

'Newbie' leaders are yet to make their mark with voters

Written by The Conversation USA

This is the first Federal election campaign in which the leaders of all three major parties, Turnbull, Shorten and Di Natale, have fought a national campaign as leaders, so this will be the first opportunity for most of the electorate to get to know and to assess them.

Even Turnbull, the better known and recognised of all three, has already had to endure being unknown, when an elderly passenger failed to recognise him as he pretended to be a train conductor.

Turnbull also has to deal with the fact that those who felt they knew him, and held certain expectations as to how he would perform, have become confused, if not disappointed, that he no longer seems to stand for what he used to, nor to be as strong a leader, or as decisive, as they had hoped.

Indeed, one of the challengers in his seat of Wentworth is running on the platform that he wants the "Old Malcolm" back – the Malcolm who used to believe in marriage equality, climate change, and substantive tax reform, and so on.

Shorten's career seemed to have peaked with his constructive and empathetic role as a union leader at the time of the Beaconsfield mine disaster, and having almost faded out of sight with the ascension of Turnbull, so it would only be natural for the electorate to assess him now in a broader leadership role and, in particular, whether he had been able to shed the tag as just an ex-union leader.

The public forum last Friday evening was the first opportunity, with the exception of their roles in Parliament, for most to see them go head-to-head, before a mixed audience of reportedly "swinging voters".

Recognising that the questions from the audience were somewhat slanted in favour of Shorten, the result was a victory to Shorten, 42-29, but with 29 still undecided. However, more importantly, perhaps, the electorate could start to see some of their personality traits appear.

'Newbie' leaders are yet to make their mark with voters

Written by The Conversation USA

It was clear that Turnbull doesn't like to share his sandpit with anyone; he clearly likes to be the center of attention; to dominate the play; he certainly doesn't like to have to wait his turn, while the other kids have a chance to play.

On the other hand, Shorten is not the sort of kid that you would like to have to share your sandpit; he'd want to hog the bulldozer, and keep all the shovels.

On the whole, it was a very respectful encounter, but with both sides were struggling to achieve just the right pitch for their messages.

Turnbull has difficulty explaining himself in "plain English", rather he comes across more as a "banker", constrained by jargon, and as somewhat "elitist". So, it is easier for the ALP to tag him as being "out of touch", and his policies as "unfair", and designed to "favour the top end of town".

By comparison, Shorten relates more easily to "Joe average", seeming to speak "his" language, and perhaps to even better understand "his" circumstances and challenges, But, he carries the legacy of the bad Rudd/Gillard/Rudd experience, and his roles therein, and a sense that, despite his "transition" (probably the key word of this campaign) from his days leading the AWU and as a member of the ACTU Executive, he is still beholden, and union dominated.

In policy terms, both sides lack adequate detail, passion, and conviction; they are much more reliant on slogans, than substance. So, it's very difficult for the electorate to believe that either side will actually deliver on what they commit, even if they do come to believe them.

My sense is that the electorate, having mostly lost respect for, and trust in, both major parties, simply feels compelled to have to vote for the lesser of two evils; and when they have cast their vote, then having to live with the evil of two lessers.

So, enter the Greens, as a third alternative, perhaps to hold the balance of power (perhaps along with the "X Factor" Nick Xenophon) in both Houses in a hung Parliament – surely the worst outcome!

'Newbie' leaders are yet to make their mark with voters

Written by The Conversation USA

Clearly, Di Natalie is no Brown or Milne! He is decidedly much more political, and pragmatic, and much more inclined to “deal” to ensure power, than to die for “principle”.

He is knocking off the extremes and excesses of past Green positions. He has been pushing both major parties to respond to the possibility of a “deal” in the event of a hung Parliament. As such, he can't be underestimated in terms of his electoral appeal, either as a protest vote, or because he can strike a chord.

Obviously, we still have a long way to go. It will be most instructive as to how these leaders actually perform in coming weeks and particularly, just how much they let their skills, attitudes, values and personalities become determinant in the electoral outcome.

Disclosure

John Hewson is chair of the Asset Owners Disclosure Project, and was federal leader of the Liberal Party from 1990 to 1994.

Read more <http://theconversation.com/newbie-leaders-are-yet-to-make-their-mark-with-voters-59583>