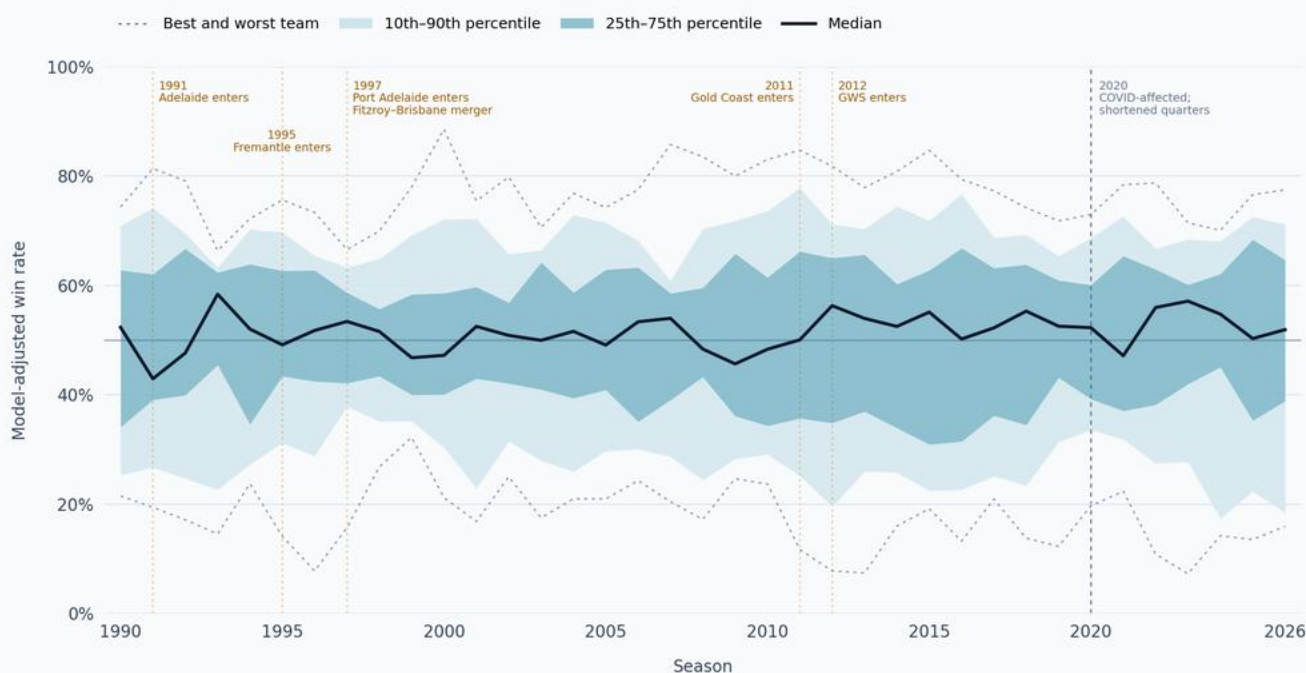


The competition tightened in the 1990s, but the spread widened again in the 2000s.

AFL team-strength spread

Model-adjusted win rate controlling for fixture differences | 1990-2026



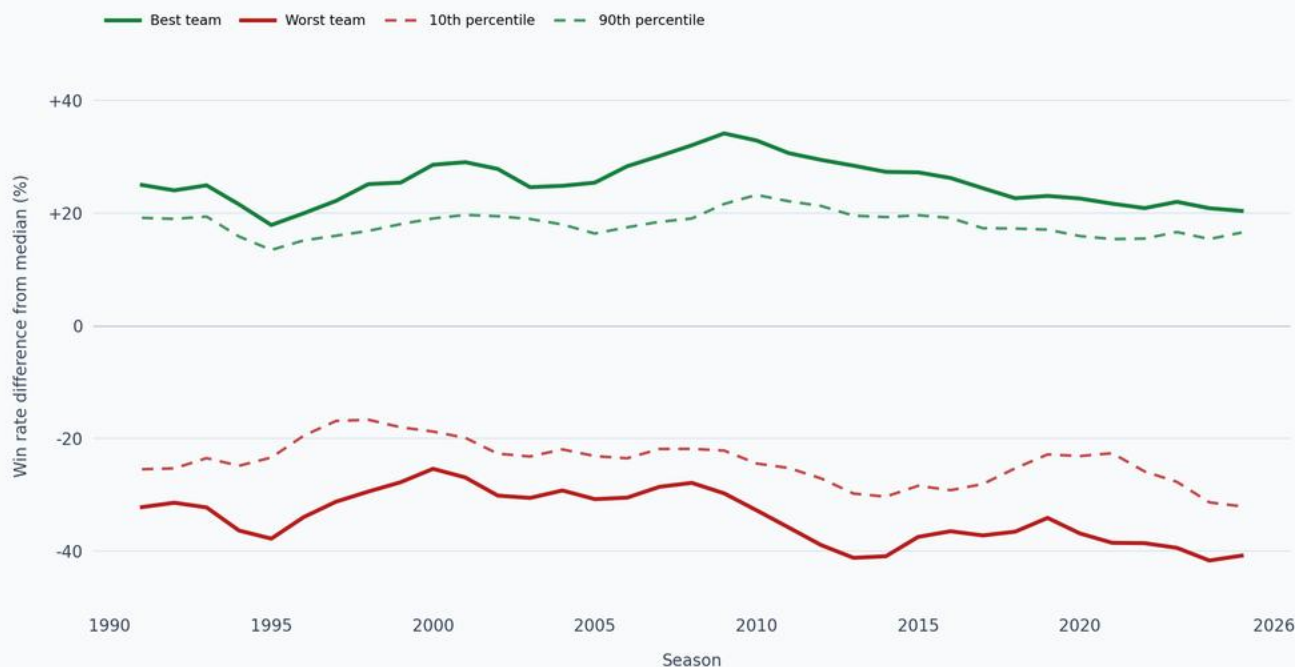
WHAT THE CHART SHOWS

The AFL was at its most even between 1995 and 2008, but since then the spread between the top and bottom teams within each season has opened up.

Recent seasons look close among leading teams while the weakest sides sit further from the middle.

More even at the top, less even at the bottom.

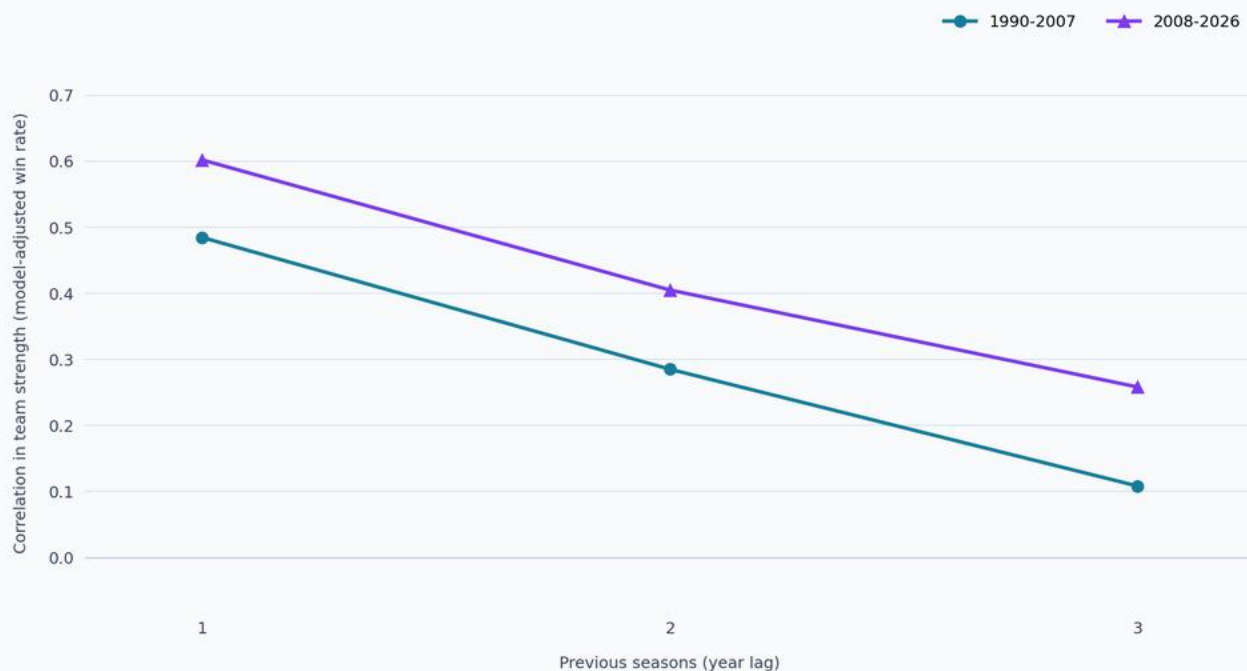
Model-adjusted win rate relative to median (middle) team, 5-year moving average | 1990-2026



Team performance is now more consistent across seasons.

Team strength has become more persistent across seasons

Correlation of team strength with team strength in previous seasons | Higher values mean less mobility



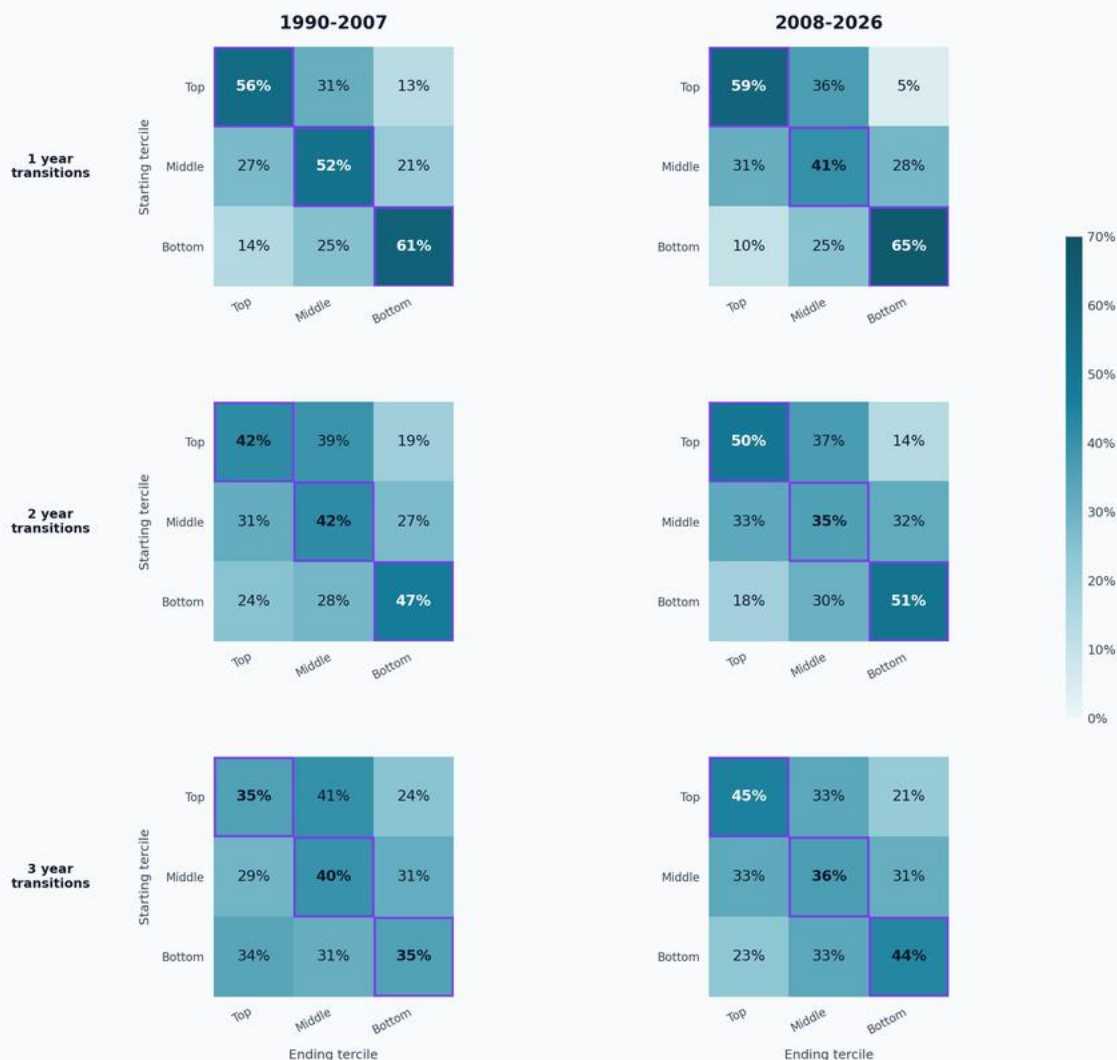
WHAT THE CHART SHOWS

Team strength is more strongly correlated across one-, two- and three-season intervals in 2008–2026, signalling lower mobility.

Moving between tiers has become harder.

Team strength movement over one to three seasons

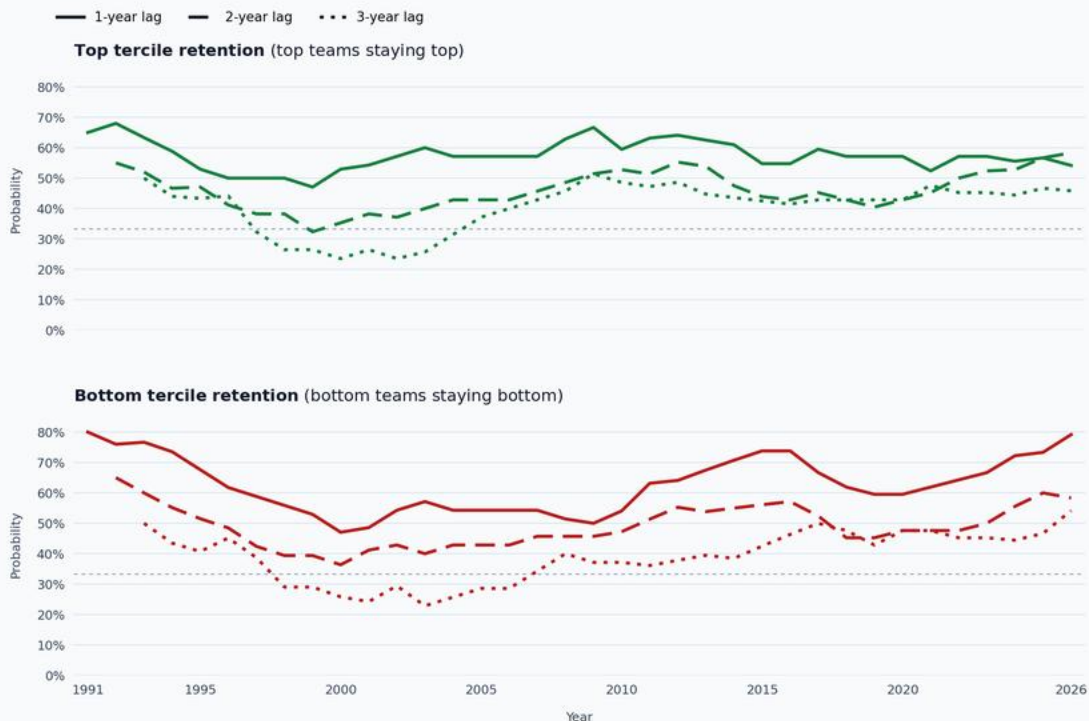
Transition probabilities for team strength terciles (top third, middle third, bottom third) by era and lag



Top teams are staying up for longer, bottom teams are staying down for longer.

The AFL's top and bottom tiers have become stickier

Seven-year centred probabilities for one-, two- and three-year transitions



WHAT THE CHART SHOWS

Since around 2000, top and bottom teams have become increasingly likely to stay in their tier.

The AFL is still more even than the old VFL.

How concentrated are premierships and Grand Final appearances?

Herfindahl concentration relative to random allocation among the active teams in each season



WHAT THE CHART SHOWS

In the 1970s and 1980s, VFL premierships were dominated by a few teams. Overall, the AFL era has been more even.



Three things to take away

1

More even at the top

Leading teams are closer together, while the weakest teams sit further from the middle.

2

Less movement between tiers

Team strength persists for longer; top and bottom teams have both become stickier.

3

Still better than the old VFL

Balance remains much stronger than in the 1970s and 1980s, despite slipping since 2008.

Read the full analysis

nealhughes.net/afl-balance/

