

The West Australian election will be held in three weeks, on 11 March. A [ReachTEL poll has a 50-50 tie](#), a 2 point gain for the Liberals since a mid-January ReachTEL. After excluding 5.5% undecided, primary votes are Liberals 35.4% (down 0.6), Nationals 8.4% (up 2.3), Labor 35.0% (up 0.1), One Nation 11.7% (down 0.1) and Greens 6.0% (down 0.6). This poll was conducted Wednesday night from a sample of 1650.

ReachTEL's recent state polling has appeared to lean to the Coalition parties, and a late January Newspoll gave Labor a 54-46 lead. Internal polling also suggests that Labor is doing better, though that is not worth much.

The WA Liberals will preference One Nation in the upper house in return for One Nation directing preferences to the Liberals in the lower house. As group voting tickets are used in the upper house, Liberal votes are likely to help One Nation far more in the upper house than One Nation's How to Vote card directions will help the Liberals in the lower house.

In other findings from the poll, Labor leader Mark McGowan leads Colin Barnett as better Premier 53-47, down from 56-44; this is the closest margin in WA ReachTEL polls. 31% approve of the Liberal-One Nation deal, and 54% disapprove. When asked why they supported One Nation, 29% said they liked its "anti-Muslim policies", 27% said they disliked the major parties, and 23% said they liked the party's "overall vision for WA".

Given Barnett's unpopularity in Newspoll, an 8.5 year-old government, and an unpopular Federal government of the same party, I would expect Labor to win this election. If the Liberals survive, it will probably be due to WA's strong conservative lean at recent Federal elections.

WA upper house uses group voting tickets, and is severely malapportioned

The WA upper house has 36 members, all up for election every four years. There are three city and three country regions, with each region returning six members. As a result, half of the upper house is from outside Perth, even though Perth made up [77% of WA's population](#) at the 2011 Census.

WA ReachTEL: Liberals gain to move to tie

Written by Adrian Beaumont, Honorary Associate, School of Mathematics and Statistics, University of Melbourne

Weighting in favour of (usually) rural voters is defined as malapportionment, not gerrymandering. Gerrymandering refers to drawing boundaries to explicitly favour one party, and is most commonly practised in the US. In WA, Labor used to do fairly well in the Mining & Pastoral region, but their vote has collapsed there.

At the 2013 election, the [Liberals won 17 of 36 upper house](#) seats, the Nationals 5 and the Shooters 1, for a right total of 23. Labor won 11 and the Greens 2, for a left total of 13.

[Ben Raue says](#)

that if the three country regions were merged, and country representation was reduced to 6, the right would have had a 14-10 majority.

Last year, the Coalition and the Greens cooperated to abolish the group voting ticket system for the Senate that had allowed micro parties to win seats on as little as 0.5% of the vote. However, the group voting system is still law for upper house elections in Victoria, SA and WA, and will be used at this WA election.

With six vacancies per region, a quota is 1/7 of the vote or 14.3%. Group voting tickets allow parties to pass on their preferences at nearly 100% rates, and so candidates with small portions of a quota can win seats. There is some speculation that a [Fluoride Free candidate could win](#) a seat on just 0.2% of the vote.

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