

The March 3 Tasmanian election, announced on Sunday, will be the opening contest in an election-heavy year that will see three state polls, with the expectation of federal byelections as well.

But, Malcolm Turnbull says, people won't be casting a national vote until the due time of 2019 – although Labor is working on contingency plans for this year in case Turnbull changes his mind or is foxing.

Of special interest at the state level is the South Australian March 17 election, in which Nick Xenophon – who left the Nick Xenophon Team in the Senate to [return to SA politics](#) – is shooting for the balance of power.

His strong support in the polls has injected high uncertainty into the battle; before Xenophon's surprise entry the state Liberals had been confident they had a good prospect of unseating the long-term Labor government.

The other state poll is in Victoria in November, with the federal Liberals already at work to assist their state colleagues by weighing into the law-and-order issue – particularly the debate about African gang violence.

There is speculation that the Tasmanian contest could result in a hung parliament.

ABC election expert Antony Green said that Will Hodgman's Liberal government could only afford to lose three seats to forfeit its majority and it was almost certain to lose two of those.

If it lost its majority, the Liberals would still probably have more seats than Labor, Green said.

Tasmania has a proportional representation voting system. The Liberals have 15 seats in the

Tasmania the first test in an election-laden year

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

25-member lower house, Labor seven and the Greens three. The election will be a test for the Jacqui Lambie Network.

Green said that if Hodgman again won a majority, he would be only the second Liberal premier of the state to be re-elected to majority government.

“Tasmanian elections are always tough for the Liberal pParty,” Green said. Labor’s fortunes had improved with the installation of a new young leader, Rebecca White, 34, who has been in the position less than a year.

Hodgman on Sunday ruled out deals with minor players, saying “we will govern alone or not at all”, warning of “the risk of going back to the political uncertainty and instability” of a hung parliament.

White had a similar theme as the campaign began formally. “We will not do any deals with any minor parties. We will not do any deals with the Greens. And we will not govern in minority.”

[Poker machines](#) are set to be a significant issue in the state campaign, with White promising to ban them in pubs and clubs.

In federal politics, the citizenship saga that dominated 2017 is set to cause more political heartaches and opportunities this year, with the [future of Labor’s David Feeney](#), who holds the Victorian seat of Batman, now before the High Court.

There is a general expectation that Feeney, who hasn’t been able to produce documentation renouncing his British citizenship, will be knocked out of parliament by the court – and that Labor will run someone else at the subsequent byelection, where it would be struggling to hold the seat against the Greens.

Labor’s ACT senator Katy Gallagher is also [before the High Court](#) – but if disqualified, she

would be replaced without a byelection.

The government has threatened to refer to the court three other Labor MPs caught up in the dual citizenship crisis – Justine Keay (Braddon, Tasmania), Josh Wilson (Fremantle, Western Australia) and Susan Lamb (Longman, Queensland).

The prospect of byelections in Labor seats means Opposition Leader Bill Shorten starts the year under some pressure, although Labor remains ahead in the polls.

Shorten will seek to get on the front foot with an address at the National Press Club on Tuesday – a week before the resumption of federal parliament – that will include some announcements of policy.

The government says its main themes for this year will be the economy and jobs, lower taxes, and national security. In legislative terms, it is pushing its tax cuts for larger companies, but so far they are being thwarted by Labor and the crossbench.

It is talking up the just-agreed deal for a [Trans-Pacific Partnership](#) that, while not embraced by the US, has put paid to the earlier suggestions – including from Shorten – that a TPP became impossible once Donald Trump refused to be part of it.

Trump has now said that: “I would do TPP, if we made a much better deal than we had”.

In Davos last week he said: “The deal was terrible, the way it was structured was terrible. If we did a substantially better deal, I would be open to TPP.”

Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce told Sky on Sunday that Australia wanted the US to be part of the agreement and if “minor changes” were required to bring the US on board, “that should be done”.

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Labor is reserving its position on the issue until it sees the detail of the deal, due to be signed in March. Legislation would be needed for the agreement's implementation, and it is expected that Labor would eventually support it.

Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

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