

New South Wales Election Preview

Written by The Conversation

The New South Wales election will be held next Saturday 28 March. The lower house has 93 single-member seats. At the [March 2011 election](#), the Coalition won 69 of these 93 seats, to 20 for Labor, 1 Green and 3 Independents. Labor has since gained the seats of Miranda, Newcastle and Charlestown at by-elections, and the Nationals gained the Independent held seat of Northern Tablelands. Due to Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) investigations, the [Coalition currently holds 61 seats](#), with six elected Coalition members sitting as Independents.

There has been a major redistribution since 2011, and this has resulted in Labor losing a net two seats, one to the Coalition and one to the Greens. [Including by-elections](#), the Coalition starts with 68 seats, to 21 for Labor, two Greens and two elected Independents.

However, Miranda is not counted on the pendulum as a Labor seat. I agree with this decision because [Labor's Miranda win in October 2013](#), with a swing of 26%, was simply too freakish. Miranda will very probably be regained by the Liberals at this election, especially as Labor's popular incumbent, Barry Collier, is retiring again, having come out of retirement to contest the by-election.

Like Queensland, NSW uses optional preferential voting (OPV) for its state elections. For a description of how OPV works, see my [Queensland election preview](#). OPV can distort the Two Party Preferred (2PP) percentages, especially when there is a huge primary vote gap, as was the case at the last NSW election.

To see this, look at the [2011 Wikipedia results](#). The Coalition won 2.32 million 2PP votes and Labor 1.29 million. If you divide these numbers into the total *formal* votes (4.15 million), the Coalition gets 56.0% to Labor's 31.2%, a gap of 24.8%; this is 0.8% less than the Coalition's primary vote advantage of 25.6%. But because we divide the 2PP by the number of *non-exhausted* votes (3.62 million), we get a 2PP of 64.2% for the Coalition and 36.8% for Labor, a 28.4% gap.

Assuming no changes in preference flows, the net primary vote swing required for Labor to

break even on 2PP is thus 12.4%, and not 14.2%. That is, something like 38.7% for the Coalition and 38.0% for Labor would be enough for a 50-50 2PP split. However, it is likely that preference flows will change from 2011.

In 2011, the [overall preference distribution](#) of all minor parties was 24.1% to Labor, 20.7% to the Coalition and 55.2% exhaust. Thus Labor gained a mere 3.5 votes for every 100 minor party votes. Even in Labor's wins in 2003 and 2007, the gain rate was respectively 10.5 and 8.4 votes per 100 minor party votes. However, the 2015 Queensland election was not just a return to preference flows under successful Labor governments, it went much further.

A [Galaxy poll](#) taken last Wednesday and Thursday has the Coalition leading by 54-46 using 2011 preferences, unchanged on last week. Primary votes are 45% for the Coalition (up 1), 36% for Labor (steady) and 10% for the Greens (steady).

An [Ipsos poll has the Coalition](#) leading by 58-42 by 2011 preferences, a 2% gain for the Coalition since early February. Primary votes are 47% for the Coalition (up 1), 32% for Labor (down 2) and 13% for the Greens (up 1). Using respondent allocated preferences, the Coalition's lead drops to 54-46. At the Federal level, Ipsos has been leaning to the Coalition by at least 1%, so this poll probably favours the Coalition, but it confirms the trend away from Labor. This poll was conducted last Thursday to Saturday with a sample of 1230.

In other findings from Ipsos, Baird's approval rating was steady at 60% and his disapproval rating up 4% to 22% for an excellent net rating of +38. Electricity privatisation is supported by 31% and opposed by 62%. If money from privatisation is spent only on infrastructure, privatisation support rises to 48% and opposition falls to 47%.

It is possible that the concentration of Coalition votes in Sydney's north shore and safe country seats could enable Labor and left-aligned Independents and Greens to win a majority of the seats with a minority of the 2PP. In 1995, Labor won the election with an estimated 49.0% 2PP.

If we sort all the seats by 2PP from best to worst for Labor, the median seat is the middle seat of the sorted list. [Antony Green has a table](#) showing the difference between the median seat and the statewide 2PP for Labor since 1984. The median seat has been more Labor-friendly than the state at six of the last eight elections, with no difference in 1991. At the 2011 election,

the median seat was better for the Coalition because Labor simply had few votes to lose in the ultra safe Coalition seats.

If the 2011 swing pattern is reversed, with Labor gaining smaller swings in the safe Coalition seats, then the median seat could also revert to being more Labor-friendly than the state as a whole. As a result, a repeat of the 1995 Labor win cannot be ruled out, but it is looking increasingly unlikely that Labor will come close to 50% 2PP.

When the previous sitting member is defeated, the new party gains a “double sophomore surge” because the personal vote of the old member is lost, and the new member gains a personal vote at the next election. Despite gaining 29 seats from Labor in 2011, sophomore effects are not very important at this election, because [12 of the seats gained in 2011](#) had retiring Labor members. A further five seats have already been lost at by-elections, or the sitting Coalition member has been forced to the crossbenches by ICAC investigations.

In 2011, Labor was virtually wiped out in the regions, and will need to make big gains there to have any chance. It has been reported that the [North Coast National seats of Ballina, Tweed and Lismore look vulnerable](#), despite having over 20% margins. On Federal voting patterns, Labor would be very competitive in these seats, and perhaps the coal seam gas issue will move these seats to Labor. A ReachTEL poll of [Ballina](#) has Labor leading by 52.2-47.8 after respondent allocated preferences, though they trail the Nationals by 9.5% on primary votes, and rely on a 20% Greens vote to win.

The Greens currently hold [Balmain](#), and notionally hold the new seat of [Newtown](#) following the redistribution. Polling has the Greens vote about the same as in 2011, while Labor’s vote has increased, so the Greens could struggle to hold either of these seats. Indeed, a ReachTEL poll of Newtown has Labor ahead by 56.5-43.5 on respondent-allocated preferences.

The [ReachTEL individual seat](#) polls were not all good news for Labor. [Strathfield](#) is held by only 6.4% by the Liberals, and Labor would have expected to regain it easily at this election, but they only lead by 50.8-49.2 on respondent allocated preferences. Strathfield is a seat where the Liberals benefit from a “double sophomore” effect. These ReachTEL polls were conducted last Thursday night with samples of 690 in Ballina, 635 in Newtown and 680 in Strathfield.

Upper House

The NSW Upper House has 42 members, with half elected at each election by proportional representation. There is no group ticket voting system that is used in the Senate; instead, voters who just vote “1” above the line will have their votes expire within their chosen party. Voters may give preferences to additional parties by numbering “2”, “3”, etc, above the line. A valid below the line vote requires at least 15 preferences.

The quota for election is 1/22 of the vote or 4.55%. However, because many votes exhaust, seats can be won on about half of that quota, so a little more than 2% can be enough to win a seat. In 2011, [Pauline Hanson](#) almost won a seat on 2.5% of the vote, but the Coalition and Greens just passed her on preferences.

The 42 current members are 19 Coalition, 14 Labor, 5 Greens, 2 Christian Democrats and 2 Shooters & Fishers. Unlike the Senate, the President of the NSW upper house, currently a Liberal, can only vote when there is a tie. The Coalition needs both the Christians and the Shooters to pass legislation that Labor and the Greens oppose.

The members elected in 2007 will be up for election this year. In 2007, Labor won 9 seats of the 21 up at that election, the Coalition 8, Greens 2, Christians 1 and Shooters 1. The Labor 2011 wipeout produced a lopsided upper house that year, with the Coalition winning 11 seats to 5 for Labor, 3 Greens, 1 Christian and 1 Shooter.

The Coalition will not be able to repeat its 2011 success at this election, but if they win 9 or 10 seats at this election, they would have 20 or 21 total seats, and would be able to pass legislation backed by only one of the Shooters or Christians, rather than both, assuming that both these parties win one seat each at this election.

8 quotas is 36.4% of the upper house vote, and 9 quotas is 40.9%. However, owing to OPV, the Coalition would probably win a 9th seat with about 8.5 quotas, or 38.6%. In 2011, the Coalition’s upper house vote [was 3.5% lower](#) than its lower house vote, despite drawing the “A” column. Recent Federal and Victorian elections have shown big drops in major party support for upper house elections compared to the lower house. To be confident of winning a 9th upper house seat in NSW, I think the Coalition’s lower house vote will need to be at least

44%.

Owing to the 2011 wipeout election, Labor and the Greens cannot hope to gain control of the upper house until at least 2019, when the seats elected in 2011 are next up. If Labor wins this election, they will find it difficult in the upper house.

To earn a group voting square above the line, groups must stand at least 15 candidates in NSW. At this election, [there are 24 groups](#) and one column for ungrouped candidates. Two of the groups ran only two candidates, and [will not receive](#) an above the line box. The “No Land Tax” Party has drawn the “A” column, with the Coalition in “E”, Labor in “K” and the Greens in “S”. Owing to the 15 candidates per group requirement, there will be a record total of 394 upper house candidates on the ballot paper at this election, an increase of 83 on 2011.

Morgan’s Other State Polls

I discussed [Morgan’s NSW SMS poll](#) in Wednesday’s article. [Morgan has now published](#) results for the other states; these polls were taken on the 13-15 March, and comparisons are with similar polls in mid-February. Sample sizes were 1260 in Victoria, 990 in Queensland, 800 in WA, 815 in SA and 432 in Tasmania. Sample sizes for the minor states are bigger than in previous Morgan state polls.

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In Victoria, Labor has recovered some ground after February’s big 4.5% drop, and now leads by 56-44, a 1.5% gain. Primary votes are 43% for Labor (up 1.5), 38% for the Coalition (down 1.5) and 12% for the Greens (up 0.5).

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In Queensland, the new Labor government has not received a honeymoon bounce, and trails by 51-49, a 0.5% gain for Labor. Primary votes are 44% for the Liberal National Party (LNP) (steady), 36.5% for Labor (down 1) and 9.5% for the Greens (up 1.5). Queenslanders seem more willing to vote for the LNP now that Newman has gone.

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In WA, Labor leads by 50.5-49.5, a 0.5% gain for Labor. In SA, Labor's lead is an unchanged 53-47. In Tasmania, Labor leads the Liberals by 41-39 on primary votes with the Greens on 15.5%; a hung Parliament would result from these votes under Tasmania's Hare Clark system. [Kevin Bonham is very sceptical](#) of Morgan's Tasmanian figures.

Adrian Beaumont does not work for, consult to, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has no relevant affiliations.

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