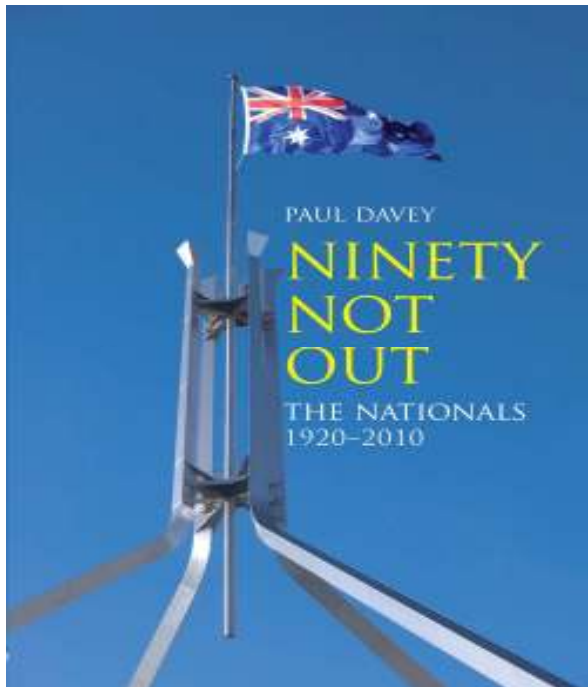


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The Nationals, originally the Australian Country Party, is the second oldest political party in Australia. It has survived for 90 years and never been unrepresented in the Commonwealth parliament, despite constant predictions of its imminent demise. Staunchly conservative, it has concentrated exclusively on representing regional Australia, including the primary and mining industries. Its successes in policy development have at times been eyed with envy by its opponents and detractors and it has wielded more weight than its parliamentary numbers should allow. While a comparatively stable and united group, the party has had its internal problems – Coalition with the Liberal Party, for instance, has always been a thorny issue – and has had to face the challenge of changing demographics in heartland regions. This is the extraordinary story of a political organisation, large in grassroots members yet small in parliamentary terms that has made an enormous, and largely unrecognised, contribution to Australia's social and economic development.