

ISSUE 1912

"In Support of Progress" Newsletter

Date: 20 May 2019

The Federal Election Part 3

The Federal Election - Part 3

It may be presumptuous to comment on the election result so definitively with so many votes still to be counted, but some preliminary observations are in order.

1 The level of pre-polling is increasing with upwards of 25% casting their votes before polling day. It's obviously not just a matter of convenience, it's something else. People simply don't want to be harangued. They have made up their mind, even before the policy launches, which in some way suggests the policies are not as important as issues (eg climate), the personalities of the leaders, or the turnoff of the negative campaigning. And it is a huge turn-off.

"I've voted, so I can now turn off."

2. The government has won an extraordinary victory, and all credit should go the Prime Minister who ran an exemplary campaign. In a very real sense was a one-man band. A high risk strategy, to be sure, if he failed, but he didn't.

3. The PM stayed on message. His positive message – I'm here for ALL Australians was well regarded. "How good is ...?", was folksy and resonated, and it blended well with the open attack on Labor's tax policy "Labor wants to take your money", "Labor wants to set up a retirement tax", "You cant trust Labor", Labor Labor Labor etc

4. Labor needs to ask the question – what went wrong? Was it the message, the size of the target, or the way it was prosecuted. Labor had a big agenda for reform, but its leader was neither popular nor convincing, a fact that had been known for some time. It was obvious that he would be targeted, and he was. Labor went off message, or rather had too many half-baked messages. It even invoked a class warfare debate "the big end of town", forgetting that everyone with super felt threatened.

5 The Clive Palmer big spendathon did not do him any good in terms of votes, but its message did add to the suspicion that Labor was untrustworthy, and if I can be cynical, probably protected his assets.

6 I am not a fan of GetUp, its structure or its tactics. Activity without responsibility. The GetUp campaign was successful in replacing a conservative Liberal with a moderate Liberal-leaning candidate in Warrighah, but that was all.

7. The Labor leadership after the election is in denial and are still arguing that their issues should have been accepted. They weren't. It reminds me of that famous Snedden comment "We didn't lose, we just didn't win". Labor, you didn't win.

8. There were two defining issues in the campaign – tax, and climate. The tax reforms were picked off by the government as being a "pensioner tax", and became a liability for them. I predicted at the outset that climate would hi-jack the election, and it did. Labor lost itself in the climate debate, and lost Queensland as a result.

9. A map of the new electoral landscape is illuminating, and an initial analysis shows Labor has failed spectacularly in the regions. Labor simply does not "get" rural Australia, and in my view its loss in rural Australia was encapsulated in the climate debate. The **perceptions** garnered around the climate debate were that water in rivers meant no water for farmers and towns, "saving" forests meant no more work for forestry workers, no more coal meant no more jobs for miners. To emphasise the point, Labor suffered a swing of almost 15% in the NSW Hunter electorate, a traditional Labor stronghold and a "coal" electorate.

Adani is for Queensland what the Hydro dams debate was for Tasmania 35 years ago. Outsiders interfering. Labor was seen to be opposed to working people in these places, just as it was for people in forest jobs at the beginning of the decade.

10. In Tasmania, the three southern seats behaved as expected, with sitting members with comfortable margins retaining their seats.

Not so in Braddon and Bass, which were shamelessly bribed by both parties. A campaign "against the south" bore fruit, aided and abetted by Labor's 'gifts' of \$50m to MONA and \$25m to the AFL, seen by the north and promoted by the government as being southern-centric grants. The ALP must have had rocks in their head to have made such offers, particularly as no attempt was made after the event to argue the case for such extraordinary largesse.

11. On the other hand, given that the state government played a prominent part in such a shameless campaign (when it also pays good money to AFL teams and promotes an AFL side), it will be difficult for them to argue they did not promote a continuing north-south schism in the state. It could well come back to bite them.

12 The following table shows the percentage of the formal vote won by the three parties in 2019 (and in brackets the corresponding percentage in 2016).

	BRADDON	BASS	LYONS	FRANKLIN	CLARK	TAS
lib	37.8 (42.0)	42.5 (39.2)	39.8 (40.6)	30.9 (35.2)	16.9 (19.9)	33.6 (35.4)
alp	32.1 (39.6)	35.0 (39.6)	37.0 (40.4)	44.7 (46.8)	20.4 (23.0)	33.8 (37.9)
green	4.5 (6.8)	10.3 (11.1)	9.3 (9.2)	16.1 (13.5)	9.6 (10.6)	10.0 (10.2)
Wilkie					50.4 (44.0)	
Other	25.5 (11.6)	12.2 (10.1)	13.9 (9.8)	8.3 (4.4)		15.6 (9.6)

(NB Other excludes the seat of Clark).

The percentages as shown in the Table (and it is accepted that the 2019 data is preliminary, being figures published on Monday but prior to the counting of all votes) show that all three parties in Tasmania suffered a decline in their primary vote, and in almost every seat. The only exceptions were the Liberals in Bass and the Greens in Franklin.

Surprising for a campaign that was hijacked by the climate debate, that the Greens did not increase their vote from 2016. For all the moral outburst, how relevant is it really?

What is this message from this table? It's simple really – the major parties are losing touch, and people are looking for alternatives. Its been happening for some time now – it isn't a new phenomenon. As the saying goes: Those who don't learn from history are doomed to repeat it"