



ELECTION 2013 – OVERVIEW AND ISSUES

By Bob Lawrence*

All the opinion polls for the September 7 Federal Election have the Coalition and Labor polling at similar levels. The winner currently looks like being determined by the side that can attract the greatest number of the currently undecided voters, and/or makes fewer errors.

We have put together a handy cheat sheet for Election Night, a la Antony Green, to help you track the progress and anticipate the outcome of the biggest power play in Australian politics in recent times. Will it be a landslide or 2010 all over again? You decide.

What to look for?

Labor and the Coalition will focus on inner-city marginal seats held by each side in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane; that is, seats that would change if three percent of voters, on a two-party preferred basis, changed their vote to the opposite side.

Labor needs to win five more seats in the 150 House of Representatives, mainly from the Coalition, to govern in its own right. The Coalition needs to win four seats (see table on the following page).

The positions of the two major parties as the campaign takes off, shows Labor reinforcing its fiscal leadership through the Global Financial Crisis, with the Coalition keen to promote real private sector jobs by lowering the imposts on the business sector. Its weapons of choice so far are removing the carbon tax and mining tax as well as cutting company tax to 1.5% as an offset Tony Abbott’s maternity leave levy on big business. The tax cut is a clear win for medium and small incorporated businesses that are likely to direct this saving into capital investment and expanded employment.

Senate

The Senate comprises Senators from the Coalition (34), Labor (31), Greens (9), Democratic Labor Party (1), and one independent Senator, Nick Xenophon (SA).

Of the 76 Senate seats, 40 are to be contested; six in each state and two in each of the territories. However, there is a time delay in the result, as the new Senators do not take their place in the Senate Chamber until July 1 2014. Any Senator losing his/her place in the election remains in parliament until June 30.

Senate places to be contested in 2013

| STATE/TERRITORY | SEATS | LABOR | COALITION | GREENS | OTHER |
|------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------------|
| NSW | 6 | 3 | 3 | | |
| VIC | 6 | 3 | 3 | | |
| QLD | 6 | 3 | 3 | | |
| SA | 6 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 (Independent) |
| WA | 6 | 2 | 3 | 1 | |
| TAS | 6 | 3 | 2 | 1 | |
| ACT | 2 | 1 | 1 | | |
| NT | 2 | 1 | 1 | | |
| 2013 Election | 40 | 18 | 18 | 3 | 1 |
| 2010 Elected (not contested) | 36 | 13 | 16 | 6 | 1 (DLP) |
| Total | 76 | 31 | 34 | 9 | 2 |

Source; Australian Parliament, Canberra

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Marginal seats

Below are lists of seats deemed marginal. The percentages are on the two party preferred vote.

Coalition Marginal Seats

| | | | | |
|-----------|-----|------------------------------|-----|-------|
| Hasluck | WA | Ken Wyatt | LIB | 50.57 |
| Boothby | SA | Andrew Southcott | LIB | 50.62 |
| Aston | VIC | Alan Tudge | LIB | 50.67 |
| Dunkley | VIC | Bruce Billson | LIB | 51.04 |
| Brisbane | QLD | Teresa Gambaro | LNP | 51.13 |
| Macquarie | NSW | Louise Markus | LIB | 51.26 |
| Forde | QLD | Bert Van Manen | LNP | 51.63 |
| Solomon | NT | Natasha Griggs | CLP | 51.75 |
| Casey | VIC | Tony Smith | LIB | 51.86 |
| Longman | QLD | Wyatt Roy | LNP | 51.92 |
| Canning | WA | Don Randall | LIB | 52.19 |
| Dawson | QLD | George Christensen | LNP | 52.43 |
| Swan | WA | Steve Irons | LIB | 52.53 |
| Bonner | QLD | Ross Vasta | LNP | 52.82 |
| Macarthur | NSW | Russell Matheson | LIB | 53.02 |
| Bennelong | NSW | John Alexander | LIB | 53.12 |
| O'Connor | WA | Tony Crook (v Lib/retiring) | NWA | 53.56 |
| Flynn | QLD | Ken O'Dowd | LNP | 53.58 |
| Sturt | SA | Christopher Pyne | LIB | 53.60 |
| Fisher | QLD | Peter Slipper (stood as LNP) | IND | 54.13 |

Government held marginal seats

| | | | | |
|-------------|-----|--|-----|-------|
| Corangamite | VIC | Darren Cheeseman | ALP | 50.28 |
| Deakin | VIC | Mike Symon | ALP | 50.60 |
| Greenway | NSW | Michelle Rowland | ALP | 50.88 |
| Robertson | NSW | Deborah O'Neill | ALP | 51.00 |
| Lindsay | NSW | David Bradbury | ALP | 51.12 |
| Moreton | QLD | Graham Perrett | ALP | 51.13 |
| Banks | NSW | Daryl Melham (retiring) | ALP | 51.45 |
| La Trobe | VIC | Laura Smyth | ALP | 51.66 |
| Petrie | QLD | Yvette D'Ath | ALP | 52.51 |
| Reid | NSW | John Murphy | ALP | 52.68 |
| Lilley | QLD | Wayne Swan | ALP | 53.18 |
| Brand | WA | Gary Gray | ALP | 53.33 |
| Capricornia | QLD | Kirsten Livermore (retiring) | ALP | 53.68 |
| Lingiari | NT | Warren Snowdon | ALP | 53.70 |
| Page | NSW | Janelle Saffin | ALP | 54.19 |
| Grayndler | NSW | Anthony Albanese (Green second) | ALP | 54.23 |
| Eden-Monaro | NSW | Mike Kelly | ALP | 54.24 |
| Blair | QLD | Shayne Neumann | ALP | 54.24 |
| Parramatta | NSW | Julie Owens | ALP | 54.37 |
| Dobell | NSW | Craig Thomson (To run as an Independent. No ALP candidate yet endorsed) | ALP | 55.07 |

Source; Australian Electoral Commission

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Election Issues

The Economy

While other issues may generate emotional headlines, the economy is the issue and one on which Labor carries a great deal of baggage. It offers as its main defense the fact that Australia has ridden out the Global Financial Crisis under its rule.

The Coalition's attack on the economy is focused on the debt generated by Labor despite inheriting a substantial surplus from the Howard Government six years earlier. Through successive Budget deficits (despite promising surpluses several years ahead) it has led Australia into its worst ever debt position relative to Gross Domestic Product. The Coalition blames the Labor Government's persistent high spending and the massive stimulus package for blowing out Australia's debt to unsustainable levels.

In the inner city areas where the marginal seats will determine government, a biting issue is the cost of living. The Carbon Tax debate was so linked to this issue that it generated the Rudd retreat from it. Management of the economy is a government breaker. Linked to the cost of living and the associated lifestyle are other major issues including employment, housing and access to healthcare and education.

Both sides aim for continued economic growth, employment generation and low interest rates.

Leadership

The instability of the ALP leadership has been an ongoing problem for Labor; combined with the fact that there has been massive churn in Cabinet positions. This has allowed the Opposition to paint the Government as unstable and inconsistent in its leadership and direction. Changing back to Kevin Rudd has greatly improved Labor's chances, but a negative legacy remains from the Gillard years with many voters remaining switched off and immune to Labor's messages.

Asylum seekers

The treatment of asylum seekers has been an ongoing hot debate since before the 2001 election.

As a point of policy differentiation, Labor opposed the Coalition's policy in the 2007 election and implemented its changes once in office. In its second term, Labor shifted ground under the influence of a wave of illegal immigration and adopted a policy

similar to the Howard Government stance, including offshore processing.

On his return to the leadership in July, Kevin Rudd unveiled a further Howard-like stance, condemning asylum seekers who arrive by boat without a visa to a life in Papua New Guinea and no chance of settling in Australia. The Coalition has since strengthened its policy by putting the military and the Immigration Minister in charge of border protection

Child care/Parental leave

There is bi-partisan support for parental entitlement to a period of paid leave after the birth or adoption of a child. On childcare, Labor, Coalition and the Greens emphasise the need for flexible and affordable arrangements for parents, the rollout of the National Quality Standards for childcare and a pay boost for childcare workers.

Labor is proposing to scrap the current baby bonus of \$5,000 for a first child and \$3,000 for subsequent children and replace it with an additional supplement to recipients of Family Tax Benefit Part A. The Coalition described removal of the baby bonus as "objectionable", but it will support the savings measure. It is unlikely to proceed with the planned increase to Family Tax Benefit Part A.

Environmental Policy

An emissions trading scheme was initially proposed by Kevin Rudd in the lead up to the 2007 Election but he postponed the idea. Julia Gillard, as the new Prime Minister, loudly refused to implement any carbon pricing in the 2010 Election campaign, but afterwards, in her agreement with the Greens, revived the idea of a carbon price in the form of a Carbon Tax. Her rating in the opinion polls suffered thereafter.

On his return to leadership, Mr Rudd terminated the Carbon Tax. Labor now promises to move to an emissions trading scheme by July 2014, one year earlier than planned, which the Coalition says is a Carbon Tax under a different name.

The Coalition plans to scale back staff in the newly created Climate Change department, and merge it into the Environment Department. Under its "Direct Action" policy a number of initiatives and agencies set up by Labor will be abolished.

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