan in addition to videos and materials, which intended to provide year 7 and 8 students with an understanding of gender and sexual diversity (Alcorn 2016). The broader Safe Schools program, particularly the ‘All of Us’ kit, was subject to criticism from a number of conservative politicians and media outlets. Nationals member George Christensen, for example, likened the program to the “grooming work a sexual predator might undertake” (AAP 2016). Such criticisms precipitated a review by Professor Bill Louden of the University of Western Australia, commissioned by the federal government, which reached positive conclusions about the program and recommended its continuation. Despite this, the federal government announced that the review “identified shortcomings that need to be addressed” and would also seek to address further public concern over “the actions, including the political advocacy, of some of the participant organisations” (Birmingham 2016). It then gave states the option of continuing it with significant changes or discontinuing its funding, before federal funding was eventually completely stopped in 2017 (Carden 2019). Following the initial decision, the NSW and Tasmanian governments announced they would no longer be funding

the program and would instead be replacing it with broader anti-bullying programs. Victoria still provides funding for Safe Schools, whilst the WA government funds an 'Inclusive Education' program, which is broadly similar in its aims to Safe Schools (Hondros 2019).

Safe Schools isn't the first education program in Australia to be condemned for supposedly corrupting children, with a number of similar movements emerging in the early 2000's. One example was the campaign against the Sexual Health and Relationships Education (SHARE) program, instituted by the South Australian government in 2003. In response to the initiation of this program, advocates including several conservative Christian groups, sought to create a sense of moral panic. As outlined in chapter 2, Cohen's (1972) concept of moral panic refers to an exaggerated, stylised emergent event which takes advantage of broad, existing social anxieties. During the debate, anti-SHARE advocates claimed the program was encouraging sexual promiscuity and homosexuality, that it was robbing children of their innocence and exposing them to explicit sexual material (Peppard 2008). Advocates sought to cultivate a sense of moral panic linked to fears that the traditional nuclear family, and indeed Christianity more broadly, were under threat (Gibson 2007).

Since its inception, the ACL has attempted to create a sense of moral panic around a number of events, primarily relating to child welfare in light of a supposed increase in the sexualisation and exploitation of children. In 1997 it focused its efforts on generating a sense of moral panic over this issue by condemning federal 'restricted consent' legislation, which the ACL claimed would reduce the age of consent to 10 and allow for incest with children under that age (Singer 1997). Jim Wallace asserted that the media, among other actors, were contributing to 'moral confusion' within Australian Society (Pinkney 2004) and asserted the need for politicians to promote Judeo-Christian values to combat 'extreme feminists' and 'the homosexual lobby' (Taylor 2005). Regarding a photographer who sought child models from a school in Melbourne, Wallace asserted

This incident is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the rising tide of problems confronting our young people who almost every day are being pressured by society to see their worth as

defined by their sexual attractiveness...There is clear community concern about the ongoing sexualisation of children and our governments need to be developing effective strategies and regulations to deal with this widespread problem (AAP 2008).

Also in 2008, the ACL railed against new Victorian laws which would allow same-sex couples access to surrogacy programs. Wallace claimed this policy change represented a form of social engineering which would allow a same-sex couple to 'order a baby on demand' and that "The wishes of homosexuals to have children should not be placed above the inalienable rights of children to start out in life with a mother and a father." The ACL has consistently sought to cultivate broad anxieties and a sense of moral panic around issues to do with sexuality and children, particularly in schools. Given this history, the ACL was provided with an opportunity to capitalise on the salience of Safe Schools as it emerged as an issue.

3.3 The ACL and Safe Schools

The ACL made considerable efforts to ensure a number of key frames became salient on the national agenda. These frames were the degradation of child welfare, ideological indoctrination, and the interconnectedness of the program with same-sex marriage. Such frames were adopted in a lot of the media reporting on the issue, and federal government responses to it. They were also influential in seeing Safe Schools ultimately defunded (Carden 2019).

Opponents of the Safe Schools program firstly tried to link the promotion of sex-ed and LGBTIQ+ inclusive schooling material to the sexualisation of children. This framing was associated with three malleable criticisms – that the program was destroying childhood innocence, that it resembled grooming, and that the promotion of the LGBTIQ+ community would lead to the bullying of heterosexual students (Thompson 2019). The sexualisation of children was additionally evident in

attempts to link the program to the same-sex marriage debate in Australia, however this will be discussed in the second case study (in chapter 4).

The ACL may not have been the first organisation associate sex-education and positive LGBTIQ+ programs with the sexualisation of children, but it was one of the earliest and most consistent voices on the issue. Since the program's inception in 2010, the ACL had been raising concerns over the concepts it promoted and its impact on children. Rob Ward, former director of the ACL's Victorian wing queried whether the program was creating a 'homo-sexual ghetto' (Tomazin 2010). In 2014, when the federal government allocated nationwide funding for the program, the ACL was again present. *The Age* reported on the ACL's comments that the program sought to "impose a sexual agenda on children" and would support the "normalisation of homosexuality and transgenderism in schools" (Jacks 2014).

The rise of Safe Schools to prominence on the agenda, however, is to a significant extent attributable to former Liberal MP and former leader of the now disbanded Australian Conservatives, Cory Bernardi. Bernardi was one of the first to raise concerns over the program after it received continued federal funding, asserting that the program "indoctrinates kids with Marxist cultural relativism" and "we have got children as young as 11 being told to imagine they're 16 and in a sexualised environment, others in a same-sex or opposite-sex attraction, to imagine themselves without genitals and being bullied" (Medhora 2016). The ACL can again be seen to have laid the groundwork for Bernardi's criticisms, appearing a number of times in the media to condemn the program even prior to the release of the 'All of Us' teaching kit. Following the introduction of Safe Schools material into Queensland, ACL state director, Wendy Francis, was able to collect over 8,000 signatures on a petition against the program (Vonow 2015). By November 2015, *The Sydney Morning Herald* had begun covering a campaign led by the ACL against Safe Schools in NSW again on the position that it was exposing children to explicit sexual material (Partridge 2015), marking the beginnings of a advocacy feedback loop.

Despite frequent campaigning on the issue, the rise of the Safe Schools program to front page controversy wasn't entirely a result of the ACL's actions. It was specifically a reflection of the public outrage expressed by conservative politicians and media outlets, most notably *The Australian* newspaper. In the month between the 10th of February and 10th of March 2016, *The Australian* published 27 articles discussing Safe Schools, and quoted individuals critiquing the program more than twice the number of times it quoted those defending it (Whyte 2016). Within this discussion however, the ACL was included with consideration as an expert authority on the issue. One of the first articles which sought to create controversy, was published by *The Australian* shortly after the release of the 'All of Us' teaching kit. Entitled 'Push for gay manual in schools', it cited the perspective of Wendy Francis, presenting her organisation as a peak body and publishing its assertions that Safe Schools represented a form of 'cultural bullying' which again exposed children to adult material (Bita 2016). The influence of the ACL was also present in the writings of former Dean of Law at the University of Queensland, Professor Patrick Parkinson. In 2016 Parkinson published a paper entitled *The Controversy over the Safe Schools Program — Finding the Sensible Centre*, in which he likened teachings of gender fluidity to scientology and asserted the program contributed to the bullying of religious students, which was subsequently reported on by *The Australian*. Parkinson has a significant history with the ACL including in co-founding 'Christian legal think-tank', Freedom for Faith, alongside Jim Wallace (Lee 2018). In 2011 he additionally authored a paper, commissioned in part by the ACL, which was widely cited as evidence of the danger same-sex marriage poses to children (Taylor 2016).

The ACL, since its inception, had consistently worked to contribute to the notion that politicians are attempting to destroy the traditional family and the strong western values it embodies, meaning the specifics of government policy are frequently less important than the agenda and trends they represent. Two of the most influential arguments pushed were firstly, that the resources were not age appropriate, and secondly, criticism that parental consent was not required. These weren't the extent of the opposition's arguments by any stretch; however, they were the ones which could be reasonably synthesised from it and placed under review. As outlined in the independent review commissioned

by the federal government and completed by Professor Bill Louden of the University of Western Australia, there was very little question of how schools were using the resources they received, or, for instance, what its impact on students was. The review specifically aimed to investigate the extent to which the resources were consistent with their intent; suitable for teachers and students; age appropriate; educationally sound; aligned with the Australian curriculum; and the extent to which parental and community consultations were taking place (Louden 2016). The report ultimately found there were some areas for improvement, though it recommended the continuation of the program. Despite this, however, the Turnbull government announced that no further federal funding would be allocated past 2017. The framing of the debate, by the government, the media and the ACL, largely disregarded the specifics of the program whilst the policy outcome seemingly reflected this agenda, as opposed to the actual recommendations of the Louden report.

Marxism was also a notably salient aspect of debate around the Safe Schools program. A Factiva search demonstrates that in Australia, there was no mention within its archives prior to 2016, however in 2016, 310 articles were published which mentioned 'Safe Schools' and 'Marx', 'Marxism' or 'Marxist'. Whilst the ACL did not significantly attempt to invoke this framing in the debate, it has demonstrably attempted to capitalise on the salient link created between Safe Schools and Marxism. It should firstly be noted, though, that this can be largely attributed to the fact the Safe Schools co-founder, Roz Ward, was a self-declared Marxist and member of Socialist Alternative (Tomazin 2016). This subsequently provided a basis for opponents to frame the program as representing an ideologically Marxist perspective. Ward was in fact mentioned in 157 of the 310 articles which invoked Marxist terminology, revealing she was linked with just over half of the articles in question.

As mentioned, Martyn Iles is a proponent of the Cultural Marxist conspiracy theory, noting in the ACL's 'Unmasking Cultural Marxism' booklet, that Cultural Marxism advances its cause through popular programs such as Safe Schools. Cory Bernardi and George Christensen were some of the first voices to attempt to frame the program as Marxist, both claiming the program represented 'Marxist

ideology' at the height of its controversy in 2016, though Lyle Shelton also frequently flirted with this framing, asserting that Safe Schools represented a 'political ideology' (Bradley 2016). The ACL had also made a number of comments prior to this, construing Safe Schools as an 'ideological program', suggesting the ACL was attempting to frame it and indeed LGBTIQ+ 'lifestyles', as neither necessary nor natural but rather distinctly political choices with detrimental consequences. For instance, a 2015 article noted the ACL had sent a briefing to parliamentarians asserting that Safe Schools was not an anti-bullying program but rather a 'promotion of ideology at the expense of the welfare of children' (Launceston Examiner 2015). Carden (2019) identified 'Marxism' as a key framing implemented by Queensland newspaper *The Courier Mail* in discussion of Safe Schools and noted that the intent was often to signify an impending descent towards cultural and social decline. This is also exemplified by an opinion piece written by ex-Labor leader and current One Nation member, Mark Latham, who argued, "Having lost the battle for economic and foreign policy in the 1980s, Neo-Marxists embarked on a long march through the institutions of the public sector, especially universities and schools. Indoctrination programs like Safe Schools, BRR and Start Early are the result" (Carden 2019). Such rhetoric alludes to the theories of Antonio Gramsci, who called for a 'long march through the institutions', particularly of general western culture and society (Peppard 2008). Gramsci is one of the earliest theorists who conspired towards the destruction of western culture with the 'Cultural Marxism' conspiracy theory (Busbridge, Moffitt & Thorburn 2020). Such rhetoric is additionally a prominent aspect of paleoconservatism and subsequently suggests the increasing popularity of the ideological perspective in salient public discourse.

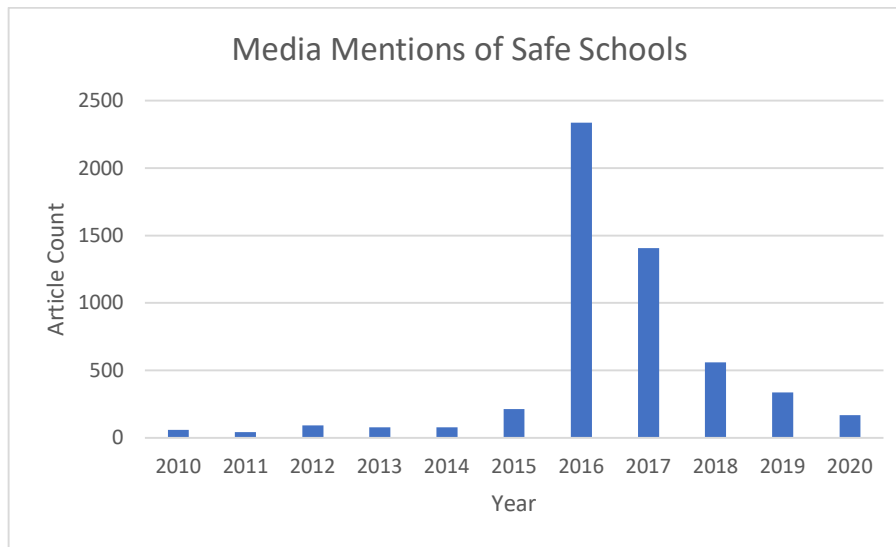
Finally, the ACL were seemingly instrumental in linking Safe Schools to the debate over same-sex marriage. Writing in *Quarterly Essays*, Lyle Shelton (2017) stated that "Honest "Yes" campaigners...know that same-sex marriage and Safe Schools are a package deal". Given Safe Schools promotes equality for LGBTIQ+ students it seems relatively uncontroversial to suggest that the program might also promote marriage equality. However, the ACL perceived an opportunity to ensure the negative framings associated with Safe Schools would remain salient during the debate over same-

sex marriage if the issues were sufficiently associated. As will be discussed further in chapter 4, Lyle Shelton headed the official opposition campaign to marriage equality, the Coalition for Marriage. During this campaign the ACL spent \$312,000 on television advertisements which encouraged constituents to vote against marriage equality as Safe School programs would become 'widespread and compulsory' (Karp 2017). Such programs are detrimental, according to the advertisements because they encourage children to decide which gender they are, to wear dresses and to engage in 'gender roleplay' (Karp 2017). By this point in time the federal government had ended funding to the program whilst most other states, except Victoria, had either ended or rebranded their own programs. This demonstrates the ACL's commitment to utilising the issue as a way of shaping the national agenda and continually attempting to broaden and control the scope of conflict in Australia.

3.4 Agenda Setting: Media

Between 2010 and 2021 there were 5,374 articles published in Australia which mentioned 'Safe Schools'. As demonstrated by figure 1 below, the salience of the policy was relatively low, receiving no more than 92 mentions per year in articles between the program's inception and the start of 2015. This supports the assertion that issue wasn't prominent on the national agenda until the 'All of Us' teaching kit led to a significant reframing within public discourse. This is important to note as it differentiates the issue from those in subsequent chapters which had been salient issues on the public agenda for a longer period of time.

Figure 1: Media Mentions of Safe Schools

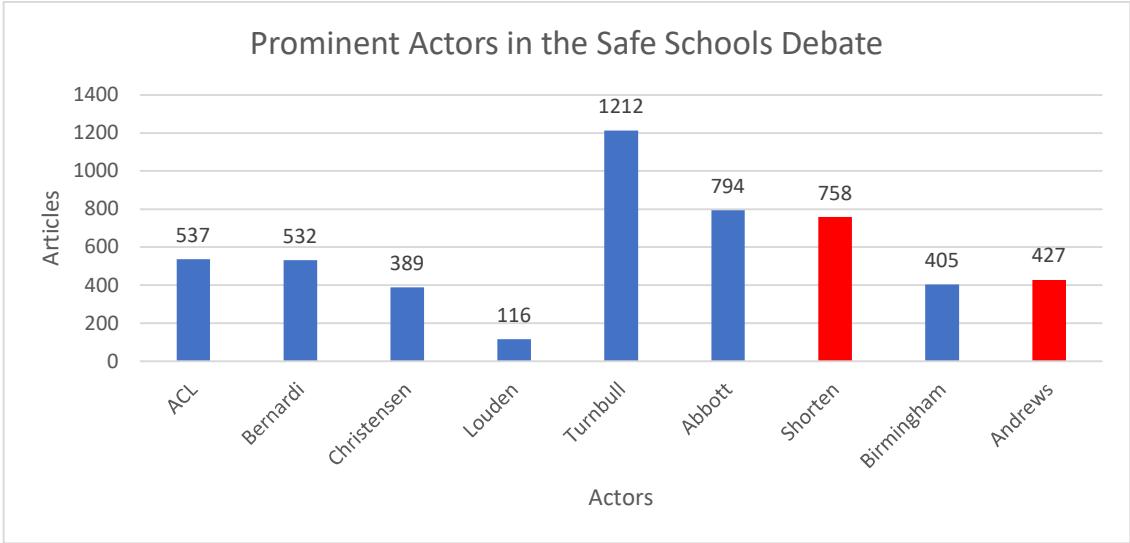


Source: Author using data from Factiva. N=5,374

This data suggests that given that the ACL had been campaigning on the issue well before the increase in attention in 2016, the heightened media salience of Safe Schools in 2016 was more likely to have been a result of increased media and political discussion following the release of the 'All of Us' teaching kit. As discussed, research suggests it was only after conservative politicians, such as Cory Bernardi and George Christensen began to level criticisms at the program that it began to significantly appear on the national agenda. However, quantitative analysis demonstrates that the ACL was one of the most discussed actors within the debate over the eleven-year period between 2010 and 2021. Data obtained from Factiva using a search of the actor's name and 'safe schools', demonstrates that the ACL was mentioned more frequently (537 mentions) than Bernardi (532 mentions) or Christensen (389). All actors were mentioned significantly more than actors such as Bill Louden (116), though the actors most frequently mentioned above all were Malcolm Turnbull (1,212) and Tony Abbott (794). The frequency of the latter two within the discourse however can largely be attributed to the fact that Abbott was the first Prime Minister under whom federal funding was allocated to the Safe Schools program, whilst Malcolm Turnbull was Prime Minister at the height of the issue's controversy and

oversaw the commissioning of the Louden review. Opposition Leader Bill Shorten also featured prominently in the discussion (758 mentions) and to a greater extent than the ACL, Bernardi and Christensen, whilst Labor premier Daniel Andrews featured a notable amount for a state leader (427 mentions), likely due to the fact the programs were state run and significant portion of the controversy played out in Victoria. Both notably featured in more articles than the minister responsible for federal Safe Schools funding at that time, Simon Birmingham (405 mentions). These results are displayed in figure 2 below and demonstrate that the ACL was one of the most prominent actors in the debate, more so even than a number of politicians who had a direct control over the program’s administration, suggesting the ability of the organisation to involve itself in Australian political debates.

Figure 2: Prominent Actors in the Safe Schools Debate



Author using data from Factiva. N=5,374

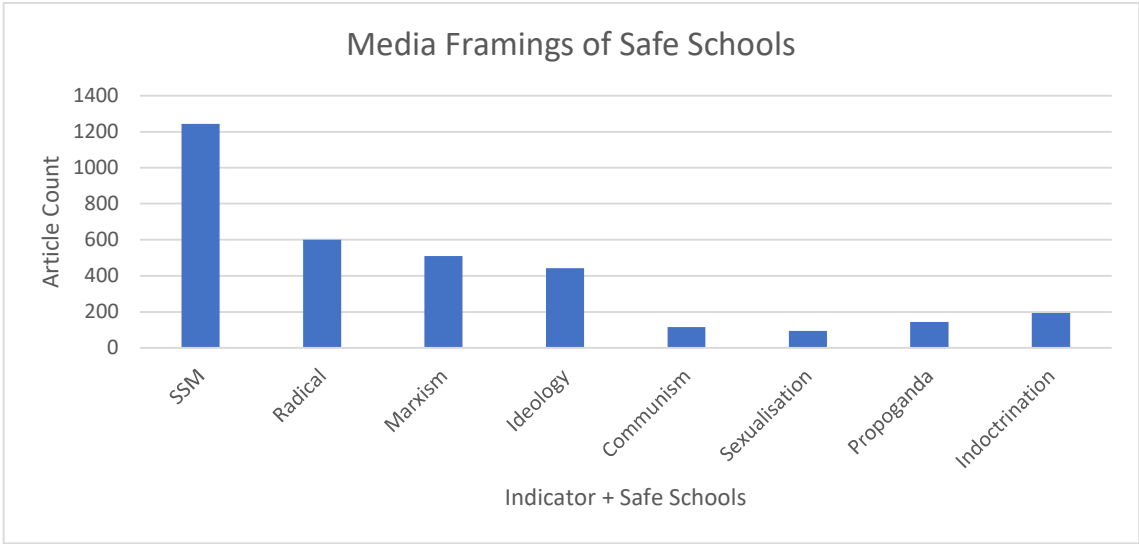
As noted, the re-framing of the Safe Schools program is strongly correlated with its significant salience on the national agenda. The thesis will now quantitatively measure and compare framings and additionally consider how they become more or less prevalent than previous definitions of the program on the public agenda.

The sexualisation of children was the first critical frame identified. However, this is somewhat difficult to capture through analysis due to the fact that the use of the frame doesn't necessarily require use of the term 'sexualisation'. This thesis did examine the use of the specific term in the media, though the prevalence of the framings is likely to have been greater. Actors did in certain instances use the direct term of sexualisation, and this amounted to 95 articles over the eleven-year period in question. This was a small number of articles in comparison to the most significant association made during the discourse which was between Safe Schools and same-sex marriage. The two issues were mentioned together in 1,243 articles between 2010 and 2021, demonstrating a sufficient correlation and the concerted efforts of advocates to associate the two.

Marxism and Communism were strongly connected with the debate, as noted. The terms 'Marx', 'Marxist' or 'Marxism' appeared alongside Safe Schools in 510 articles, whilst 'communism' appeared in 116. As noted, this is partially explained by the invocation of Roz Ward in media coverage, however it was also a salient framing which actors invoked in the debate. The term 'ideology' was used in discussions of Safe Schools to invoke a sense of divergence from the traditional and 'neutral' education of the past to an ideologically slanted and biased political education program. This term was referenced in the discussion in 441 articles, whilst one step away was ideological 'indoctrination', with 'indoctrination' appearing in 194 articles.

To reiterate, the substantial quantity of articles in each framing category demonstrates that the use of such frames correlated with the issue becoming salient on the national agenda, as each frame was subject to more substantial discussion than the entire program beforehand. The ACL's claims were often picked up by the media and subsequently contributed to public understandings of the program. These framings are depicted in figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Media Framings of Safe Schools



Author using data from Factiva. N=5,374

3.5 Agenda Setting: Hansard

In order to further understand how the framings of the Safe Schools debate were dispersed throughout Parliament, a content analysis search was conducted through the Hansard to examine speeches within Australian Parliament. As ‘Safe Schools’ was found to be too broad a term firstly, the search was narrowed to the specific name ‘Safe Schools Coalition’ to ensure the relevance of the content. This might have potentially excluded some speeches which discussed Safe Schools, though it also ensured that the speeches included in the analysis involved extended and specified discussion of the program. The search was limited to include only direct parliamentary transcripts including some debates which specifically discussed Safe Schools. External documentation and Parliamentary debates which mentioned Safe Schools only in passing were excluded from this analysis. The search identified 46 speeches in the Hansard which contained direct and substantive discussion of the Safe Schools Coalition and its program. Each speech was individually reviewed to confirm the speaker’s position and then marked as in favour of the program, against it or not applicable. 25 speeches were coded as

in favour of the program, meaning they directly argued for its continuation, endorsed or commended it. 16 speeches were found to demonstrate opposition to the program, whilst the remaining 5 were coded as not applicable as they did not provide a clear position.

According to this data set, the first speech which directly argued against the Safe Schools program in Parliament was by Cory Bernardi, announcing his intention to table a petition calling for the cessation of federal funding to Safe Schools in 2016. The frames identified in this speech were the contribution of the Safe Schools program to the bullying of non-LGBTIQ+ children, the sexualisation of children, indoctrination, Marxism, links to same-sex marriage, the precipitation of 'radical social change' and the degradation of the family (Australia, Senate 2016, pp. 753-755). Notably, this speech did follow condemnation of the ACL's campaign against the program, in speeches made by MP's Warren Entsch (Australia, House of Representatives 2015, p. 13804) and Robert Simms (Australia, Senate 2015, p. 8933) on the 25th of November, just after Transgender Day of Remembrance, 2015.

Regarding the frames which were implemented to oppose the Safe Schools program, 10 out of 16 argued that the program aimed to sexualise children, whilst seven suggested it aimed to indoctrinate. Indoctrination in this instance suggests that the program is explicitly political and has the intent to push children towards a supposedly contested political belief system. Marxism or communism as frames appeared in 4 of the speeches, whilst the concept of 'social engineering' or pressuring children to adopt a certain sexuality appeared in five. The subsequent depictions of the program included suggesting it was a threat to a child's wellbeing, that it would promote the bullying of heterosexual or cis children, and that the program would be corrosive to the traditional family.

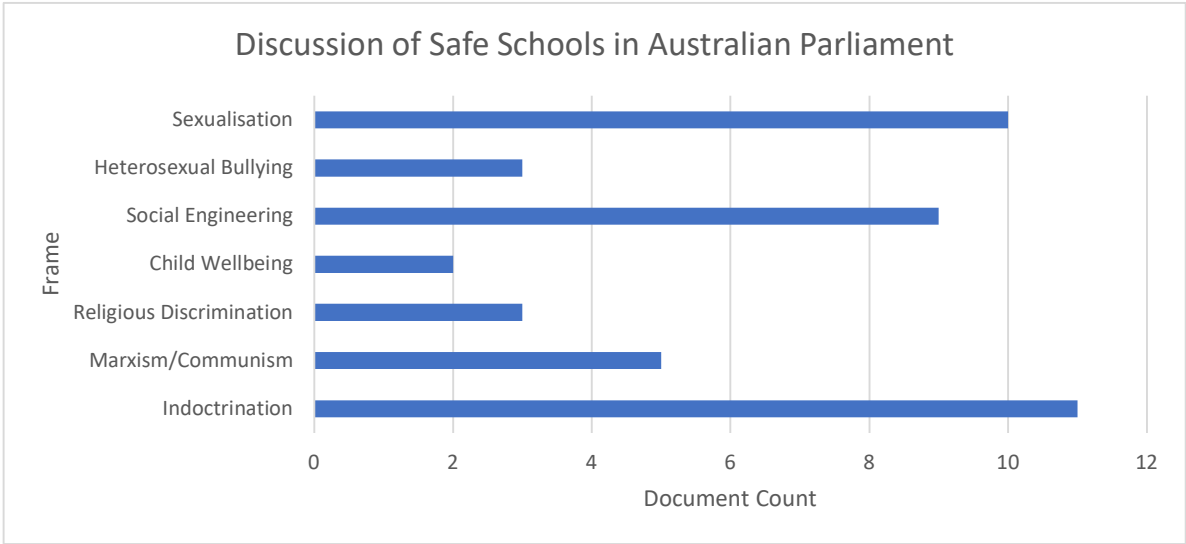
A further eight speeches which argued in favour of the Safe Schools program were found to identify and respond to frames of argument against the program. In four of the eight speeches politicians attempted to respond to the assertion that the program was a form of social engineering which attempted to either convert or promote non-heterosexuality in children. Three referenced assertions that the program was a form of 'indoctrination', whilst one responded to the criticism that the

program promoted the bullying of heterosexual or cis children and another that it promoted Marxist views.

After this, indoctrination and sexualisation appeared to be the most easily transferable frames attempting to portray the program negatively. This is perhaps unsurprising as the program is fundamentally concerned with sexuality and sexual orientation. Rather than asserting that acknowledgment of the LGBTIQ+ community is inappropriate for children, critics played into the broader assertion that discussions of sexuality are inappropriate, perceiving school aged students in a binary way which arbitrarily differentiates between child and adolescent (Thompson 2019). This perhaps naturally facilitates the assertion that such a program is inevitably political, with politics being normatively asserted as inappropriate for children who are not yet able to make informed decisions.

Perhaps most notable in this analysis, however, is how seemingly insignificant the opposition to the program was in parliament. Of the 16 speeches mentioned in which politicians voiced their criticism of Safe Schools, only eight occurred in the midst of the program's controversy in 2016. The subsequent eight speeches occurred following the completion of the Loudon review and the government's decision to cut funding. In contrast, there were 14 speeches made over the same period expressing support for the program. Although such a quantitative consideration can hardly account for the substance and impact of such speeches, it is clear that parliamentary support for the program seemed to outweigh the relative minority of Coalition members in opposition to it. This given 22 speeches argued in favour of the program compared to 16 which argued against it. Thus, on the basis of relatively ill-supported arguments and little consideration of public opinion, other than that reported by conservative news outlets such as *The Australian*, the federal government swiftly implemented reforms with potentially significant consequences in the lead up to the same-sex marriage plebiscite.

Figure 4: Discussion of Safe Schools in Australian Parliament



Source: Author using data from Hansard. N=46

3.6 Policy Impact and Organisational Success

This thesis will now consider the impact of the ACL’s lobbying on the Safe Schools program in the context of government policy, the broader political landscape, and public opinion. It will then examine whether the ACL was able to use this issue to strengthen its organisational resources.

The Safe Schools debate also demonstrated a moral panic, reflecting the early intentions of the ACL. In accordance with the objectives of Paleoconservatism, moral panic contributes to a galvanisation of support and cultivation of the notion that western culture is being insidiously undermined. Moral panics commonly manifest in concerns over paedophilia or child abuse, and in accordance with the theory that moral panics are stylised and exaggerated emergent events which trigger broader social anxieties, the debate over Safe Schools fits within this framework. Firstly, a modest LGBTIQ+ inclusive education resource, was presented by moral entrepreneurs and social control culture actors, as an ideological indoctrination, sexualisation and grooming program. The issue was linked with broader

perceived threats to society, including paedophilia, communism, and same-sex marriage in order to suggest the potential degradation of society and manifestations of western value systems, including the traditional nuclear family. This finally precipitated a disproportionate response from the government, with the Turnbull government's recommendations exceeding those of its officially commissioned review, creating the conditions which would inevitably lead to the cessation of federal funding.

The media-definer feedback loop (Cricher 2008) is also important in the functioning of moral panics. This is key to understanding the ACL's success and influence, and indeed the question of where the most important area of policy contestation is, in either public opinion, media agendas or the political arena. As outlined in chapter 2, the media-definer loop holds that public opinion is often incidental to media agendas. In terms of the Safe Schools debate, the suggestion is that moral entrepreneurs, such as Bernardi, Christensen, and the ACL, firstly frame the issue for the media. This framing is then dispersed and defined to the public as an issue the public is concerned about, despite this concern in fact originating with politicians or interest groups. The framing is then emphasised and ultimately construed as public sentiment which justifies an eventual political response.

This process is observable in the significant increase in discussion of the topic following the emergence of criticisms of the Safe Schools program by Bernardi and Christensen, which saw negative framings discussed and perpetuated. Social control culture actors then respond to this, and political action was taken independently of actual public opinion. In this instance social control culture actors can be seen as the federal government, the politicians who sought policy change and education minister Simon Birmingham, whose decisions initiated a federal review prior to any significant public consultation. The results of this review were also interpreted and acted upon independently of the public. The ACL evidently attempted to shift both public opinion and the media agenda, though it seems perceptions of public opinion as portrayed in the media can often be similarly important. Subsequently, though this form of impact is indirect, it is apparent that the ACL did play a notable role in determining policy

regarding the Safe Schools program through the attempts to cultivate a moral panic which at the very least was convincingly portrayed to conservative politicians.

This chapter has argued that the ACL alongside conservative politicians succeeded in invoking a moral panic in the political arena and will now consider how its agenda setting efforts shaped public sentiment. It should firstly be noted that the public support in question is specifically for LGBTIQ+ awareness education in schools. Support, particularly for same-sex marriage and further rights for the community will be discussed in later chapters. Secondly it seems that whatever the public opinion of the issue was – if in fact there were a prevailing perception or consensus – it wasn't documented or recorded particularly well. A Factiva search between 2010 and the start of 2016 shows there were approximately 17 articles which mentioned Safe Schools in conjuncture with either 'public opinion', 'poll' or 'petition'. One of the articles published by *The Age* discusses the disconnect between the \$8 million pledged to the Safe Schools program and \$245 million allocated to school chaplaincy programs in 2014, some members of whom had been found to be openly hostile to the LGBTIQ+ community. The article noted that LGBTIQ+ advocacy group 'All Out' had galvanised support against the school chaplaincy program, particularly through an online petition which had attracted over 180,000 signatures (Stark 2014). Another 2014 petition organised by FamilyVoice Australia called for the cessation of federal funding to Safe Schools (Hiatt 2014), whilst in 2015 the ACL tabled a petition in the QLD state parliament against the program, garnering 8,000 signatures when reported (Vonow 2015). In February 2016, Family First Senator Bob Day tabled a petition with *Change.org* entitled 'Stop the March of Gay Recruiting Campaign in Primary and High Schools', with the final count of signatures at 650 (Change.org 2016). In the lead up to the Loudon review Cory Bernardi tabled a petition against the Safe Schools program with 9,499 signatures, though shortly after this Robert Simms and Janet Rice responded with a petition in support of the program with over 36,000 signatures (Parliament of Australia 2016).

A lack of initial information on public opinion is perhaps not unexpected, though this soon changed. The rights of that community had only recently begun emerging, with for instance the Australian Sex Discrimination Amendment Act, which banned discrimination within education on the basis of gender identity, only being enacted in 2013 (Jones 2017). Evidently actors on both sides of the Safe Schools debate were able to galvanise consistent support, however there was a clear bias in the quantity of support for the pro-Safe Schools, or at least anti-conservative sides of the debate. This was found not to be the case however, with the ABC's Vote Compass probing public perceptions and acceptance of transgender awareness in primary schools, shortly after the federal government had launched its inquiry. From a sample of close to 250,000 participants, Vote Compass ascertained that 46 per cent of the population disagreed with transgender education in primary schools over the 37 per cent who agreed. The data presented demonstrated strong discrepancies in the groups which represented each side. Among those aged 18-34, women, and Labor voters, a majority supported the program, whilst those outside of these categories were more likely to oppose it (ABC Vote Compass 2016).

As there was seemingly little interest in the issues prior to this analysis, it is difficult to ascertain exactly how public opinion shifted over the course of the debate. However, based on the numbers of people willing to be politically involved in its early stages, and the fact that a single petition launched in favour of the program garnered more support than a number of those launched against it combined, it appears those politically aware were likely to support the program. Furthermore, whilst a shift cannot be confirmed, as the program was only introduced in 2010, public opinion necessarily moved from a lack of awareness to a normative position, which ultimately according to Vote Compass was predominant opposition. Given the significance of the ACL's capacity to contribute to key critical framings of the program in both the media and parliament, there is a strong case to suggest that the ACL substantially impacted broad public opinion and legitimised public anxieties concerning the program. Such public anxieties became an apparent aspect of broad opinion following the debate and laid the groundwork for the ACL's same-sex marriage campaign in which they utilised fears around Safe Schools to a great extent.

Ultimately, the ACL was successful in its policy aim of seeing federal funding for the Safe Schools program cease. It is notable however, that this decision seems to have been forced by a number of conservative MPs and the Prime Minister, who responded by dropping federal funding. Following the completion of the Loudén report, but prior to its public release, a significant number of MPs, led primarily by George Christensen and including Tony Abbott, delivered a petition to the Prime Minister. The petition was delivered with 43 signatures and outlined a strong disagreement with the recommendations of the Loudén report, suggesting that the limited scope of the review, and its lack of consultation with parents, meant that a parliamentary inquiry should be necessary to determine future funding to the program (The Australian 2016). Though Turnbull rejected the idea of a parliamentary inquiry, it is notable that when the report was publicly released alongside federal recommendations from Education Minister Simon Birmingham, the conservative MPs behind the initial petition seemed satisfied. George Christensen for instance, who had initially outlined his displeasure with the Loudén report, announced that the program was being ‘gutted of all its bad content’ by the new recommendations (Conifer 2016). The government recommended, for instance, the redesigning of a lesson on intersex variation which Loudén had outlined as age and educationally appropriate. It also recommended changing the availability of certain programs which Loudén had again outlined as appropriate, whilst Christensen suggested he had been given assurances by the Minister for Education, that in the likely event that the Safe Schools Coalition rejected these changes, any remaining funding would be pulled (Taylor 2016). This subsequently suggests that the recommendations were perceived by the 43 MPs who signed the petition as reflective of their preference and not of the Loudén review itself.

The movement against Safe Schools in Victoria also preceded but did not necessarily directly lead to the Victorian government taking control of the program. Having been run up until 2016 by La Trobe University, with Roz Ward, the subject of significant public debate, being involved infrequently. However, following the rise of the debate to the national agenda in early 2016, the Victorian government announced in December that it would be terminating its contract with La Trobe University

within six months and Safe Schools would be taken over by the Victorian Department of Education (Tomazin 2016). This was partially perceived to be a result of the framing created by conservative groups including the ACL. However, overall, the ACL did not succeed in achieving its preferred policy outcome in Victoria. The Victorian Government is continuing to fund the program, and the ACL's failure in this area is especially apparent considering its concerted efforts. Safe Schools appeared to be a prominent issue for the ACL before the 2019 Federal election, the organisation discussing it in several instances, notably in connection to the topic of religious freedoms. However, it has seemingly dropped off the ACL's agenda in the time since, with no posts dedicated to the topic on the organisation's website since 2019, although it is sometimes still mentioned intermittently alongside other issues such as Cultural Marxism and other vague and general threats to western culture, which are more central to the ACL's current concerns.

Although it did not achieve its major policy objectives, the ACL clearly saw significant levels of organisational success across the resource dimensions identified by Lowery and Gray's niche theory (1996). It succeeded in adding substantially to its membership base and budget, whilst it also used the campaign against Safe Schools to legitimise its continued existence and presence in the policy arena. The exact number of active members supporting the ACL is somewhat difficult to ascertain given the organisation tallies members based on the simple provision of a name and email account to the ACL's website with no fees or obligations. However, the self-reported number of ACL members has increased rapidly since its involvement in the Safe Schools campaign. In 2012 the organisation had an estimated membership base of 15,000 (Maddox 2014), and this had more than tripled by 2016 with approximately 50,000 at the height of the campaign against Safe Schools (Ireland 2016). Accordingly, over the same period the ACL's yearly reported total gross income increased from \$2.4 million in 2014 to almost \$3.2 in 2016, primarily as a result of increased donations (ACNC 2021). Following the organisation's significant lobbying against the Safe Schools program, its income increased again to almost \$4.1 million in 2017 (ACNC 2021). Such a notable increase prominently coincides with the organisation's campaign against the Safe Schools program, suggesting that the decisions it made over

that period substantially contributed to an increased budget and broadly a level of organisational success.

Finally, niche theory asserts that the fifth resource dimension which organisations must maintain access to in order to survive, is having a reason to lobby. In other words, there must be an incumbent policy or threat which necessitates advocacy on behalf of the constituency the organisation represents, in order to justify its existence. As noted, this thesis argues that organisations are deeply aware of this need and subsequently it is a fixed aspect of internal agenda setting processes. Advocacy organisations, such as the ACL understand that there is a constant need to justify their own existence and subsequently seek to convince members of this justification, rather than wait for a material policy area to emerge. In the instance of Safe Schools, there was no material policy threatening to impact Christian Australians, as confirmed by the Loudon review, rather the ACL sought to create moral panic around the program and justify its involvement against it. In this context the ACL should also be seen as successful, as increased membership and funding also suggest that the ACL was able to convince its members, that Safe Schools posed a significant incumbent threat, not only to Christian value systems, but to the safety of children. The moral panic which the ACL created around Safe Schools, became a prominent aspect of the ACL's campaign against same-sex marriage (Karp 2017), justifying religious prejudices against the LGBTIQ+ community. This moral panic served to substantiate the ACL's continued campaigning against the program in Victoria, which was prominent until at least 2018. As noted, following this, Safe Schools continues to serve as a justification for the ACL's presence in the policy arena. Although the organisation does not actively campaign against it, it remains to function as a point of discussion for the organisation in online forums. The program, according to Iles, is not only a significant threat to children, but reflects an insidious Marxist ideology threatening the fabric of western society.

3.7 Conclusion

The ACL seemingly laid the foundations for the Safe Schools controversy over a number of years. It was one of the first organisations to begin to sow the seeds of anxiety and doubt within the polity and begin to develop the frames which would eventually be picked up and implemented by a number of conservative politicians. Whilst the ACL wasn't responsible for the initial salience of the Safe Schools program, it capitalised on the salience created by conservative politicians, and utilised this to bolster its public position, as demonstrated by its frequent invocation by the media. Broadly the examination of agenda setting demonstrates that a number of the frames initially created and dispersed by the ACL were eventually picked up by both politicians and the media. Content analysis of media discussion suggests that themes of indoctrination were most salient, whilst the ACL's impact on the parliament was further evident in 'indoctrination' and fears of child sexualisation, presenting as the most common arguments against the program.

In terms of policy impact, the ACL's preferred policy position, that the Safe Schools program be forced out of Australian education, was broadly successful at a federal level although not at a state level. The ACL was largely successful in creating a moral panic which precipitated the eventual policy outcome though the extent of its direct policy impact remains unclear.

The fears the ACL cultivated were also significant as they contributed to the organisation's survival as an entity willing to stand up and fight for the cause. In triggering broad anxieties and depicting itself as a defender of traditional western culture, the ACL was able to ensure subsequent threats outlined by the various actors involved, contributed not only to the organisation's survival but in fact its flourishing. This is demonstrated by the significant increases the ACL saw in access to both funding and members directly after the Safe Schools debate.

Since 2018, the salience of the issue has considerably dipped and the political focus has shifted elsewhere, due to some extent to the ACL's partial lobbying success and actions of conservative

politicians, which saw an end to federal funding. This, however, has necessitated the ACL also move its focus, suggesting that a necessary condition of the ACL's influence is in fact a precipitating public interest, such as that which occurred following the launch of the 'All of Us' teaching kit. Safe Schools is still a consideration for the organisation, however there is seemingly no arena for it to substantively engage in public debate. Subsequently the ACL can be seen to have had partial success in influencing Australian public policy and justifying its organisational existence, should the necessary conditions arise.

Chapter 4: Same-Sex Marriage

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine the success and impact of the ACL in attempting to shape Australia's marriage equality debate. This will be examined and substantiated through an examination of the ACL's campaigning and content analysis of agenda setting in the media and in parliament. Content analysis will be divided into sections regarding the media and parliamentary analysis. The chapter will discuss the ACL's ability to shape the policy and the debate around it, while strengthening its organisational position. Ultimately the ACL was unsuccessful in its public campaign on the issue, though moderately successful in achieving its organisational aims.

Opposition to same-sex marriage and indeed to broader rights for the LGBTIQ+ community, is a fundamental and ingrained aspect of the ACL's existence, just as it has long been a key issue for the Christian Right and paleoconservatives in the US. The ACL in 1995 announced itself to the Australia public with the statement that it had formed with the intent of combatting the 'gay and green lobbies' (Reuters 1995). The organisation has asserted that 'traditional' marriage relates to the 'compound right to form a family' and concerns providing a 'biological identity for children' (ACL 2013). It has advocated this position throughout its existence, eventually even leading the official 'No' campaign in the same-sex marriage debate, with Lyle Shelton heading and managing the official campaigning body, the Coalition for Marriage. Over the course of this debate the ACL's campaign activities and public discussion of the issue contributed significantly to the way it was framed. Distancing itself from previous instances of overt homophobia that precipitated Jim Wallace's resignation as managing director (McKenzie-Murray 2013), the ACL made concerted efforts to associate same-sex marriage with the issues of human rights for children, Safe Schools and religious freedom.

The chapter will argue that the ACL has been able to shape the framing of key issues within the same-sex marriage debate, contribute to the delaying of same-sex marriage legalisation, and facilitate the conditions necessary for the organisation's continued existence. The ACL's ability to create and maintain salient opposition to the issue, contributed to an exaggerated policy stasis, demonstrating its capacity to have a significant level of impact as well as an ability to cultivate moral panic around threats to traditional Judeo-Christian values.

4.2 Same-Sex Marriage in Australia

Same-sex marriage was legalised in Australia in December 2017 following a national plebiscite conducted in November and extensive public debate over the course of the previous decade. This followed the 2004 decision by the Howard government to amend the 1961 Marriage Act to define marriage as specifically between a man and a woman (Donovan 2014). This amendment originated in response to multiple court cases which sought the legal recognition of international same-sex marriages in Australia, and to prevent same-sex couples from adopting children internationally (Parliament of Australia 2004). The amendment passed the Parliament with bipartisan approval, the Labor Party stating that the amendment was simply a confirmation of the existing law (Poulos 2020). Despite being considered the more socially progressive of the two major parties, the Labor Party maintained this stance on the definition of marriage for the next decade (Malloy 2017). Following this amendment there were 23 bills introduced to federal parliament supporting the legal recognition of same-sex marriage in Australia, although none were successful until 2017. The same-sex marriage voluntary plebiscite was conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and followed Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's announcement that a national vote would determine the future definition of marriage. 61.6 per cent of those who took part voted in favour of amending the law to allow same-

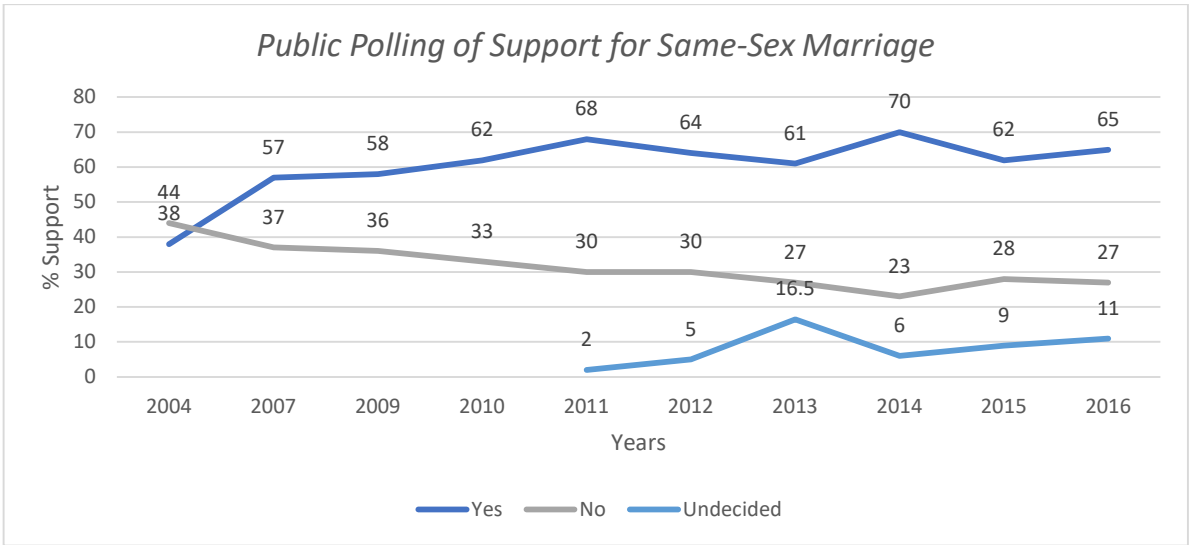
sex couples to marry. In response to this vote, the parliament officially amended the Marriage Act on 7 December 2017 to legalise same-sex marriage (Parliament of Australia 2020).

Marriage equality in Australia was not a significant issue prior to 2004. It was not considered necessary for the law to state that marriage should be between a man and a woman either. In fact, Liberal senator George Hannan proposed inserting a definition into the 1961 Marriage Bill which would clearly define marriage in Australia as between one man and one woman, but this was convincingly defeated by 40 votes to 8 (Parliament of Australia 2020). Even for LGBTIQ+ advocates in Australia the issue was not particularly salient and received relatively little attention (Millibank & Sant 2004). Walker (2007) contends that the relative lack of interest in the issue prior to 2004 resulted from the fact that same-sex couples were able to attain broad legal recognition in Australia as de facto couples, although there were slight variations in laws and requirements from state to state. This gave de facto couples access to many of the rights afforded to married couples including recognition as next of kin in the event of a partner's death and the right to property distribution in cases of relationship breakdown, which was different from the situation in several other countries, such as the US.

In Australia there was mounting approval for the legalisation of same-sex marriage in the late 2000s and early 2010s, however reform did not occur until 2017. Johnson & Tremblay (2016) argued that this was ultimately because of a lack of 'political will'. As the remainder of this chapter illustrates, this view seems to be correct. To argue this, Figure 5 below has been created to demonstrate the significant level of public support for the legalisation of same-sex marriage. Data for this chart was collated from publicly available data and specifically *Galaxy Research*, *Newspoll*, *Roy Morgan*, *Ipsos*, *Nielsen*, *Crosby Textor*, *ReachTEL* and *Essential*. For each year the respective results of polls from these organisations regarding support for same-sex marriage, was averaged to create an overall estimate of public opinion on the issue since 2004. In 2004, there was greater opposition to the legalisation of same-sex marriage than there was support. From 2007 onwards, polling has indicated a significant level of public support for the issue, culminating in the strong vote for same-sex marriage at the 2017

plebiscite. Furthermore, when federal bills were brought before parliament in 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015, there was clear majority support for reform, suggesting the need to consider more closely why there was a divide between the views of the public and the views of MPs on this issue.

Figure 5: Public Polling of support for Same-Sex Marriage



Source: Author using data from *Galaxy Research, Newspoll, Roy Morgan, Ipsos, Nielsen, Crosby Textor, ReachTEL* and *Essential*.

4.3 The ACL and Same-Sex Marriage

This section of the chapter will discuss the ACL’s agenda setting efforts, and the arguments it has attempted to disperse throughout debate over the issue. It asserts that the ACL played a significant role in shaping the most prominent arguments of the debate and was able to cultivate a broad sense of moral panic over the issue.

Having been a primarily Christian Right organisation, the ACL has consistently accorded with the movement's history of advocacy against same-sex marriage. Using the staple rhetoric of this movement, the ACL contends that same-sex marriage is one of the primary corrosive forces which threatens the nuclear family, which is fundamental to modern society. As noted, the ACL was involved in the official 'No' campaign against same-sex marriage, with then managing director of the ACL, Lyle Shelton, heading the Coalition for Marriage. The first primary tab on the Coalition for Marriage's website strongly demonstrates this fear of the perceived effects of same-sex marriage. This tab is titled 'Consequences' which states that the consequences of same-sex marriage are a significant evolution in gender identity, decreased freedom of religion, continued Safe Schools and a loss of free speech (Coalition For Marriage 2017). The ACL has a notable history of framing the issue in these ways, asserting in their parliamentary submission to the inquiry into the 2012 Marriage Amendment Bill¹ that marriage between a man and a woman is a necessary social good and that same-sex marriage poses significant consequences to "children, to religious freedom, to education, and to the institution of marriage itself" (ACL 2012, p. 3). This is exemplified by the instance of a 2011 Queensland Association of Healthy Communities advertising campaign. Jacques (2013) outlines how this campaign to promote safe gay sex, pictured two men embracing, one of them holding a condom packet with the words 'Rip & Roll' featured in the top left corner. The advertisement was met with significant criticism from the ACL, whose Queensland managing director argued that the advertisement sexualised children through public exposure to condoms. The ACL specifically stated that their complaint had nothing to do with the same-sex couple itself (Hall 2011), however this led to a major public debate over perceived homophobia when the advertisement was removed, with movements to re-instate the campaign in support of same-sex couples trending on Twitter as six of the top ten topics (Jacques 2013). The advertisement was eventually re-instated. However, the ACL's initial campaign against it

¹ A bill introduced by Labor MP Stephen Jones, which intended to amend the 1961 Marriage Act to enable same-sex marriages and place no obligation on religious ministers to solemnise such a marriage, though it did not pass parliament (Parliament of Australia 2012).

demonstrates, in microcosm, the way it tends to frame homosexuality as detrimental to children and society.

This is also one of the main ways in which the ACL has framed same-sex marriage over the last decade. In their 2012 submission regarding the 2012 *Marriage Equality Amendment Bill*, they suggested that many supporters of same-sex marriage wished to indoctrinate children in homosexual ways of life, whilst in midst of the 2017 marriage equality debate, Lyle Shelton claimed that the issue was “trashing human rights for children” (Karp 2017). On other occasions the ACL has compared same-sex marriage to the stolen generation. For example, in a 2013 statement, the ACL wrote that “The Prime Minister who rightly gave an apology to the stolen generation has sadly not thought through the fact that his new position on redefining marriage will create another” (ACL 2013). Lyle Shelton, confirmed this view in 2016 on the program ‘Q & A’ asserting that same-sex couples who chose to utilise assisted reproductive technology, would be taking children away from their biological parents in a similar manner to indigenous children being taken from their parents during the stolen generation (Davidson 2016). These arguments demonstrate the ACL’s attempts to use the language of rights in accordance with a popular tactic of the contemporary Christian Right. Such rhetoric also notably appears to cite the importance of maintaining the cultural norms of Judeo-Christian culture in the face of a potential cultural dispossession by those seeking equality, which is a prominent tenet of paleoconservative thought.

The ACL made attempts to ensure this framing had an academic basis, particularly in its work with Professor Patrick Parkinson of the University of Queensland. As previously noted, the law professor had a history with the ACL, notably co-founding Christian legal think tank Freedom for Faith, alongside Jim Wallace. Subsequently, in 2011 Parkinson published a report, commissioned, and partially funded by the ACL, as well as other religious groups, entitled ‘For Kids’ Sake’. In the report Parkinson claimed that children who did not live with their biological parents experienced diminished welfare. Since then, the paper has been frequently used in arguments against same-sex marriage, particularly by the ACL

(Lee 2018), as evidence of the “increasing fragility of Australia’s family” (ACL 2011) and it has undoubtedly been used to contribute to a broader sense of moral panic.

The ACL has also attempted to frame same-sex marriage as a threat to children by claiming that same-sex marriage, safe schools and the sexualisation of society are all inherently linked. Lyle Shelton, in particular, has actively promoted this perspective. For example, in responding to journalist and same-sex marriage advocate, Benjamin Law’s Quarterly Essay in 2017, he claimed that that “honest “Yes” campaigners, like Law, know that same-sex marriage and Safe Schools are a package deal” (Shelton 2017). Shelton characterised same-sex marriage as the first step on an inevitable slippery slope towards the ‘queer’ sexualisation of society, which had already been confirmed by the experiences of countries such as the US, the UK and Canada. His assertion was that subsequent government policies in these countries to cater more towards trans-gender constituents is proof “that same-sex marriage and safe schools are joined at the hip”, though in Australia the LGBTIQ+ ‘movement’ had played its cards too early by introducing safe schools before same-sex marriage was legalised. In 2012, the ACL stated that,

[A]lthough no one would object to the condemnation of homophobia, promoting homosexuality in this fashion is something many parents would not be comfortable with. Redefining marriage will increase these incidents, as schools would be required to teach the equivalency of same-sex and opposite-sex relationships (ACL 2012).

The Coalition for Marriage was eventually able to access public funding for advertisements during the same-sex marriage plebiscite campaign. Over this period, it ran advertisements which featured ‘concerned mothers’ noting their sons had been told it was acceptable to wear a dress at school, that one had been forced to experience same-sex roleplay whilst another suggested such programs had become ‘widespread and compulsory overseas’ (Karp 2017). Regarding these advertisements, the Coalition stated they would “play an important role in helping Australians understand that saying ‘yes’

to gay marriage would mean saying ‘yes’ to radical gay sex education in schools” (Coalition for Marriage 2017).

The decline of religious freedoms was the final frame which the ACL attempted to push, and which was suggested as one of the primary consequences of same-sex marriage. Since 2013, the ACL has argued that the legalisation of same-sex marriage would facilitate the erosion of religious freedoms, including the rights of churches to refuse to marry same-sex couples and religious institutions to ‘protect their ethos’ (ACL 2013). The ACL has consistently pushed this framing, asserting in 2017 that a ‘Yes’ vote would inevitably harm religious freedoms (Karp 2017), whilst the Coalition for Marriage website argues that this harm would certainly extend further to consequences for religious schools, faith-based charities and religious institutions (The Coalition for Marriage 2017).

As discussed in more detail below the impacts of this framing substantially filtered their way into the public discourse over the course of the marriage equality debate, and into the reported articles, such as in Cory Bernardi’s warning of ‘weaponised’ anti-discrimination laws (The Australian 2017), and a severe curbing of religious rights and freedom of speech (The Daily Telegraph 2017). It was also reflected in the Tasmanian government’s move to amend anti-discrimination laws to allow for religious exemptions, prior to the plebiscite (ABC 2016). Such a framing additionally clearly invokes paleoconservative notions of the threat modernity or post-modernity and its institutions pose to the sanctity of Judeo-Christian culture and the inherent moral panic which pervades such perceptions.

Perhaps the most direct impact of the ACL’s campaign was the inquiry into religious freedoms commissioned by Malcolm Turnbull following the result of the same-sex marriage plebiscite, which will be explored further in the next chapter. The ACL’s assertion that same-sex marriage posed a threat to religious freedoms was a position it had held since 2012 and despite the perception of the Australian public that same-sex marriage should be legalised it was still considered important enough for the Australian government to pursue. Broadly the ACL was an important factor in shaping the trajectory of the public and political debate over same-sex marriage. The fact that several of its key

framings were adopted by politicians further serves to strengthen notions of the ACL's influence on this debate.

4.4 Agenda Setting: Media

This section will examine how the ACL and its framings were depicted in media coverage of same-sex marriage since 2009. It will firstly consider quantitative article count as a comparative measure of issue-proximity, looking to explore how consistently the ACL was associated with the issue of same-sex marriage during the campaign. This section will then look to examine the extent to which the ACL's major framings of the issue were picked up by the media, focusing on freedom of speech, freedom generally, and its suggested links to the safe-schools program. Results for this section have been collated using the search program Factiva. The key terms and organisations discussed below, were searched in conjuncture with a relevant contextualising term, which allowed Factiva to provide a total article count.

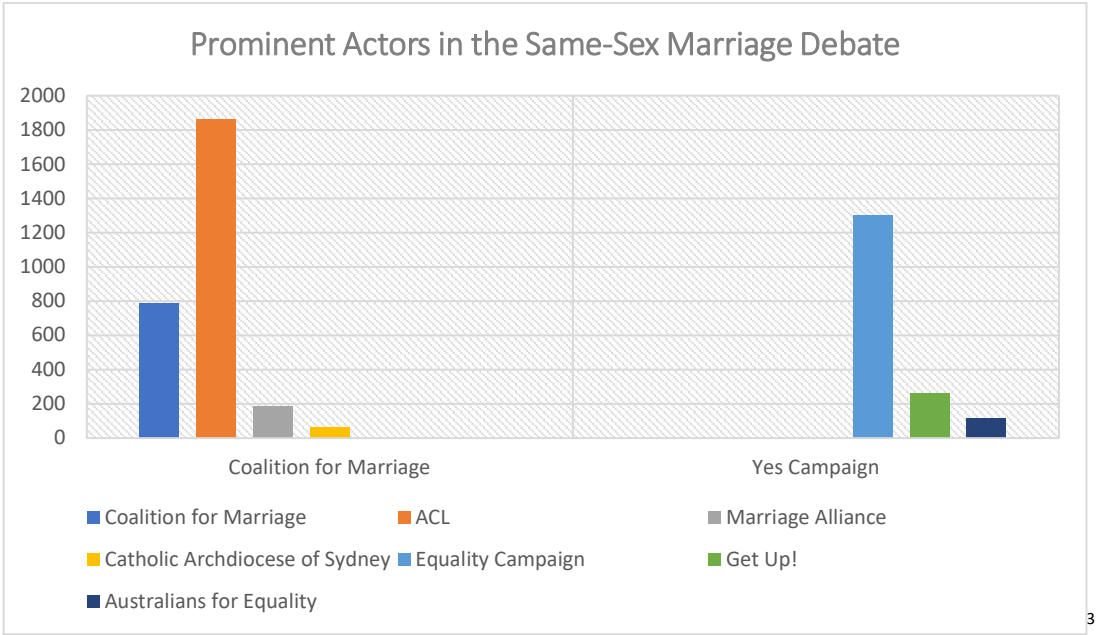
As depicted in Figure 6 below, between the initial introduction of the Marriage Equality Plebiscite Bill on August 19, 2015 (Parliament of Australia 2020) and the final day of the Marriage Equality plebiscite on 7 November 2017 approximately 1,864 news articles were published which included both specific reference to the 'Australian Christian Lobby' and the 'Same-Sex Marriage' or 'Marriage Equality' debates. This does not initially seem like a large number of articles overall as it only constitutes around seven per cent of the 25,741 articles published that included the terms of 'Same-Sex Marriage' or 'Marriage Equality'. However, it is significantly higher than the number of mentions the other major advocacy groups received over this period.

The 'No Campaign' was led by the Coalition for Marriage. This was formed by a variety of groups opposed to same-sex marriage, managed by the ACL and including Marriage Alliance,² the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney and the Anglican Archdiocese of Sydney (Karp 2017). The Coalition for Marriage was mentioned in approximately 788 news articles, Marriage Alliance was mentioned in approximately 185, the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney in approximately 60, and the Anglican Archdiocese was not mentioned specifically at all. The 'Yes' Campaign was led by the Equality Campaign, which was a coalition formed by a variety of organisations supporting same-sex marriage including Get Up! Australia, Australian Marriage Equality and Australians for Equality (Kemp 2017). Get Up! was only found to have been mentioned in approximately 261 articles alongside the term same-sex marriage, whilst Australians for Equality appeared in only 119. Equality Campaign by far received the most coverage with mentions in 1,303 articles. This analysis obviously makes no statement about the effectiveness of any particular organisation in terms of campaigning; however, it does suggest the ACL received more media attention than any other organisation in the debate.

This analysis further suggests that the 'No' campaign received a substantial amount of coverage over the course of the debate. This conclusion is also supported by media analysis conducted by a number of online news outlets shortly after the campaign. For instance, *BuzzFeed News* reported that data from media analysis company *Streem*, indicated that between September 10 and 17, the 'No' Campaign was mentioned 4,334 times, or four times as much as the 'Yes' Campaign, across print, online, TV and radio over the specific period (Taylor 2017). Although this covers a shorter time period than the data in Figure 6 below, it reinforces the conclusion that the 'No campaign' received a lot of coverage, despite claims by Lyle Shelton and the ACL that there was a concerted effort to censor and silence opponents of same-sex marriage (Knaus 2017).

² Marriage Alliance, now 'Binary Australia', is a conservative advocacy organisation, founded in 2015 by former Liberal party members, which campaigned against same-sex marriage and Safe Schools (Lewis 2018).

Figure 6: Prominent Actors in the Same-Sex Marriage Debate



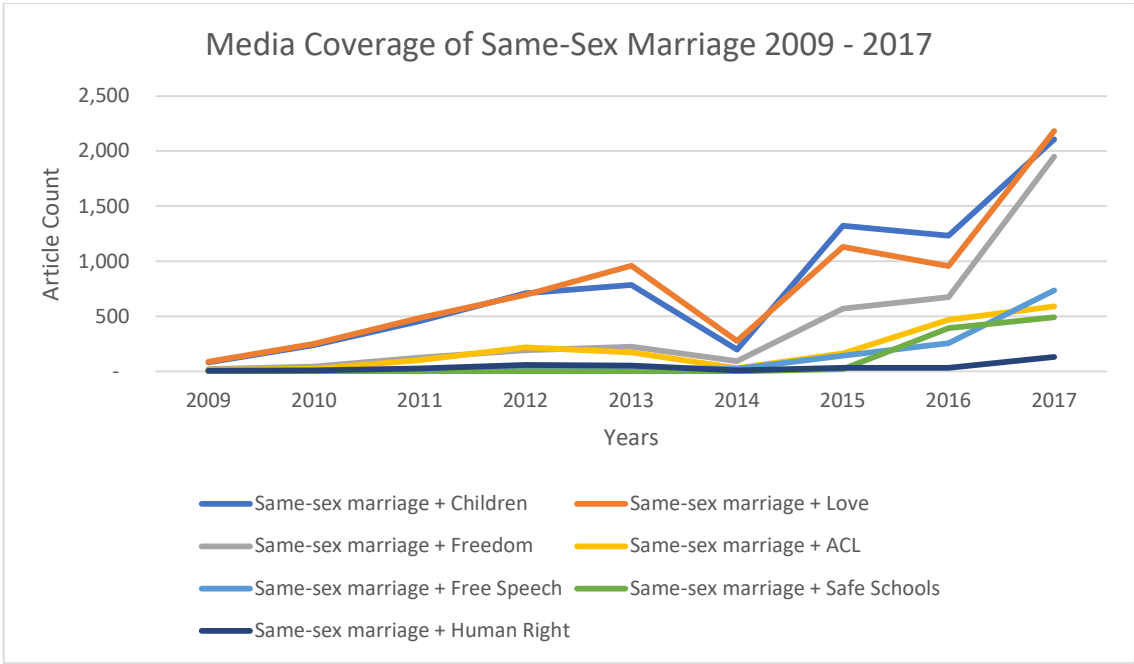
Source: Author using data from Factiva. N=25,741

The ACL and the Coalition for Marriage frequently attempted to frame the issue of same-sex marriage around the welfare of children, religious freedoms, freedom of speech and attempted to link it to the Safe Schools program. Using the content analysis technique noted above, the terms ‘Safe Schools’, ‘Children’, ‘Freedom’ and ‘Free Speech’ were firstly selected and searched as they were common indicators of ‘No’ framings. Comparatively the ‘Yes’ campaign sought to depict same-sex marriage as a human right which was ultimately concerned with the love between two individuals. ‘Love’, and ‘Human Right’ were subsequently selected as primary indicators of this campaign’s key framings. These were all searched in conjunction with the terms ‘Same-sex marriage’ and ‘Marriage Equality’. The period used for this analysis was the start of the period of interest for this thesis, January 1st, 2009,

³ The number of articles associated with Get Up! has been inflated by inclusion of articles which merely mention the phrase ‘get up’ without referring to the organisation itself. This means that the gap between the number of articles on the ACL/Coalition for Marriage and Get Up! may be even larger than suggested here.

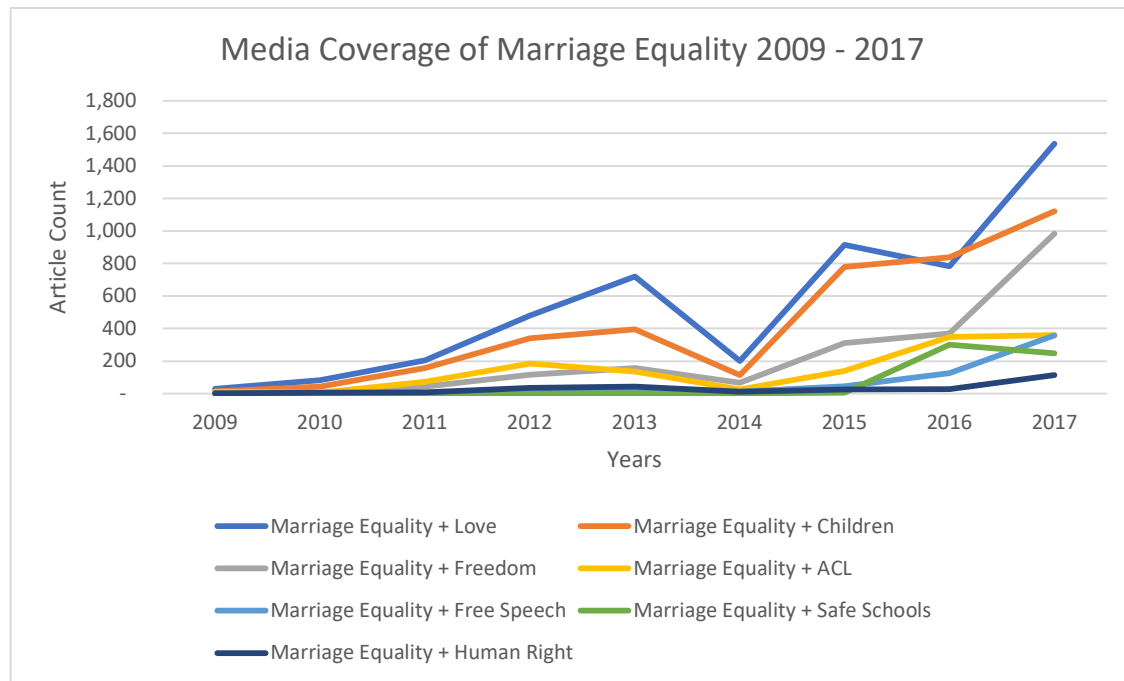
to November 7th, 2017, the final day the same-sex marriage plebiscite. Over this period, in the region of Australia there were approximately 45,553 articles which included the terms ‘same-sex marriage’ or ‘marriage equality’. The two phrases were then analysed separately and spaced over the period in question. The results, as shown in the Figures 7 and 8 below, demonstrate that throughout this period, the most referred to terms were consistently ‘Love’ and ‘Children’. ‘Love’ in conjuncture with same-sex marriage returned 7,028 articles and 4,951 when searched in conjuncture with ‘Marriage equality’ whilst the term ‘Children’ was mentioned in 7,136 articles for same-sex marriage and 3,803 articles relating to ‘marriage equality’. The term ‘Freedom’ also appeared third most in both categories whilst ‘human right’ and ‘safe schools’ both consistently had the lowest counts.

Figure 7: Media Coverage of Same-Sex Marriage 2009 - 2017



Source: Author using data from Factiva. N=37,011

Figure 8: Media Coverage of Marriage Equality 2009 - 2017



Source: Author using data from Factiva. N=20,161

The results of this data suggest that whilst the ACL failed to significantly associate same-sex marriage with safe schools and religious freedom, it contributed to children being a prominent part of the debate. Children were a significantly greater aspect of the debate than even the idea of human rights, and for a period in 2016, love. The period spread of the data indicates that all aspects of debate experienced an increase in 2016 and 2017 when campaigning on the issue was most prominent. The ACL notably saw increasing mentions as official campaigns were launched and it became a frequently mentioned actor in the debate, ultimately more so than even the concept of human rights over the majority of the period. This shows the ACL succeeded to some extent in ensuring that its arguments and indeed discussion of the organisation itself were notable aspects of the agenda in media coverage of same-sex marriage in Australia.

4.5 Agenda Setting: Hansard

To demonstrate further how the ACL contributed to the debate over Same-Sex marriage, this section will now consider discourse within the Australian parliament. For this analysis, a sample of parliamentary speeches discussing same-sex marriage legislation were selected, including all Second Reading speeches of Marriage Equality amendment bills between 2010 and 2016. This sample was selected as it was found to provide a good indication of the arguments employed within federal parliament and was the most comprehensive list of speeches expressing a direct position on same-sex marriage available. This sample was then coded, firstly based on whether speeches opposed or supported reform, and then based on the key framings employed. A sample was also selected to ensure consistency across formats and ease of comparability. No speeches were selected from 2017 as the agenda had already been significantly set at that point and the federal government had furthermore made clear its intentions to hold a national plebiscite in 2016 (Parliament of Australia 2017).

This analysis identified 62 speeches within the sample, with 40 of these speeches arguing for the amendment of the Marriage Act to introduce same-sex marriage and 22 arguing against it. One of the first things evident in the data set was the division along party lines. Only one of the speeches arguing for the amendment of the law one was made by a Liberal Party senator. Another two were made by a Liberal Democratic senator and by a member of the Nick Xenophon Team, whilst the remaining 59 came from Labor and Greens members. The divide was slightly less stark on the 'against' side, with three speeches made by Labor members although all others were from Coalition and Family First members.

This analysis identified six primary framings that were used by opponents of same-sex marriage to argue against reform. These were found through reading all 22 speeches arguing against same-sex marriage and distinguishing the primary arguments used. The first was the claim that same-sex

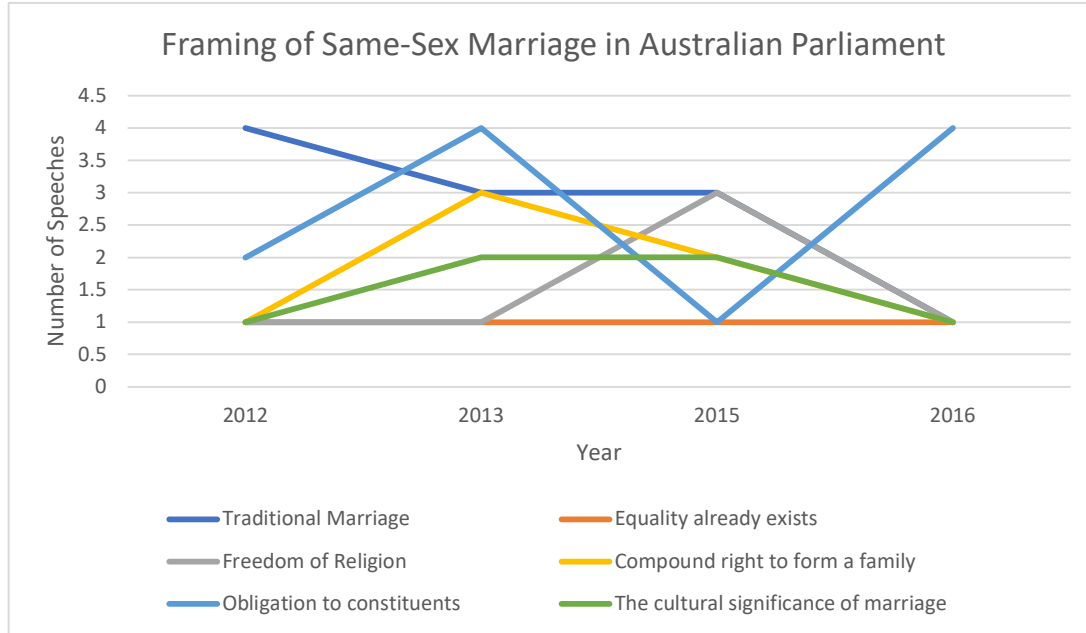
marriage undermined the concept of 'traditional marriage' and the MP's commitment to upholding it and the societal values it represented. Such a frame was also frequently presented in a matter-of-fact way as an immutable value that someone either held or did not. As Labor Party member Shayne Neumann asserted in 2012 "I believe that a marriage between a man and women is a fundamental institution of our society" (Australia, House of Representatives 2012, p. 6842) following a clear statement that he supported same-sex relationships broadly, but not an alteration which might undermine the framers of the constitution. The second was that substantive equality already existed for the LGBTIQ+ community and further equality was either not possible or necessary or was purely a rhetorical tool of a 'political' movement. Liberal member Stuart Robert suggested this political movement was in part that associated with the Greens Party (Australia, House of Representatives 2012, p. 6838), whilst Labor member John Murphy suggested it was a lasting effect of second-wave feminism originating in the 1970s (Australia, House of Representatives 2012, p. 6839).

Third, opponents of reform argued that same-sex marriage inherently conflicted with freedoms of religion and political expression. Stuart Robert for instance also in 2012 cited legislation in Denmark as proof of the fact that Churches might inevitably be forced to recognise and conduct weddings for same-sex couples in opposition to their religious beliefs (Australia, House of Representatives 2012, p. 6838). The fourth argument can put in terms used by the ACL, that marriage is about the 'compound right to form a family' with the institution of marriage being directly connected to the biological necessity of human reproduction. John Murphy again, outlined his conception of this in 2012 stating that "the purpose of marriage as a legal institution relates specifically to the distinctive biological possibilities of this union... Without children, there is no need for marriage. Marriage serves the public interest by connecting mothers and fathers and their children and holding biological parents accountable for raising their children. That is the crux of this matter" (Australia, House of Representatives 2012, p. 6839). The fifth argument was perhaps the most straightforward and was the simple assertion that the member's view was representative of their constituency, which in some instances, was defined as the Australian public. The final frame was that opposing amendments to the

Marriage Act was a matter of preserving the cultural significance of marriage. Family First senator Bob Day, outlines this in 2016 stating “Normally the state would not regulate relationships between adults. It is only because marriage has a position as a foundational building block of society that marriage is an exception to that rule. Out of the 1,000-plus societies recorded in Murdock's *Ethnographic Atlas* marriage between one man and one woman is common in all” (Australia, House of Representatives 2016, p. 2300).

According to the total number of speeches in which a frame was included, the most prevalent were those of ‘traditional marriage’ and ‘obligation to constituents’, both included in 11 of the 22 speeches. The notion that marriage is about the ‘compound right to form a family’ closely followed in 7, whilst the argument that equality already exists was implemented least, appearing in only 4 speeches. ‘Freedom of religion’ and the ‘cultural significance of marriage’ were both evident in 6. Figure 9 below outlines the consistency of these framings and their frequency between 2010 and 2016. It is notable that the ‘compound right to form a family’ was mentioned so frequently given it pertains to a conservative conception of marriage and is an argument frequently used by the ACL. This argument closely relates to notions of human rights for children, which the ACL argued would be damaged should children not be provided with a ‘biological identity’. The issue of religious freedom was similarly prevalent and reflects another key way in which the ACL attempted to frame the issue. Figure 9 below also demonstrates that initially, preserving traditional marriage was perceived as an acceptable justification for opposing same-sex marriage, though by 2016 it was much more politically viable for opponents to claim to merely represent the will of the Australian people.

Figure 9: Framing of Same-Sex Marriage in Australian Parliament



Source: Author using data from Factiva. N=22

This ultimately provides an indication of how MPs opposed to same-sex marriage attempted to frame the issue and shows similarities to the arguments used by the ACL. Broadly, the reasoning employed in opposition appealed to wide principles outside of any single person's control, including tradition, biology, culture and the Australia public, allowing members of parliament to attempt to eschew personal responsibility for their decision to oppose reform, though ultimately reflecting personal beliefs. Same-sex marriage was perceived to have corrosive consequences, though by the end of the debate, the broad consensus among the opposition in parliament was that it was a matter for the public to decide, despite of course the fact that it mostly already had. Finally, a fear that same-sex marriage would threaten religious freedoms was only present in 6 out of 62 Second Reading speeches made. The following section and chapter of this thesis will discuss in more detail the debate over religious freedoms in Australia, though what is apparent at this point is that concerns for religious freedoms were seemingly not significant enough to warrant an inquiry and subsequent legislation.

This in turn reveals that a significant shift must have occurred in the Australian Federal Parliament over the course of the same-sex marriage debate in 2016 and 2017.

4.6 Policy Impact and Organisational Success

This section will finally consider the ACL's policy impact and organisational success on the issue of same-sex marriage. It will argue that although the ACL did not succeed in its efforts to maintain the traditional definition of marriage the polling above indicates there had been majority support for same-sex marriage in Australia since 2007, so the ACL's capacity to delay reform might be considered a success.

Firstly, despite the ACL's opposition to same-sex marriage, a plebiscite was its preferred solution in resolving the debate. The ACL has been a strong proponent of a voluntary public vote, despite consistent opposition from the same-sex community, stating that "It is time to stop undermining the people's vote on marriage and accept that this is the fairest way to resolve what has been a long-running, activist-driven public policy debate" (ACL 2016). Following the outcome of the marriage-equality plebiscite Lyle Shelton claimed the Coalition for Marriage had contributed to a shift of at least a million votes to 'No' (Gartrell 2017). There is no way to confirm this shift however, as Shelton did not identify any clear demographics or provide any data to support his claim. Nonetheless, some initial reporting on the tactics of 'No' advocates suggested they were having an impact. *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported the results of exclusive polling commissioned by the Equality Campaign, conducted between August and September of 2017, which suggested there had been a fall of six per cent in support for the 'Yes' campaign and a four per cent increase in support for the 'No' campaign. It was reported that support for the 'Yes' had dropped from approximately 64 per cent to 58, whilst support for 'No' rose from approximately 29 to 31 per cent over a two-week period at the end of August (Massola & Koziol 2017).

It is evident however, that increases in polling responses towards 'No' were not linked to a broad Christian demographic. The greatest indicator of a 'No' vote was an electorate with a relatively high proportion of non-English speaking, non-Christian and newly arrived immigrants. This is not to say that there were no Christians who voted 'No' but merely that Christianity was a much less prominent indicator of a 'No' vote (McAllister & Snagovsky 2018). The implications of this are that Christian Australians who might have been influenced by the ACL's campaigning, were not the most prominent voting group for 'No'. Gravelle & Carson (2019) note that the greater presence of Catholic voters in an electorate resulted in a decrease of 'Yes' votes by more than 11 per cent, however even in the Catholic constituency the 'Yes' vote still won out, suggesting that the ACL ultimately had minimal impact on the eventual outcome of Australia's marriage equality debate. The result of the plebiscite merely seemed to confirm existing perceptions that support had remained steady in the mid 60 per cent range throughout the 2010s.

Furthermore, despite its population being notably more secular than the likes of the US and considered to be a reasonably progressive state, Australia was one of the last developed democracies to pass same-sex marriage legislation. The US (2015), Ireland (2015), England (2013) and New Zealand (2013) all preceded Australia in legalisation (Pew Research 2019). As noted, there was no lack of public support for same-sex marriage in the early 2010s. This suggests that the issue was a lack of policy responsiveness from MPs to public opinion. One study sought to examine policy responsiveness as an explanation for the outcome of the 2012 same-sex marriage vote. The results indicated that MPs who might generally be attuned to the will of constituents, were often not as responsive on the issue of same-sex marriage. The study found that there was a consistency between the party and MP's positions on the issue, and the extent of responsiveness to the public, which was often strongly influenced by the party position (Carson et.al 2018). The legalisation of same-sex marriage would have to wait another five years in a trend which demonstrated increasingly significant deviations from public opinion. It is telling that despite significant campaigning for a number of years, advocates for delaying the legalisation of same-sex marriage, including the ACL, which was one of the largest and

loudest organisations, were able to frame same-sex marriage as detrimental to society more broadly. Additionally, within two years of the debate, those opposed were able to lobby for the 2019 Religious Discrimination Bill, a bill which would allow religious institutions the right to discriminate against same-sex couples. This is also noteworthy because of the consistent public support for same-sex marriage over the prior decade. As the ACL was arguably the most significant entity opposing same-sex marriage, it seems the moral panic it contributed to, extended to party room discussions. Politicians displayed a greater level of responsiveness to their party positions than their constituents and relied on a public conflict in order to justify their reticence to legislate on the issue. Hence, though there were multiple factors which shaped the debate, the ability of the ACL to maintain a public conflict and cultivate a sense of moral panic can be seen as influential in delaying the eventual legislation of same-sex marriage.

The plebiscite being conducted in the first place also represents a victory for the ACL, as it overcame significant political and economic opposition. Whilst lobbying for the plebiscite may have at times been conducted in private, such consultations concerned the objective of broadly socialising the debate. Socialisation denotes a concerted effort to change the venue of political conflict from the private to the public, in this case, lobbying MPs to hold a plebiscite on the issue rather than just letting Parliament decide (Schattschneider 1983), a tactic which was clearly implemented by the ACL. Concerns that same-sex couples might face public abuse if a public campaign eventuated also meant the vote was required to overcome opposition from Labor and the Greens among others. This was well understood by the ACL as in 2016 it went so far as to request a temporary suspension of anti-discrimination laws during the campaign period, in the event that a plebiscite was called (Parliament of Australia 2016). A plebiscite was perceived to be merely an expensive exercise in confirming what opinion polls had consistently reported since 2007 -- that the majority of Australian were already supportive of same-sex marriage being passed. It was initially estimated by PricewaterhouseCoopers to cost \$525 million, not including the funds necessary for both campaigns, whilst a Senate committee inquiry advised that a plebiscite would inevitably cause significant psychological harm to people in the

LGBTIQ+ community (Short & Dane 2016). Turnbull's push for a plebiscite, however, was widely depicted, not as an attempt to respond to the will of constituents, but rather to satisfy the complex political requirements of an internal government dispute. Turnbull himself noted later that he was required to balance the will of the broader public with that of more conservative politicians within his Coalition, whose support he desperately needed (Manne 2020). Subsequently a plebiscite was perceived as the best way to satisfy both these parties, though evidently at a cost to the Australian public and the LGBTIQ+ community.

Although it remains unclear whether the ACL was able to create a moral panic within the public, it seems it successfully contributed to a moral panic among politicians and the mechanics of a 'media feedback loop' which perpetuated politicians' concerns about the implications of introducing same-sex marriage. In accordance with the media feedback loop outlined in chapter 2, media coverage of an issue often facilitates a closed loop between politicians and those defining the issues. The media's emphasis on particular aspects of an issue are presented as acceptable to readers and indicative of a broad opinion, which proceeds politicians acting on concerns presented by the media rather than on the actual concerns of the public. The second section of this chapter highlighted that a significant amount of media coverage of same-sex marriage discussed the issue using the kind of frames put forward by the ACL. The subsequent section further demonstrated that politicians also picked up many of these frames and used them to justify their reticence to legalise same-sex marriage. It seems apparent that concerns raised by the media were often assumed by politicians to be the concerns of the public, despite clearly documented majority support for same-sex marriage over the previous decade. This seems to demonstrate the media-feedback loop in action on this issue.

Finally, the ACL was successful in achieving its organisational goals and the paramount goal of its own survival. According to niche theory (Lowery & Gray 1996), the first resource which organisations must maintain access to is their membership base. The exact number of active members supporting the ACL is, as noted, somewhat difficult to ascertain given how the organisation measures and reports its

membership. However, based on self-reported figures, the number of ACL members has increased more than rapidly since its involvement in the same-sex marriage campaign. Whilst in 2012 the organisation had an estimated membership base of 15,000 (Maddox 2014), this had more than tripled by 2016 with approximately 50,000 (Ireland 2016), whilst presently the organisation cites a membership base of over 175,000 (ACL 2021). Similarly, regarding another crucial resource, the financial position of the ACL has also improved. The year prior to the same-sex marriage plebiscite the organisation reported a total gross income of \$3.2 million, though for 2017 it reported almost \$4.1 million, most of which was derived from donations and bequests (ACNC 2021). This represented a modest increase necessary to support the increased lobbying efforts of the organisation which took place throughout that year, although it was dwarfed by its total gross income for the following year which more than doubled to \$8.9 million in 2018 (ACNC 2021). Again, this figure was primarily derived from donations, and the ACL also matched this figure in expenditure which totalled \$8.8 million in 2018 (ACNC 2021). Such statistics provide a strong case for the assertion that the lobbying activities conducted during the same-sex marriage debate provided a strong financial reward and added to a key resource dimension. It is important to note however, that most of the organisation's donors are anonymous, and subsequently it is difficult to analyse trends in, and the reason for donations to the organisation. Same-sex marriage perhaps increased the publicity of the organisation, though many donations specifically during the same-sex marriage debate went directly to the Coalition for Marriage.

Whether attributable explicitly to the issue of same-sex marriage or otherwise, it is clear that over the past decade, including in the case study discussed in chapter 3, the ACL has successfully begun galvanising support around traditional Judeo-Christian values, based on the idea that these values are under threat. The entire campaign strategy of the organisation was to contend that the amending of the marriage act represented a significantly broader change to Australian society and was explicitly connected to dedicated movements, such as the Safe Schools Coalition, which sought the erosion of social institutions such as the family and traditional gender roles. The case study of the same-sex

marriage demonstrates how the ACL are not entirely focussed on policy success, but on fomenting an alternative consciousness through which they might thrive as an organisation. For the ACL, the same-sex marriage campaign demonstrates how a focus on the pushing certain framings rather than just their outcomes can contribute broader ideological shifts. As Sam Francis outlines regarding paleoconservatism, change occurs through the “patient elaboration of an alternative culture within but against the regime – within the belly of the beast but indigestible by it” (Drolet & Williams 2020, p. 39). Paleoconservatism does not seek sweeping legislative successes through public debate, but the steady consolidation of cultural dominance and the consistent push of public discourse towards concerns over maintaining a defined cultural identity. This is true of the ACL also, which sought for years to steadily create ambiguity and fear around the prospect of deviance from supposedly traditional Judeo-Christian laws, which served the purpose of both setting the scene for future legislative debate over the treatment of LGBTIQ+ people and consolidating the necessity for the organisation’s existence in the public arena. As the 2010s progressed, a vote of some form on same-sex marriage was increasingly inevitable, and though stemming the tides of social progress was too difficult a task for the ACL, its work over this period tells a greater story of the patient elaboration of an alternative culture, and its success in this should perhaps be the greatest point of consideration.

4.7 Conclusion

The influence of the ACL on same-sex marriage policy and its impact on Australia’s political discourse have been notable. The ACL’s campaign against same-sex marriage was ultimately unsuccessful, though its ability to shape how the debate played out and interact with the process of the media feedback loop, suggest the organisation can be impactful in the right circumstances. The organisation was additionally successful in achieving the organisational aims of maintaining a strong membership base and more importantly a sustained reason to lobby and continue to lobby in the future. The ACL

was able to contribute to a political climate that saw Australia fall far behind most developed democracies in the acceptance of the LGBTQI+ community as equal citizens, being the 21st country to see same-sex marriage legalised. The events of 2017 proved that despite public acceptance of progressive change, there remains an influential, socially conservative, Christian political force in Australia. It further suggests that Australia's politicians, if not the constituents themselves, are susceptible to periods of moral panic concerning the sanctity of Judeo-Christian values and indeed the cultural lines which define it. The ACL, both as a conservative Christian organisation and a paleoconservative organisation, can be seen to be a strong lobbying force in Australian politics when examined in the context of broad impact and organisational objectives.

Chapter 5: Religious Discrimination

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will assess the impact and success of the ACL on the issue of religious freedom and discrimination in Australia. Religious freedom is an issue which the ACL has sought to maintain on the public agenda since at least 2009, particularly during the 2017 same-sex marriage debate and its aftermath. This culminated in the release of a draft Religious Discrimination Bill in 2019. This bill is an attempt to enshrine the rights of the religious, and among other issues, is particularly concerned with protecting the right of individuals and institutions to engage in actions that would otherwise be considered a violation of anti-discrimination laws on the grounds that these actions are based on honestly held religious beliefs. It is the aim of this chapter to analyse the ACL's advocacy activities in pushing for the increased protection of religious freedom both prior and subsequent to the introduction of the 2019 bill, and the impact of these activities. As with the previous chapters, it will engage in content analysis to examine the shifting salience of this issue over time, and the extent to which the ACL's attempts to frame the issue have been replicated in media coverage. It does not however, consider the impact of the ACL's agenda setting on discussion in parliament as there is not sufficient content yet available for this to occur. Following this, the chapter will analyse the ACL's impact on policy outcomes and consider how it has used this issue to strengthen its organisational position.

5.2 The ACL and Religious Discrimination

The ACL first brought up the issue of religious freedom as part of its advocacy against a federal bill of rights. Australia has a significant history of debate over this issue as it is the only democratic nation in the world without a federal bill or charter of rights (Williams & Reynolds 2017). Some states have

nonetheless legislated their own rights protections -- the ACT and Victoria introduced charters in 2004 and 2006 respectively and Queensland passed a bill of rights in 2019 (UNSW Sydney 2019), while NSW still does not have a bill of rights (Human Rights for NSW 2020). Federally a bill or charter of rights has been a recurring issue of debate, and in 2009 the Rudd government established a National Human Rights Consultation (NHRC) to consider introducing such legislation. Although the Consultation argued in favour of a bill or charter in their report, the government did not proceed with this reform, instead adopting a more limited series of changes (Crosthwaite 2013). One of the central reasons they decided not to proceed was because of opposition from religious organisations, including the ACL, who argued that a bill or charter would pose a threat to religious freedom by undermining legal provisions that exempt religious organisations from discrimination laws (Crosthwaite 2013). Such exemptions allow individuals to conscientiously object to providing certain services in their occupation on the grounds of their religious beliefs. They also allow religious organisations to hire staff based on their religious affiliation (Parkinson 2010).

Crosthwaite (2013) argues that the ACL had a significant impact on the Rudd government's decision not to introduce a Human Rights act following the NHRC, citing the ACL's organised petition to reject a charter of rights without a national referendum. The petition organised by the ACL and presented to parliament Senator George Brandis, achieved over twenty-thousand signatures. In their submission to the NHRC, the ACL argued that a Human Rights Act would undermine religious freedoms, referencing the protection of Christian doctors as an example. The ACL asserted that under a rights act, doctors would be forced to provide abortion services to patients, even if they held a religiously based, conscientious objection to abortion (Ball 2013). Crosthwaite (2013) notes that this position was not necessarily reflective of the consensus view among the Christian community, nor the general public. The vast majority of individuals and organisations who made submissions to the NHRC advocated for a rights bill existing in some form or another. Over 86 per cent of submissions provided to the NHRC were in favour of a bill of rights (Crosthwaite 2013), whilst 70 per cent of the submissions regarding the status of human rights in Australia at the time, agreed there were not effective

protections in place (Erdos 2012). Regarding the religious community however, only two religious organisations gave unqualified support, and many submissions expressed concern that religious freedoms were under threat in Australia (Erdos 2012). This suggests that a significant number of Christian organisations were concerned that improvements in overall levels of rights protection would paradoxically lead to fewer rights for Christians and exacerbate their self-perceived marginalisation (Whitaker 2018). Maddox (2017) furthers this assertion, arguing that although the ACL was a primary facilitator of opposition to the human rights consultation, their actions reflected a longer-term trend of conservative Christian opposition to entrenched rights, dating back to the 1980s.

Indeed, the period between the 1980s and 2010 represents a significant shift in the way in which the problem of religious freedoms was understood in Australia. Poulos (2019) provides an assessment of this shift, analysing all of Australia's public and political enquiries into religious freedoms between 1984 and 2019. Within the research, Poulos finds that broadly between 1984 and 2011, the problem of religious freedoms was primarily constructed around concerns over religious diversity and the problems facing the increasing number of religious minorities which populated Australia's faith landscape. Over this period, enquiries into religious freedoms mostly sought to assess how best to protect the rights of these religious minorities who had mostly immigrated to Australia, as well as the religious freedoms of indigenous Australians, as both groups experienced significant discrimination and marginalisation (Poulos 2019, p. 7). Enquiries also included, for instance, investigations into protections for Australia's Muslim population in the post 9/11 era.

By 2011 however, the problematisation of the issue had substantially shifted, as exemplified by the *Freedom of Religion and Belief in 21st Century Australia* report of that year, which the ACL played a key role in facilitating. One of the main concerns of this report was to argue that the freedoms of the 'Christian Majority' were being threatened by minority groups, as if too many concessions were given to such groups, Australia would begin to lose its cultural identity (Poulos 2019, p. 8). Whilst the ACL played a notable role in facilitating the consultations associated with this report, the report largely

reflected the existing views of the Christian organisations involved in these consultations. This suggests that the ACL's focus on religious freedom was a reflection of a broader ideological shift among Christian organisations. Nelson, Possamai-Inesedy and Dunn (2012) subsequently provide an in-depth analysis of submissions to this enquiry and demonstrate further the problematisation of the issue of religious freedom. Whilst the ACL's position primarily reflected a broader Christian position, it again impacted proceedings through securing a Christian only focus group consultation (Nelson, Possamai-Inesedy & Dunn 2012, p. 304). The authors note that Christian organisations were overrepresented in the submission data, accounting for over 84 per cent of submissions from religious organisation and over 61 per cent of all general organisation submissions (Nelson, Possamai-Inesedy & Dunn 2012, p. 304). Such organisations subsequently expressed a significant concern over their right to lawfully discriminate against minorities and express sentiments of superiority through religious exemption legislation, demonstrated in 92 per cent of the 1,029 submissions which discussed the issue (Nelson, Possamai-Inesedy & Dunn 2012, p. 309). The authors found through qualitative analysis that a popular sentiment which ran through the flood of submissions from Christian organisations, was of cultural superiority and antipathy to religious diversity, particularly regarding Muslims (Nelson, Possamai-Inesedy & Dunn 2012, p. 313). Finally, among submissions from conservative Christians, there was a frequent assertion that Christianity was at the 'core' of Australian culture, preceeding other religions which were perceived to have primarily immigrated in recent years and which would inevitably undermine Australia's core culture if they were granted greater legal protections (Nelson, Possamai-Inesedy & Dunn 2012, p. 313).

Regarding the ACL's specific role in the report, then ACL Director, Jim Wallace was specifically thanked in the introduction for his assistance in organising consultations. Comments made by representatives of religious organisations at these consultations were cited on numerous occasions in the report. One perspective cited from the NSW ACL consultation asserted the benefits of positive religious discrimination in employment practices, stating "there needs to be a freedom to express our conscience in employment practices and a commitment for people to access the goods and services

on the basis of their conscience also” (p. 34). Another expressed concern that the promotion of diversity would lead to conflict between Christian law and ‘Sharia’ and ‘tribal Hindu’ laws, demonstrating a bias towards specifically Christian religious protections:

I’m concerned with the dumbing down of law to accommodate diversity – soon it’ll be a great big melting pot of world views to a coffee-coloured mix that does nothing to inspire, and then you have victims everywhere (2011, p. 24).

The ACL was also cited a number of times in the report, providing their perspective on issues of religious freedom. Regarding the position that only secular voices should take part in public debate it argued “the outward expression of religion should be a conspicuous part of Australian society” (Australian Human Rights Commission 2011, p. 24). The ACL played a noteworthy role in shaping the report and facilitating the involvement of other religious organisations.

This framing of rights around the issue of religious freedom by some groups in the Christian community and by the ACL has been largely consistent throughout the 2010s and was evident in a number of further instances. In 2010, a key issue for conservative Christians was the prospective ‘inherent requirements’ legislation. Introduced initially by Victorian Labor, the legislation would have ensured that religious organisations could not discriminate against potential employees or clients on the basis of religion or sexuality, though it was scrapped when Labor lost office to the Coalition who ended plans to introduce the legislation. In 2011 the ACL also continued to defend the right of religious schools to expel openly gay children as asserted by managing director at the time, Jim Wallace (Maddox 2014). They also condemned amendments to Tasmanian anti-discrimination laws, which the ACL argued would “threaten the ability of religious schools to maintain their ethos”. In a 2013 blog post, the ACL criticised the 2013 Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Intersex Status’ Bill which removed religious exemptions for aged care facilities wishing to preference married couples over others. This has all significantly contributed to an agenda of supposed concern for the safety of religious expression. It also demonstrates how the ACL in Australian politics has not only sought to

adopt the language of rights in accordance with contemporary understandings of the Christian Right (Lewis 2019), but sought to alter how rights are framed and understood in Australian discourse. This chapter argues that the agenda setting of the ACL has significantly contributed to the currently proposed 2019 Religious Discrimination Bill.

On the 29th of August 2019, Attorney General Christian Porter introduced to parliament the first exposure draft of a Religious Discrimination Bill. The bill proposed the introduction of an act which would eliminate discrimination on the basis of religion and protect the right to religious opinions and freedom of religion (Australian Government Attorney-General's Department 2019). The draft was put forward as a direct result of discussions concerning religious freedoms during the 2017 marriage equality debate, with the explanatory notes of the draft indicating that the origins of the bill lie in the 'Expert Panel' Malcolm Turnbull commissioned to review religious freedoms, a week after the plebiscite results were finalised. The draft asserted, considering the review outcome, that there was an "opportunity to further protect, and better promote, the right to freedom of religion under Australian law and in the public sphere" (Attorney General's Department 2019).

The bill has since been widely criticised for, among other aspects, clause 41, which proposed to allow individuals to say or write statements which violate anti-discrimination laws if they are considered honestly held religious beliefs (Rice 2020). A revised second draft of the Bill was then published in December 2019, addressing some of these concerns, though again attracting significant criticism from human rights advocates, among others, for including protections for religious hospitals and aged care facilities with discriminatory hiring policies, as well as a general failure to address some key concerns about the first draft (Karp 2019). The bill has since been referred to the UN Human Rights Council as it is perceived to place the beliefs of the religious above those of individuals seeking medical care (Human Rights Law Centre 2020) and remains a topic of interest in the media in its connection to other cases of discrimination (Wittig 2020).

The response to the bill from the religious community has certainly been mixed, highlighting that not all religious organisations share the ACL's views on religious discrimination. In February 2020 Equality Australia published a statement urging the government not to proceed with the religious discrimination bill because of concern over the legalised discrimination it would promote. This statement was signed by organisations throughout the religious community including Anglicare Victoria, Good Shepherd, McAuley Community Services for Women, Sacred Heart Mission, JewishCare, Jesuit Social services, Anglicare SA, Brotherhood of St Laurence and St Mary's House of Welcome (Equality Australia 2020). It should be acknowledged however that the bill is seen as not going far enough to protect religious beliefs by a number of religious groups including the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney, the Anglican Diocese of Sydney, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, the Australian National Imams Council, Greek Orthodox Church in Australia, Christian Schools Australia and Seventh-day Adventist, Baptist and Presbyterian leaders. These groups signed a joint letter to the Prime Minister and the then Attorney-General advising that they hoped a revised bill would address their concerns (Ireland 2019).

Whilst the bill was pushed down the government's agenda it has recently resurfaced in 2021, with current Attorney-General, Michaela Cash, now holding stakeholder consultations with the aim of pushing the bill forward (Kozioł 2021). What is most important to consider regarding this bill, is the fact that it resulted directly from concerns raised during the same-sex marriage debate. Concerns for religious freedoms, the sexualisation of schools, and the inability of a Christian service provider to uphold 'Christian ethics' in their business are all consequential frames which can be attributed to the ACL and which seek to protect the supposed sanctity of Judeo-Christian culture.

The ACL's advocacy for the 2019 Religious Discrimination Bill has been much more muted than for same-sex marriage, though is still an important aspect of the ACL's agenda setting efforts. This research argues that the two campaigns were not entirely separate, as many of the frames pushed by the ACL in its marriage equality campaign relate to religious freedoms. The ACL argued that same-sex

marriage would facilitate a society which denied religious freedoms and pushed 'radical gender theory' in schools, subsequently necessitating legislated protections in the event that same-sex marriage was legalised.

The ACL has also sought to influence the agenda following the legalisation of same-sex marriage through direct interaction with specific cases which invoke the supposed need for religious protections. It became an active participant in the defence of a number of individuals who made discriminatory and specifically homophobic statements under the pretext of religious beliefs. The ACL was significantly vocal in the case of Rugby Union player Israel Folau whose contract with Rugby Australia was terminated after an Instagram post in which he suggested that hell awaited gay people. The ACL donated \$100,000 to Folau's legal action against this decision (Bye 2019) and was at the forefront of the public defence of his comments (Moore 2019). The ACL subsequently took over the funding of Folau's expenses and saw over \$2 million donated through the organisation over a period of just two days in June 2019 (Robinson 2019). Martyn Iles also promoted the case of Folau in a public interview at the ACL's 2019 national conference (Jennings 2019), publicising it to the ACL's constituency and arguing that it was an example of religious discrimination that showed the need for more comprehensive legal protection of religious freedom. Iles went on to discuss Folau's case during a number of televised interviews including on *The Project* (Chung 2019), *Sunrise* (7News 2019) and *The Today Show* (YouTube 2019), with the *The Today Show* even describing Folau as the 'inadvertent poster boy' for the religious discrimination bill (YouTube 2019). Iles has himself acted as a conduit between the public and political arena, asserting in an earlier interview on *The Today Show* in the midst of Folau's fundraising campaign, that the ACL's stance on this issue resonated with the views of ordinary Australians because they felt their freedoms were being infringed upon (YouTube 2019). These comments were repeated almost verbatim in the three interviews. Iles also argued that public empathy with Folau should translate to political action, and that the views of the 'quiet Australians' who had voiced their concerns over religious freedoms at the previous federal election, had not yet translated into legislative action (YouTube 2019). The mention of 'quiet Australians' was a reference

to a theoretical constituency associated with Scott Morrison and considered an amalgamation of 'Howard's Battlers' and Trump and Nixon's 'silent majority'. It is defined by a largely and intentionally ambiguous demographic (Mckenna 2019). This term implies a constituency that is defined by traditional Judeo-Christian values which is perceived to be undergoing a loss of legitimacy and rights. Iles and the ACL's commandeering of the Folau case demonstrates a significant effort to shift the political agenda through the public and its ingrained anxieties, which yielded not only Folau a generous settlement but also the religious discrimination bill in question.

Following a relatively quiet year in 2020, due in part to the Covid-19 pandemic, the ACL returned to the campaign trail in 2021, pushing the issue of religious freedoms both in relation to religious discrimination legislation and as an aspect of the debate around change and suppression practices in Victoria. In February 2021, the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020, passed Victoria's upper house, essentially outlawing practices which seek to convert, change or suppress a person's sexual orientation or gender identity as well as provisioning the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) with new abilities to investigate such practices (AAP 2021). Whilst similar legislation banning gay conversion practices was passed in the ACT and Queensland in 2020 (AAP 2021), the ACL primarily focused its attention on intense lobbying over the Victorian legislation.

Among a number of claims, the ACL asserted that the new legislation would outlaw prayers if they regarded a person's sexual orientation and was "the most serious threat to religious freedoms in Australia's history" (Thomas 2021). On the ACL's Newscast channel 'The Truth of It', Iles suggested the new laws would criminalise being Christian and suggested in the title of episode 58 that it was a "Law to make the soviets blush" (ACL 2020). This approach to the program, was subsequently transferred into a public campaign by the ACL, distributing flyers throughout Victoria which suggested that simple, personal, Christian conversations, even within families, could incur the harshest of penalties, in an attempt to create a moral panic over a threat to Christian values. One of the flyers distributed for

instance prominently displays a pair of hands in handcuffs and a mother speaking to a young child with a bold statement asserting “Parents Like You, could be jailed for 10 years under new Victorian law” (ACL 2021). The flyer also asserts “Your neighbour could dob you in for having the ‘wrong’ conversations with your own kids” (ACL 2021). This is perhaps a simplification of the bill empowering the VEOHRC to consider and respond to reports from any person of change or suppression practices, before launching a formal investigation or referring the matter to police (Engage Victoria 2021). Though the legislation eventually passed, the campaign was undoubtedly an important aspect of a broader shift towards portraying Christian Australians as a persecuted group requiring protection.

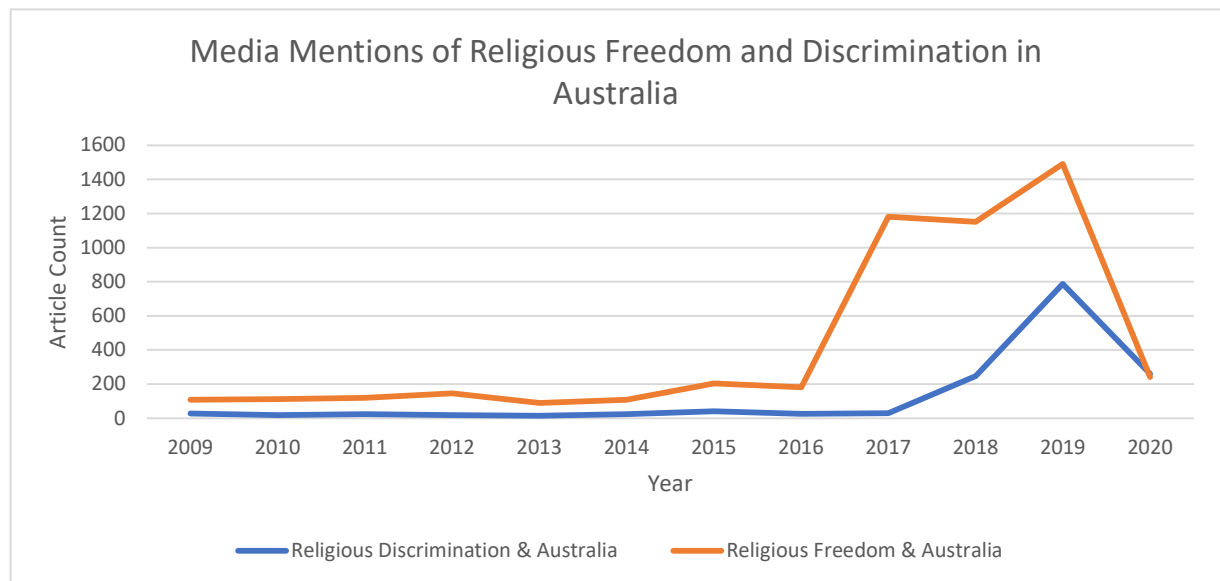
With religious discrimination legislation now back on the federal agenda, the ACL has once again launched a significant political action campaign over this issue. In June, Iles reportedly held private meetings with a number of Coalition MPs in Canberra regarding religious discrimination legislation, whilst the ACL also spent over \$63,000 on Facebook ads asserting the present danger for people of faith (Napier-Raman 2021). The ACL also spent an additional \$40,000 on a full-page newspaper advertisement pleading for Israel Folau’s return to Australia’s professional Rugby league (Clearly 2021). Overall, this demonstrates a significant investment by the ACL in their claim that basic freedoms are being swiftly eroded alongside the defining lines of Judeo-Christian culture.

5.3 Agenda Setting: Media

Religious Discrimination has clearly been a key focus for the ACL across the last decade and it has actively pushed its framing in the media on numerous occasions. Firstly, to examine media coverage of the issue, using Factiva, the search term ‘Religious Discrimination Bill’ in the region of Australia returned approximately 880 articles. This is a relatively small number of articles, as it was proposed only in late 2019. The terms ‘Religious Freedom’ and ‘Religious Discrimination’ were searched separately in conjuncture with ‘Australia’ and returned results of 1,561 in total for discrimination, and 5,513 for freedom. The fact that the bill is relatively recent is also the reason why this chapter does

not include parliamentary analysis. Figure 10 below outlines a timeline of articles and demonstrates that both issues began to increase in salience primarily between 2016 and 2017.

Figure 10: Media Mentions of Religious Freedom and Discrimination in Australia



Source: Author using data from Factiva. N=7,074

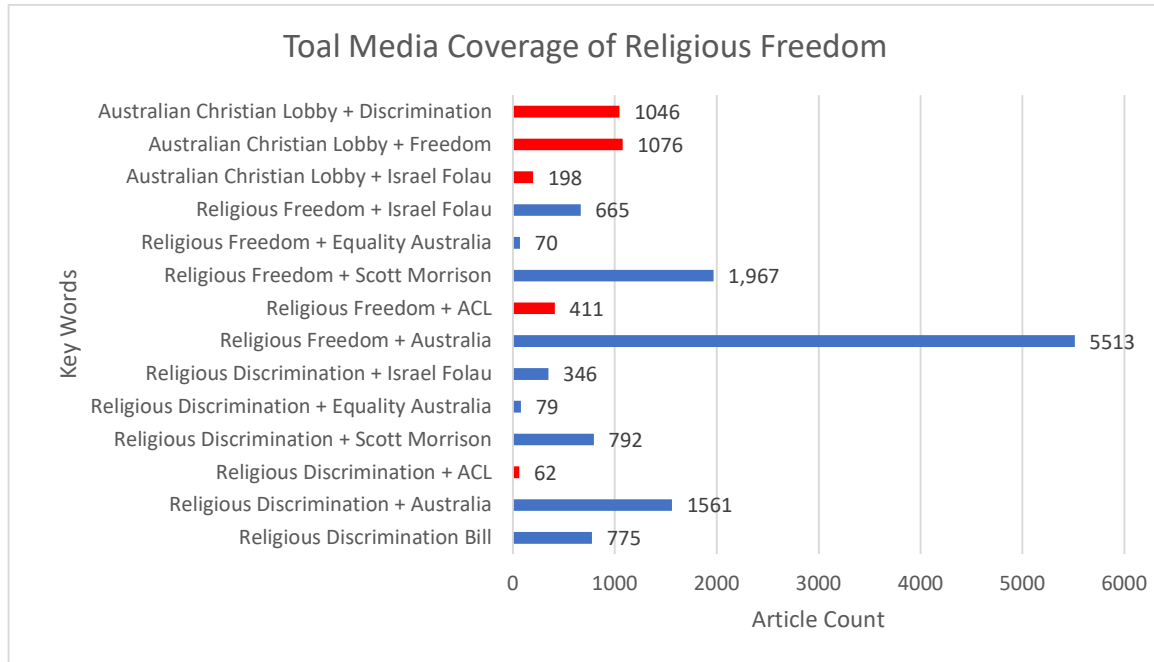
This shift in salience is noteworthy given its high correlation with the agenda setting activities of the ACL. As figure 10 demonstrates, the issues began to increase in coverage during the same time as the same-sex marriage debate was occurring. As noted in chapter 4, the ACL did attempt to push concerns for religious freedoms as a key frame during the debate. Both the terms 'religious freedom' and 'religious discrimination' declined slightly in 2018, though peaked in 2019, the year in which the ACL launched its campaign on behalf of Israel Folau and the 2019 Religious Discrimination Bill was created. The latter a direct result of an enquiry following the 2017 marriage equality plebiscite.

Secondly a review was conducted into the quantity of stories associated with different political actors and the religious discrimination debate between 2005 and 2021. Regarding articles relating to

religious discrimination, the ACL had a small article count of 62, where other key individuals, Scott Morrison and Israel Folau, were mentioned in 792 and 346 articles respectively. A prominent opponent of the bill, 'Equality Australia', also had a higher count of 79 articles. There a more significant association between the ACL and the term religious freedom. The ACL was mentioned in 411 articles using this term, whilst Scott Morrison was mentioned in 1,967, Israel Folau in 665 and Equality Australia in only 70. These data suggest that the ACL has attracted a reasonable amount of attention in media coverage of this issue. It is less prominent than other key actors such as Morrison or Folau, but it has certainly capitalised on the salience of the issue by becoming one of the most prominent advocacy organisations in the debate.

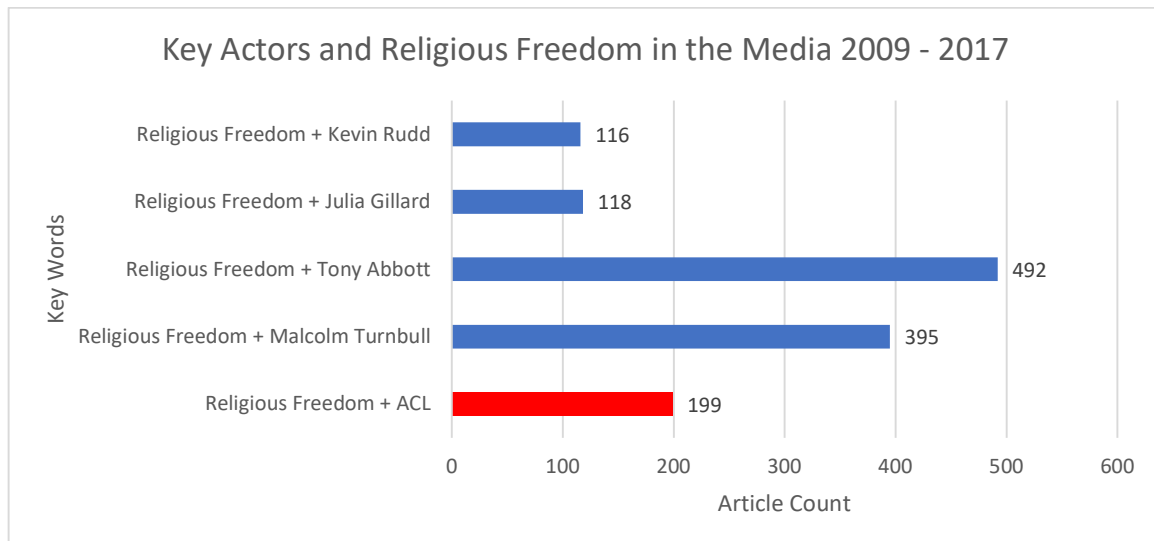
To consider how the debate was framed, the results compiled below, and Figure 10 above, demonstrate that the term 'religious freedom' was by far the most used in media reporting, even when articles specifically using the name of the 2019 Bill are excluded from the analysis. This suggests that religious freedom has been a more prominent framing of the issue in the media than discrimination, particularly during the same-sex marriage plebiscite campaigns. This is the ACL's preferred way of framing the issue.

Figure 11: Total Media Coverage of Religious Freedom



Source: Author using data from Factiva. N=7,074

Figure 12: Key Actors and Religious Freedom in the Media 2009 - 2017



Source: Author using data from Factiva. N=5,153

Whilst this analysis benefits from the context of the ACL's lobbying activities, this evidence shows that the ACL were successful in seeing itself widely mentioned in the media, suggesting a close proximity to the debate in question. The growth in salience of the issue also correlates with the activities of the ACL, with discussion of the issue increasing significantly in 2017 as the ACL were attempting to push the issue during the same-sex marriage debate, and ultimately peaking in 2019 following its campaign on behalf of Israel Folau and the announcement of the 2019 Religious Discrimination Bill. It also played a key role in placing the issue on the agenda and its preferred way of framing the issue was widely adopted in the media.

5.4 Policy Impact and Organisational Success

This section of the chapter will consider the policy impact and organisational success of the ACL regarding the debate over religious discrimination. This success is firstly evident in their leadership of the opposition to a charter of rights in 2009-2010, when Australia came close to introducing one. As the Australian government deliberated on whether to adopt a charter, the ACL sought to undermine the case for a charter by emphasising the need to protect religious rights, attempting to portray itself as a broad representative of Australian religious communities and positioning greater human rights as fundamentally incongruous with religious rights. This was a crucial step in the policy area as the institution of a charter of rights would have significantly undermined any attempts to enshrine religious freedoms, specifically freedoms involving the right to discriminate on the basis of religious beliefs. Whilst the extent to which the ACL contributed to this policy outcome is certainly contested, the case still represents an initially successful policy outcome following a concerted campaign which primed the policy stage for the next major emergence of legislation.

Despite the fact the 2019 Religious Discrimination Bill has yet to be presented to Parliament, the fact that the bill has been drafted in the first place seems to indicate the influence of the ACL. This is firstly

the case as the ACL framed the same-sex marriage debate as a threat to religious freedoms, and it was this framing which directly led to Turnbull's initial inquiry into the issue, and subsequently to the creation of the current bill. Between the outcome of the same-sex marriage plebiscite and the proposal of the 2019 bill, the ACL sought to cement the issue on the public and political agenda by actively involving itself, financially and publicly, in salient cases of religious discrimination. The case of Israel Folau was promoted by the ACL and heralded as the poster-case of the religious freedom debate, whilst the ACL continued the decade-spanning characterisation of Christians as a marginalised and condemned minority.

One of the most significant impacts of the ACL's lobbying activities is its contribution to the re-problematisation of religious discrimination in Australia, which has supported both its policy efforts and its organisational survival. As noted in the previous section of this chapter, the problem of religious freedoms in Australia has largely shifted from one specific to non-Christian communities to one seemingly monopolised by Christian organisations. Such a shift has and will continue to fundamentally shape Australia's policy landscape as some Christian organisations perceive themselves to be justified in a continued search for the right to discriminate on the basis of beliefs. This re-problematisation of the issue is of immeasurable value to the ACL's political and organisational survival.

It is clearly evident that there is a significant convergence between conservative Christianity in Australia, the ACL and paleoconservatism, as outlined in chapter 2. Key to paleoconservatism is the preservation of western culture as defined by Judeo-Christian values and a predominantly white heritage. Such a culture is perceived to be fundamentally threatened by multi-culturalism, which at the behest of the 'managerial elite', erodes cultural lines. As Bobrowicz and Nowak (2021) note, this normative perception of society leads to the moralization and politicisation of social issues in terms of their status as either natural and moral, or unnatural and immoral, facilitating conflict over policy such as LGBTIQ+ rights. The result of this is that the policy positions of the conservative Christian

organisations subsequently coalesce into the present consideration of religious freedoms. Such a policy is to an extent, the ultimate embodiment of paleoconservative concerns, as it firstly relates to the rights of Christians to consider themselves superior, sidelining the rights, specifically the speech, of non-Christian cultures. It secondly relates to the ability of Christian individuals and organisations to be able to treat members of the LGBTIQ+ community as supposedly unnatural and corrosive to western culture. Finally, for there to be a re-galvanisation of the nation around the values in question, there must be an eminent threat justifying the increased protections. Religious Freedom legislation and consultation around it, serves the dual purpose of furthering the superiority of Christianity over minority religions and creating the perception that such legislation is required to protect against attempts to silence Christian belief and thought. The case of Israel Folau is again the 'poster boy' case for this theory, with his right to express anti-gay sentiment as a reflection of his Christian belief perceived to be a fundamental aspect of free speech and the right to religion in Australia. It is also again endemic of the moral panic both fundamental to paleoconservatism and the ACL.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the ACL over the past 5 years has experienced a significant increase in its membership, including over the course of debate regarding the 2019 Religious Discrimination Bill. Whilst in 2016 the organisation had a reported membership of 50,000 (Ireland 2016), this has now jumped to a self-reported 175,000 members (ACL 2021). The exact periods and causes of such a jump are presently unknown, though it remains clear that its broad organisational strategies have significantly contributed to a flourishing in access to the key resource dimension of support. In terms of another key resource, financial capital, the organisation reported a reasonable increase in support following its advocacy in 2019, with its total gross income increasing from \$5 million in 2019 to \$5.8 million in 2020. This is particularly impressive considering the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic which significantly reduced social spending power, although it should be noted that a significant portion of this increase can be attributed to government grants and the provision of goods and services, representing \$238,000 and \$185,738 respectively (ACNC 2021).

The ACL's advocacy over the course of a decade saw the issue of religious discrimination re-problematized and then re-emerge on Australia's national agenda. A consideration of niche theory shows that the ACL was successful firstly in using this to maintain a continued reason to lobby. It has ensured that regardless of its ability to shape policy, it has securely cemented its positions as an ingrained aspect of Australia's broad conservative Christian constituency even though it doesn't necessarily represent any one denomination. This has allowed it to assume the concerns of this constituency and propagate them into a greater moral panic, which necessitates its existence as a force against the impending decline of western civilisation. This has provided the organisation with a substantially increasing membership base, access to the political arena, public attention and subsequently the funds necessary to continue lobbying and maintain its presence in Australian politics.

5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the ACL has had success in influencing religious freedom legislation in Australia both in terms of setting the agenda and implementing policy, though more broadly, it has also used this issue to carve out a more secure position in Australia's political landscape. In its attempt to shape Australia's public policy agenda it has successfully advocated for the need to introduce religious freedom protections and suggest that such freedoms are currently under threat. Analysis demonstrates this framing was dominant in media discussion of the issue. The fact that the ACL's concerns materialised in a bill currently before parliament further demonstrates their influence over policy in Australia. The case of religious freedoms in Australia specifically demonstrates the ability of the ACL to play a leading role in pushing religious discrimination onto the Australian policy agenda and ensure its salience gained momentum over the course of a decade. It demonstrates further the organisation's ability to adapt to defeats, such as the success of the same-sex marriage plebiscite and suppress change which would adversely shape the issue in question through lobbying against human rights legislation. It

further appears that the ACL has been successful in achieving organisational success, positioning itself as a key organisation within both a broader conservative Christian Australian movement and as part of a paleoconservative movement seeking to halt the rapid erosion of Judeo-Christian culture. It has succeeded in generating a moral panic in accordance with its ideological aims and provisioned itself with a continued membership, providing a reason for such members to contribute to the organisation. Overall, the organisation has succeeded in creating a reason for its continued existence and demonstrated that it is likely to continue to have a significant impact on both the political agenda and public policy.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter draws out the key implications of the case studies and summarises the key findings of the thesis. It finds that the success of the ACL has been substantial and its impact on Australian politics significant, although contingent on a number of key factors and conditions. The chapter will firstly discuss the impact of the ACL on Australian politics through attempts to shape the media and political agenda and influence policy outcomes. It will argue that it has generally been successful, although only when certain optimal conditions are in place. The chapter will then discuss the success of the organisation in surviving and maintaining its access to key resource dimensions. Finally, the chapter will conclude by summarising the major contributions of the thesis.

The findings of this thesis strongly suggest that the ACL has had a significant impact on Australian politics. First, there is considerable evidence that the ACL is influencing the way issues are framed in media coverage and parliamentary debates. Secondly, the thesis shows that the ACL is becoming an institutionally legitimate actor and one of the most prominent organisations involved in debates over social issues. Thirdly, the public activities of the ACL have helped shape public policy in Australia. However, although these findings suggest that it has had a significant impact, the case studies also indicate that its capacity to shape the agenda and influence policy are contingent on certain conditions being in place, such as receptive government or politicians and existing salience around key issues. Lastly, the thesis found that the ACL has used its campaign activities to bolster its resources, helping ensure it can survive and succeed as an organisation.

Broadly, this thesis and its findings also have reasonable implications for existing theories of advocacy influence. The implementation of Andrews and Edwards framework in distinct case studies allows for the compartmentalisation of impact and the consideration of what an ability to shape the media and see successful policy outcomes implemented, suggests about interest groups and politics. The

research was primarily conducted in accordance with the majority of existing research which implements a focus on limited in scope, contextual analysis (Hojnacki, et. al 2012). Its findings also support the theories of Baumgartner (et. al 2009) and Mahoney (2008) which suggest policies are most likely to change when there is government support which facilitates a salience feedback loop. The thesis does, however, look to comprehensively examine the ACL's lobbying efforts in each case study. It uses niche theory to provide greater context to campaigns, which in all three case studies spanned multiple years. It suggests that the ACL, and interest groups more broadly, can often be seen as impactful and powerful even when their policy preferences are not enacted and when ideological and organisational ambitions are taken into account. It finally, directly contributes to understandings of agenda setting ability and policy impact theories, through applying salient theoretical frameworks to discussions of the ACL which will be discussed further in the following sections.

6.2 Agenda

Rose and Baumgartner (2013) argue that shifts in key issue frames are likely to have significant impacts on politics when associated with greater ideological shifts that apply across a wide range of policy issues. Such an ideological shift associated with framings was notable in all three case studies considered in this thesis, though particularly so in the instance of religious discrimination which has been significantly re-problematised over the last decade as part of a broader shift towards concern for the strength of Judeo-Christian values in Australian society. The Safe Schools and same-sex marriage debates were also associated with greater ideological attempts to cultivate moral panics around LGBTIQ+ rights, though demonstrated the impact of multiple actors creating feedback loops and how this can increase the chances of lobbying success. Overall, this thesis affirms the existing theories of agenda setting and demonstrates their use in an Australian setting.

The first case study of the Safe Schools program suggested that the ACL's frequent advocacy helped disperse critical framings of the program and contributed to a sense of moral panic over the issue. The ACL framed Safe Schools as a sexual indoctrination program, and this criticism was often picked up in media coverage and in parliamentary debate. The ACL itself was often asked for its perspectives on the matter and was frequently mentioned in articles covering Safe Schools, notably by the politically right-leaning outlet, *The Australian*. The ACL's criticisms of Safe Schools were similar to those of conservative politicians Cory Bernardi and George Christensen and seem likely to have contributed to public hostility towards the program as the Vote Compass findings outlined in chapter 3 indicated. It is important to note however, that there were no comparable surveys taken on the issue prior, which means that it is difficult to determine if this response demonstrated a shift in existing public opinion on the issue.

It is also important to note that the ACL's ability to get the Safe Schools issue on the media and policy agenda was to a certain extent contingent on other high-profile actors becoming involved in the issue. The media analysis conducted in chapter 3, as well as existing research on the subject (Thompson 2019; Alcorn 2016), indicate that the program didn't receive much attention until the latter half of 2015. This was despite the ACL having made a number of appearances in the media to decry the program, seemingly in an attempt to create a panic around it, asserting in 2010 that the program was creating a "homosexual ghetto" (Tomazin 2010). In 2014, it asserted that nationwide funding of the program was an imposition of a "sexual agenda" on children (Jacks 2014). Despite the ACL's campaigning, the issue only became salient on the public and political agendas following the efforts of Cory Bernardi, among others, to directly bring the issue into the policy arena, which subsequently led to stronger interest from the media and the wider public. It is possible that the ACL's campaigning precipitated Bernardi's actions, however the media did not significantly engage with the issue until Bernardi did. This demonstrates the effect of the policy salience feedback loop which suggests that once issues are made sufficiently salient, interest in them rapidly compounds as more interested parties become involved (Mahoney 2008; Baumgartner et. al 2009). Once the issue was on the public

agenda, the ACL did notably see key framings adopted, cultivating a moral panic which perpetuated the dangers of the Safe Schools program. The ACL's attempts to set the agenda on this issue led to concerns about the sexualisation and indoctrination of children appearing widely in the media and in parliament, and it ultimately precipitated a federal review into the program, alongside a largely negative interpretation of the eventual report. These findings strongly align with theories of moral panic and media feedback, demonstrating how such an occurrence can play out in the public arena.

The ACL also had a significant impact on the Australian political agenda during the debate over same-sex marriage, although once again, this impact was to a certain extent contingent. Its efforts prior to the initiation of the official campaign demonstrates the ability of the organisation to create framings which were broadly adopted and remained salient regardless of the specific policy debate. A frame introduced during the Safe Schools debate was that the program and same-sex marriage were 'joined at the hip' as Lyle Shelton put it, with the two mentioned together in over 1,200 articles. By the following year when the ACL was at the forefront of the campaign against same-sex marriage, it capitalised on the controversy that the campaign against Safe Schools had generated. In particular, the ACL funded advertisements that sought to generate moral panic around the notion that Safe Schools would become 'widespread and compulsory' if same-sex marriage were to be legalised. The significance of this framing is demonstrated in the analysis conducted in chapter 4, with 'children' being one of the most mentioned terms in coverage of the issue.

The ACL's framing of same-sex marriage also influenced parliamentary debate over the issue. In particular, dominant frames used by parliamentarians related to the need to uphold the sanctity of traditional marriage, freedom of religion and the compound right to form a family. These framings reflected those of the ACL suggesting it has the ability to shape the perspectives of influential politicians. The organisation and its managing director were mentioned more than any other advocates during the debate, demonstrating the ability of the organisation to shape and take part in the public agenda. This is due in part to the fact the ACL essentially lead the 'No' campaign, allowing

it a greater opportunity to shape the agenda. The impact presented here is again contingent however, as the salience of the same-sex marriage debate is attributable to the rising public demand for its resolution as well as the significant campaign efforts by the LGBTIQ+ community. The majority of the anti-same-sex marriage framings which shaped the debate were perpetuated by the ACL, though were again dependent on the salience of previously contested areas, such as the Safe Schools policy dispute. The framings of the debate additionally demonstrated the capitalisation on existing social anxieties and key re-framings, including those regarding religious freedoms. Same-sex marriage suggests a strong impact on the agenda, though also the need for appropriate facilitating conditions to exist.

The final case study again demonstrates the ability of the ACL to utilise issue framings to impact multiple policy areas. During the debate over same-sex marriage the organisation went to significant efforts to frame the issue as a direct threat to religious freedoms in Australia. This resulted in a tangible shift on both the public and political agendas as MPs and the media increasingly focused on the issue and the Australian government initiated an inquiry and, ultimately, a draft bill. The ACL continued to be one of the most prominent voices on this topic, particularly as a result of its involvement with Israel Folau's legal action against Rugby Australia, while media mentions of religious discrimination rose to their highest point in 2019 whilst the issue itself continued to be re-problematised.

The religious freedom case study demonstrates again how advocacy impact is contingent on the necessary social conditions being in place, which in this instance included the existence of MPs who were particularly responsive to the key message. The ACL sought to significantly capitalise on the seemingly optimal conditions for their advocacy, emerging as the largest organisational advocate for Israel Folau, with Martyn Iles appearing across a plethora of television shows.

Overall, the findings of thesis seemingly affirm existing theories of agenda setting. These firstly, suggest that government support can significantly increase the chances of a major policy reframing, with the Australian federal government being receptive in almost all instances to the arguments of the ACL. The Victorian Government's opposition to the ACL's arguments regarding Safe Schools was

one notable instance of government pushback and notably saw the ACL lose out in their agenda setting advocacy. This thesis also aligns with these theories as the ACL campaigns functioned most efficiently when they were part of broader ideological shifts. This was most notable in the case of religious discrimination as the ACL's agenda setting activities were aspects of a reframing of the issue over a number of years. It was also the case in the instance of Safe Schools and same-sex marriage as the ACL's agenda setting can be seen as part of a greater ideological shift to legitimise anti-LGBTIQ+ sentiment in Australian politics. The ACL's ability to agenda set is subsequently seen to be substantial and warrants greater attention.

6.3 Policy Success

Findings regarding policy impact are largely similar as the ACL has been able to shape policy across all case studies, although this was found to be contingent on the involvement of politicians and the way the issues played out in the media. It is important to note that in all case studies the ACL advocated for positions which only had minority public support and its ability to shape policy outcomes should be understood in this context. The first case study, for instance, broadly demonstrates the success of the ACL in leading a large public campaign that contributed to the end of federal funding for Safe Schools, and a majority of states choosing to either discontinue or rebrand the program, despite there being no recorded public opinion on the issue. However, such impact was to a great extent facilitated by the actions of George Christensen and Cory Bernardi who initially elevated the issue to the political arena through interpreting and dispersing problematizations of the program. The ACL certainly contributed to the key frames which ultimately precipitated the Loudon review, although Bernardi and Christensen, among others, were more directly responsible for the political conditions that put pressure on the government to conduct such a review. Such findings reinforce existing theories of

interest group literature and demonstrate the importance of government support and the creation of salience which might precipitate the involvement of subsequent actors.

Policy impact in the second case study was discussed in terms of both campaign outcome success and success in pushing the debate to a public vote in the first place, despite such significant and documented support for the legalisation of same-sex marriage. In the first sense, the ACL ultimately had little policy impact as its campaign was convincingly defeated and it is difficult to determine the extent to which its campaign even affected the decisions of individual voters. Regarding the second determinant, the ACL saw some success in socialising a political issue on which it was likely to lose. Contingency, however, is prominent in this understanding as, whilst the ACL was supportive of a plebiscite, it appears the decision to hold a plebiscite was very likely a political solution to the problem of a party room that was divided on the issue.

The ACL's impact on the same-sex marriage debate is interestingly even more notable in the context of the third case study. The assertion that legalised same-sex marriage would encroach upon religious freedoms created a sense of moral panic among politicians and in the media, which facilitated a government review into the potential threats. This despite the fact the public support for same-sex marriage clearly indicated a lack of widespread concern for religious freedoms. This led directly to the 2019 Religious Discrimination Bill which is currently being considered by the government. The successful adoption of this agenda item was perhaps contingent on the ideology of the government that was being lobbied. In this case, Prime Minister Scott Morrison and then Attorney-General Christian Porter were particularly pre-disposed to support such legislation. It was also an issue which had been significantly re-shaped over the past decade, due in no small part to the advocacy of the ACL. The issue was altered to reflect the position of a number of conservative Christian groups which sought to strengthen their positions in Australian society, with the ACL playing a role in facilitating consultations, lobbying against greater general rights protections and for the re-problematisation of the issue.

The case studies discussed in this thesis demonstrate the ability of the ACL to capitalise on emergent opportunities and involve itself significantly in Australia politics. Although it does not always win out on policy matters, when it chooses to campaign on an issue, it demonstrates an ability to significantly shape discourse and instigate political actions in opposition to public opinion. Whilst each case study serves to provide some indication of the ACL's impact on Australian politics, together they demonstrate the cumulative development and evolution of both the ACL's focus on policy and the policy areas themselves. Impact is demonstrated most clearly in the ACL's ability to maintain the salience of an issue and concede short term policy or campaign losses whilst ensuring continued policy debates and potential long-term success. Impact is particularly significant in the context of an organisation which has been able to create moral panics across numerous policy contests. The ability to push key framings and generate a sense of moral panic does not independently demonstrate success, though the ability to maintain these across movement perhaps does.

Whilst this thesis makes a strong case for the significant impact of the ACL on media coverage and policy in Australian politics, express causal influence remains more difficult to establish. Such analysis seemingly demonstrates that advocacy influence is a highly contingent concept and requires the correct social, political and media conditions to be in place for it to occur. Advocacy organisations can contribute to existing societal trends, mobilise support or opposition, create and disperse key framings and present themselves as authorities on policies. However, the first case study at least demonstrates that advocacy organisations do not always have the necessary influence in Australian politics to independently create salience around an area of concern. This aligns with the theories of Baumgartner (et. al 2009) and Mahoney (2008) outlined in chapter 1 which suggest that policies are most likely to shift when organisations are able to create momentum for change as more interest groups become involved. These theories also suggest that interest groups are more likely to succeed when there is government support for the issue. The ACL lobbied unsuccessfully against Safe Schools for several years before it eventually became salient on the national agenda. Certainly, they can have a reasonable impact on media and policy areas, though not as much as politicians themselves.

Advocacy organisations are constrained by the fact that policy positions are often not legitimised until they are recognised by either the media or politicians. For the ACL, the initial concerns raised over the Safe Schools program were not initially legitimised by further actors and subsequently did not impact the policy. However, when conservative politicians later adopted such policy positions, they were elevated to a central position and generated significant public debate. Finally, there needs to be a sufficient public appetite for the debate to take place. This is not necessarily the case when lobbying occurs in private, but in public the advocacy needs to have some relevance to popular beliefs, capitalise on social trends and engage with public sentiment, including for instance, the existing anxieties associated with moral panic. Without such factors, the influence of advocacy is likely to be significantly limited.

Overall, the findings of this thesis align with the existing theories which suggest that interest groups do have policy influence. Andrews and Edwards (2004) note that policy enactment and implementation is the most widely recognised form of advocacy impact, though is often difficult to observe. Dur (2008) argues that assessing the degree of preference attainment offers a considerable insight into how policy influence might be observed even if information on lobbying is not publicly available. In accordance with his research, this thesis observes that the ACL frequently either came close to achieving its policy preferences or saw them enacted. Furthermore, Gilens and Page (2014) theorised that public opinion often has little sway in comparison to the policy positions of organised interests. This thesis had similar findings in an Australian context, noting that particularly in the instance of same-sex marriage, public preferences were widely ignored whilst those of ACL and other interested parties consistently had an impact on policy. This thesis suggests in accordance with these prominent theories that the political impact of interest groups is observable and significant.

The findings of this thesis also have a number of implications for existing research in an Australian context. Broadly, they lend weight to Maddox's (2014) conclusions about the power and weight of the ACL, although the case studies in this thesis largely examine the period subsequent to this study. This

thesis also functions to support the existing observations of both Warhurst (2008) and Malloy (2017), that the emergence of evangelical conservative Christian forces is continuing to shape politics, both in the provision of further votes for conservative politicians and in supporting their policies. The ACL is also seemingly beginning to move beyond this role, now a prominent political actor in its own right which functions to directly contribute to policy outcomes.

6.4 Organisational success

Niche theory holds that interest groups use their advocacy activities not just to achieve their policy goals, but also to build their organisational strength. This thesis found strong evidence for this in the case of the ACL. Looking at the first resource dimension of membership, there is a clear sense that the activities of the ACL significantly contributed not only to its survival but its expansion as an organisation, as it seems to have rapidly accrued new members (at least according to the ACL). As noted, the ACL went from a reported membership base of 15,000 in 2012 (Maddox 2014), to 175,000 in 2021 (ACL 2021), although there may be some doubts over the legitimacy of such figures as they are difficult to verify. Next is access to finances and again, with a focus on niche theory, the success of the organisation is apparent. Having a total gross income of \$2.4 million in 2014, following the activities of the ACL regarding Safe Schools in 2015 and 2016 the income of the organisation jumped to \$3.1 million in 2016 and then to \$4 million in 2017. This demonstrated a significant increase, particularly given its income only rose by \$0.3 million between 2014 and 2015. Following its campaign against same-sex marriage in 2017 its income again rose, this time more than doubling from the previous year to a significant \$8.9 million across 2018 before 2019 and 2020 saw the organisation report a total gross income of \$5 million and \$5.8 million respectively (ACNC 2021). Such figures are dominated by 'donations and bequests', though there is presently no greater level of granularity

available in the sources of funding. In this context, organisational success is clearly demonstrated as the ACL maintained and improved its access to the key resource dimension of finance.

The final two resource dimensions that Lowery and Gray (1996) mention are access to the policy arena and establishing a reason to lobby. Access to the policy arena is something which the ACL has successfully maintained over the past decade. As noted, the organisation has met with every single Australian Prime Minister since its inception and has regularly had politicians attending and speaking at its annual conference (Koziol 2021; Napier-Raman 2021). The ACL has also successfully established itself as a high-profile organisation in media coverage, featuring prominently in the case studies which have been discussed. The organisation often featured as a voice of the Christian community during the Safe Schools debate, and its managing director, Lyle Shelton, had more media attention than any other advocate during the same-sex marriage debate. It also went on to feature prominently in the media in the debate over religious freedom, particularly during the Israel Folau controversy. This high profile allows the ACL to convey to its supporters that it is a major presence in both the public and political arenas in debates over social issues.

This thesis provides a slightly different interpretation of the final resource dimension of niche theory, a reason to lobby. In its original conception, a reason to lobby is intended to denote an incumbent political threat or opportunity that requires the advocacy group to act in the interest of its constituency. This is essential for the organisation to survive as without it, the existence of the organisation would not be required by its constituency. However, this thesis considers this resource dimension to be an aspect of organisational agenda setting, as it is in fact incumbent upon the interest group to convince its constituents that there is a material reason for them to provide further support to the organisation. A tangible policy threat is entirely secondary to the need for organisations to successfully portray their existence as meaningful and necessary. Subsequently such organisations must be aware of the need to maintain their legitimacy in the interest arena.

For some organisations perhaps, there will legitimately be a continuous need to advocate, whilst for others, once goals have been achieved, the organisation might move on to other policy areas. However, this thesis argues that in the case of the ACL its reason to lobby is informed by an ideological position, which seeks a broad revolution and by its desire to survive as an organisation. This means tangible policy objectives are not always the paramount goal of the organisation, nor is its ability to achieve them entirely indicative of its power. For the ACL, its existence is predicated on, and justified by, the need for a significant, though difficult to measure, cultural shift, which is strongly associated with paleoconservative notions of revolution. The role of the ACL in accessing this resource dimension is subsequently to convince its constituency of the need for such a cultural shift, whilst a consistent policy focus is significantly less important for its organisational survival. Whilst in previous iterations the organisation was concerned with opposition to existing policies, such issues have gradually fallen from the policy agenda as they were either renamed and re-introduced, as was the case with the Safe Schools program in WA, or as Australian society progressed and left the ACL behind.

As a result, the ACL has now turned to education on, and advocacy against, cultural Marxism, global communism, post-modernism and the erosion of cultural lines. There is some policy focus in terms of religious discrimination legislation, though broadly the ACL dedicates more of its time to advocating against cultural deviancy rather for specific policies. Such areas of focus are not indicative of an organisation with a consistent ethos, but rather of an organisation continually attempting to cultivate moral panic and anger to justify its own existence. This strategy appears to be working, as discussion in this thesis suggests the organisation is successfully steering political discourse in a direction further away from policy than ever before.

Analysis of this aspect of niche theory demonstrates that the ACL, across the three case studies, has consistently sought to legitimise new problematisations and galvanise supporters around issues of moral panic. A salient point which should be emphasised is that the underlying issues in the case studies presented do relate to traditional Christian Right perspectives, but the specific arguments and

positions of the Christian Right had already failed by the time the policies re-emerged on the national agenda. Rather than the traditional advocacy against sex-ed in schools, which is seldom brought to contest in the policy arena in Australia anymore, the underlying problematisation of the Safe Schools program related to conceptions of gender and sexual identity. Neither the ACL nor any of the other prominent advocates against the program sought to protest sex-education broadly, rather the conflict over the issue specifically related to education on LGBTIQ+ identity and health, representing a deviation from the initial conservative religious perspective and a newly formed reason for advocacy (Thompson 2019), legitimised by moral panic. It is possible that the conflict was motivated by traditional objectives which might have had a more limited impact, though this still demonstrates the process of shifting problematisation. The same is true for the same-sex marriage debate as there was virtually no attempt to invoke the supposed inherent immorality of non-heterosexuality (DiMauro & Joffe 2009), as the debate specifically focused on the social consequences of same-sex marriage. Again, as has been discussed in chapter 5, the problematisation of religious discrimination has significantly shifted over the past 20 years and now represents a recent justification for advocacy and indeed the existence of the ACL.

This thesis demonstrates the utility of niche theory in advocacy analysis as it allows for consideration and evaluation of often clear measurable variables. Reframing organisational success through niche theory demonstrates the importance of considering how organisations sustain access to key, measurable resources, such as funding and membership and allows for a greater layer of nuance in understanding advocacy impact, as mere considerations of policy success often neglect the tangible societal impacts of organisations such as the ACL. Niche theory is further crucial to understanding emergent organisations similar to the ACL which seek more fluid social change and identify policy objectives in an ad hoc fashion. Advocacy evaluation can often neglect analysis of organisations who cannot demonstrate consistent policy influence, though niche theory demonstrates how such organisations might continue to flourish and accrue membership and financial support despite this.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This thesis has sought to examine the impact of the Australian Christian Lobby on Australian social policy debates and its organisational success over the past decade. It has found the ACL's advocacy had considerable impact on both the media and the parliamentary agendas and, in doing so, it has contributed to a significant level of organisational success. There have previously been no systematic studies of the organisation undertaken, nor has any scholarship attempted to examine in detail the important place it appears to hold in the Australian political landscape. The only extended discussion focused specifically on the ACL's power in the political arena was conducted by Maddox (2014), and whilst this research suggested the organisation wielded a notable level of power, it primarily sought to focus on the ACL as a right-wing extremist organisation. Furthermore, there have been several significant shifts in the organisation's leadership and a number of major policy debates have taken place since this research was conducted, which featured the ACL centrally. As such, this is the first extensive research undertaken with the intention of specifically analysing and suggesting the power and impact of the organisation in these recent controversies.

This thesis firstly demonstrates that paleoconservatism is key to understanding the organisation's goals and successes, a link which has not previously been demonstrated or addressed. There is currently renewed scholarly interest in paleoconservatism, particularly in the US context, and its application to the ACL provides an understanding of how the organisation is hoping to cultivate a sense of moral panic around issues which supposedly threaten western, Judeo-Christian values. It suggests that the ACL's objectives extend far beyond those it has expressly stated or that might be expected of a conservative Christian organisation. It further suggests the increasing prevalence of this renewed ideological perspective, as well as how it can be adopted by organisations that previously had a different ideological position. Finally, this thesis has examined the differences between religious conservatism and paleoconservatism in an Australian context, applying this distinction in the literature to the ACL to better illuminate it.

Through case study analysis, this thesis demonstrates that the ACL provided vital contributions to the public debate over the Safe Schools program, with the moral panic surrounding it eventually precipitating its federal de-funding. The case study suggests that it has been able to leverage its position as an institutionally legitimate organisation to achieve a regular presence in Australian media, though its impact is often contingent on the involvement of other political actors, particularly conservative politicians.

The case study of same-sex marriage demonstrates how the ACL was able to shape discourse on the issue and despite the failure of the campaign, influence future legislation as a direct result of the key framings it introduced. It demonstrated the susceptibility of the Australian media and government to episodes of moral panic, and the consequences of the media feedback loop. It achieved this by providing an insight into political action against LGBTIQ+ equality and the campaign tactics implemented in eschewing same-sex marriage.

The final case study of this thesis presents the culmination of the ACL's advocacy efforts throughout the previous two case studies, demonstrating the significant impact and ability of the organisation to set the policy agenda. It additionally emphasises the importance of its capacity to capitalise on salient existing issues and to cultivate active social anxieties. This section additionally noted how the issue of religious freedom itself has been significantly re-problematized, primarily as a result of Christian lobbying and facilitated in a number of instances by the ACL at the start of the decade.

The thesis demonstrates that policy influence is often contingent on external factors fortuitously creating the conditions necessary for impact, though it proves that when such conditions arise, advocates are often prepared to capitalise. Such social conditions included a public appetite, political enablers and precipitating media events. This thesis also makes a strong case for the organisational success of the ACL, which when considered through niche theory, can be seen as substantial. The organisation maintained and expanded on its access to the most essential resource dimensions which allowed it to ostensibly thrive as an interest group throughout the decade. This analysis also

represents a notable theoretical contribution to the literature. Its compartmentalisation of advocacy impact using Andrews and Edward's framework suggests how multiple levels of analysis might be used to consider the impact of an organisation such as the ACL. It provides evaluation of how advocacy impact occurs and demonstrates the use of niche theory in contextualising advocacy activities. Its re-evaluation of niche theories fifth resource dimension in particular, represents an original contribution, and one which is useful in furthering understandings of advocacy organisations engaged in the discourse of moral politics. This also suggests subsequent avenues for future research to consider the applicability of niche theory to the Australian context.

Limitations of this study, which potential future research might look to address, include analysis of the impact of direct lobbying and private consultations on Australian politics, which as Maddox (2014, p. 133) hints, are potentially significant. This thesis did not attempt to significantly explore this aspect as such information is difficult to obtain. This analysis could potentially be conducted through a larger scale project involving interviews of both the ACL leadership and Australian politicians. Such research would help to further explain the contingent conditions affecting the ACL's capacity to influence the agenda and achieve its policy goals. Additionally, information which was not attained by this thesis included data on the ACL's membership, which has not been significantly explored since the early 2010s (Judd 2013), though is potentially an interesting avenue for further research as its reported base continues to rampantly grow. Finally, this thesis did not consider potential links between the ACL and other Christian organisations in Australia, which is another area for potential future research to consider.

Overall, the ACL is an organisation deserving of further attention and research as it continues to shape Australian political discourse as well as several key social policies. This thesis has provided a significant insight into how this has taken place and further contributed to interest group theory.

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