

# Shane Rattenbury's record run in balance of power

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May 2026

## 18 years in balance of power

Shane Rattenbury is stepping down as Member of the Legislative Assembly of the ACT, after 18 years in office – having entered politics at the 2008 territory election.

For the entire duration, the ACT Greens have been in sole balance of power in the Legislative Assembly – that is to say, they have been the only bloc that decides which party forms government.

From what the Australia Institute can tell, this makes Rattenbury the longest-ever MP in a Westminster democracy to serve in (sole) balance of power.

Rattenbury has also been party leader since 2012. This 14-year stretch is the longest stretch that we could find where a party leader in a Westminster democracy has served in sole balance of power.

Notably, Rattenbury has also served in a variety of parliamentary and executive government roles over his time in office: backbencher, crossbencher, presiding officer and several ministerial roles. Rattenbury was the world's first speaker from a green party.<sup>1</sup>

## Similar cases

**Albert Dunstan, Victorian premier** — his Country Party was the third-largest party, but he leveraged balance of power to become premier of a Country government propped up by the numerically stronger Labor Party. 1928-1932 (crossbench to a minority Labor govt), 1932-1935 (junior coalition partner), 1935-1943 (premier).

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<sup>1</sup> Predavec (2025) *Election entrée: Speakers from other parties*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/election-entree-speakers-from-other-parties/>

However, a premier cannot be said to be in balance of power – so Dunstan only spent 7 years in balance of power.

**West Germany's FDP** — had 'sole' balance of power from 1961 to 1987. But the German parliament is not a Westminster system. German state parliaments probably have even longer examples, as would countries such as Sweden and Brazil — again, not Westminster systems.

**Irish Labour's Dick Spring** — was leader with shared balance of power for 15 years, from 1982 to 1997, just 6 months more than Shane – but not in sole balance of power.

**Similarly, New Zealand's Peter Dunne** — was a crossbench MP from 1994 to 2017, and the leader of United Future from 2002 to 2017, providing confidence and supply for those 15 years – but not in sole balance of power.

## Achievements of ACT power-sharing governments

Parliaments exist to share power, and power sharing has been a feature of Australian parliaments for as long as they have existed.<sup>2</sup>

Even so, over the last four decades, the ACT has had more formally power-sharing parliaments than any other jurisdiction: between 1989 and 2024, Australia had 25 power-sharing parliaments and 10 of those were in the ACT.<sup>3</sup>

Despite alarmist talk of “coalitions of chaos”, minority and coalition governments are competitive, usually last the full term and help enforce ministerial responsibility. They allow for new policy ideas and legislative improvements through private members' bills and amendments.<sup>4</sup>

Notable achievements of the Labor minority governments (2008–2012 and 2024 onwards), where the Greens held the sole balance of power and provided confidence and supply, and the Labor–Greens coalition governments (2012–2024), where Greens took ministries, are:

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<sup>2</sup> Browne and Denniss (2024) *Power sharing in Australian parliaments*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/power-sharing-in-australian-parliament/>; Browne, Black and Predavec (2025) *Forming power sharing government*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/forming-power-sharing-government/>

<sup>3</sup> Browne, Black and Predavec (2025) *Forming power sharing government*

<sup>4</sup> Browne, Black and Predavec (2025) *Forming power sharing government*

- Open government measures: freedom of information reform and an independent officer to assess executive privilege claims.<sup>5</sup>
- Changing the name of the offence “sexual relationship with a child”, which implies consent, to the clearer “persistent sexual abuse of child or young person under special care”. Grace Tame recognised then Attorney-General Rattenbury by name during her National Press Club address.<sup>6</sup>
- Truth in political advertising laws, thanks to a Greens private member’s bill passed with unanimous support by Labor, Liberal and Greens parliamentarians.
- Light rail for Canberra
- Becoming the first Australian jurisdiction to transition from fossil fuel-based supply to 100% renewable energy,<sup>7</sup> along with other emissions reduction and net-zero targets.
- Cannabis and then other drug decriminalisation measures, thanks to Labor private member’s bills passed with Labor and Greens support.
- A public holiday for Reconciliation Day, Australia’s “only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-focused public holiday”.<sup>8</sup>
- First Australian state or territory to formally declare a climate change emergency, thanks to a motion proposed by Rattenbury.<sup>9</sup>
- Holding institutions liable for sexual abuse perpetrated by those who are not technically employees but who have privileged positions within the institution, like some priests, thanks to Rattenbury’s private member’s bill.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Griffith (2010) *Minority governments in Australia 1989-2009: accords, charters and agreements*, pp. 32–33, <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/researchpapers/Pages/minority-governments-in-australia-1989-2009-acco.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> Rattenbury (2022) *Language is important and powerful. In response to @TamePunk’s advocacy, the ACT will change the name of the offence of ‘sexual relationship with child or young person under special care’ to ‘persistent sexual abuse of child or young person under special care’*. <https://t.co/IMnmTQZoUj>, <https://twitter.com/ShaneRattenbury/status/1491255453254578179>

<sup>7</sup> Cass (2019) *Class ACT: How the Australian Capital Territory became a global energy leader*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/class-act-how-the-australian-capital-territory-became-a-global-energy-leader/>

<sup>8</sup> Bahr (2026) *Reconciliation Day: Why is the ACT the only jurisdiction that has a public holiday today* <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/reconciliation-day-why-is-the-act-the-only-jurisdiction-that-has-a-public-holiday-today/8innlp0w2>

<sup>9</sup> Bennett (2019) *Bob Hawke leaves behind an important environmental legacy*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/bob-hawke-leaves-behind-an-important-environmental-legacy/>

<sup>10</sup> Milligan (2025) *ACT becomes the mouse that roared in helping survivors fight for justice*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-10-31/act-bird-defence-survivors-canberra-nsw/105939314>

- The Greens negotiating a lower healthcare levy than the flat \$250/year proposed by the ACT Government.<sup>11</sup>
- Establishing the ACT Independent Integrity Commission.
- Voluntary assisted dying, after the federal Labor Government pursued legislation to lift the restriction on territories legislating VAD laws.
- Pill testing at festivals,<sup>12</sup> later expanded to a permanent testing site.
- Justice reinvestment policies, to put the savings from lower incarceration rates towards crime prevention and rehabilitation.<sup>13</sup>
- The Drug & Alcohol Court, which provides “an alternative to imprisonment” that leads to better outcomes for participants and money saved overall.<sup>14</sup>
- Animal welfare achievements like banning battery hens and puppy farms, and ending greyhound racing by removing subsidies for the industry.<sup>15</sup>
- Raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14 years of age, a staggered process that began while Rattenbury was Attorney-General.<sup>16</sup>
- Accessibility and energy efficiency housing standards, first in the ACT and then in the National Construction Code.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Lindell (2025) *ACT's health levy heavily cut after tough talks with ACT Greens*, <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/9004703/act-drops-250-health-levy-opts-for-100-rates-charge/>

<sup>12</sup> Browne (2019) *Canberra: Laboratory of democracy*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/canberra-laboratory-of-democracy/>

<sup>13</sup> ACT Government (2024) *Early intervention and diversion to shape next phase of ACT justice reinvestment approach to addressing issues in the Criminal Justice System*, [https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/open\\_government/inform/act\\_government\\_media\\_releases/rattenbury/2024/early-intervention-and-diversion-to-shape-next-phase-of-act-justice-reinvestment-approach-to-addressing-issues-in-the-criminal-justice-system](https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/open_government/inform/act_government_media_releases/rattenbury/2024/early-intervention-and-diversion-to-shape-next-phase-of-act-justice-reinvestment-approach-to-addressing-issues-in-the-criminal-justice-system)

<sup>14</sup> Newtime Media (2022) *ACT Drug and Alcohol Court ‘an effective program,’* <https://canberradaily.com.au/act-drug-and-alcohol-court-an-effective-program/>

<sup>15</sup> ACT Greens (n.d.) *Animal welfare in the ACT*, <https://greens.org.au/act/assembly/animalwelfare>

<sup>16</sup> Government (2026) *Raising the age of criminal responsibility*, <https://www.act.gov.au/law-and-justice/law-reforms/raising-the-age-of-criminal-responsibility>

<sup>17</sup> ACT Government (2021) *ACT Government secures national mandatory accessible standards*, [https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/open\\_government/inform/act\\_government\\_media\\_releases/vassaroti/2021/act-government-secures-national-mandatory-accessible-standards](https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/open_government/inform/act_government_media_releases/vassaroti/2021/act-government-secures-national-mandatory-accessible-standards); Lindell (2022) *Govt increasing minimum energy efficiency standards on new homes in Canberra*, <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/7877962/govt-increasing-minimum-energy-efficiency-standards-on-new-homes-in-canberra/>

- Civil union legislation to allow for same-sex couples to have the same legal treatment as married couples, until federal laws allowed same-sex couples to marry.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> ACT Government (2026) *Civil unions*, <https://www.accesscanberra.act.gov.au/births-relationships-and-deaths/relationships/civil-unions>