

The March 2013 Western Australian election: first fixed election date delivers a resounding victory for the Barnett government¹

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Historically, the pattern in Western Australia (WA) has been for respective governments to serve their full terms. In August 2008, Premier Alan Carpenter broke with tradition and called an election some six months early, which contributed to an all-party call for fixed term governments. Carpenter's Labor government lost power at that election, and in a 'hung parliament' the new Liberal Party Premier Colin Barnett began the quest for fixed term elections in WA. Complications around the entrenchment provisions in the relevant legislation meant a fixed election date was easier to achieve than a fixed four year term. Consequently, the amendments fixed the date for Legislative Council elections to occur on the second Saturday in March every four years, beginning 9 March 2013, and provided for a conjoint general election to occur when the Legislative Assembly is dissolved or expires after 1 November in the prior year. Hence, the second Saturday in March from 2013 was the agreed date for the first election under the new provisions. Widespread speculation occurred as to how a fixed date would alter the campaign strategies of the political parties. The Premier contended the campaign would not begin until after Australia Day, 26 January 2013, but the parliamentary parties were in full election mode even before the New Year had begun. The December 2012 *Mid-Year Financial Projections Statement* underscored the challenges facing both sides of politics, which included rapid population increase, a decline in mining and GST revenues, and a warning about the loss of the Triple A credit rating.² The major polls predicted a win to the incumbents, supporting the 'iron law' of first term governments being returned to office. In fact, only two first term governments in WA have lost an election since the First World War. In 1933 it occurred in the midst of the Depression and in 1974 John Tonkin's one seat Labor majority could not be maintained when faced with an economic downturn and a troubled Whitlam Labor government in Canberra.

1 Appreciation is due to Antony Green for the electoral aggregates, preference and swing calculations included in this article and to Judy Ballantyne, Parliamentary Library Director in WA for permission to use data included in the electoral analysis prepared by Antony Green for the Parliamentary Library, 2013.

2 See Peter Kerr, 'Buswell turns on cautious mode,' *Weekend West*, 19 January 2013, p. 53.

REDISTRIBUTION AND CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES

The redistribution for the 2013 election boundaries was released in October 2011. Although 44 of the 59 Legislative Assembly seats were altered to some degree, it was a relatively minor distribution with fewer than 9 per cent of WA's registered voters finding themselves in different electorates. Key Government seats with improved margins were Riverton, which increased from 0.2 per cent to 2 per cent and North-West Central, where former Labor member turned National Vince Catania went from -3.1 to + 3.3 per cent. Some of the Liberals' redistribution losers were: Ian Britza in Morley, whose margin fell from 0.9 per cent to become notionally Labor at 0.8 per cent; Michael Sutherland in Mt Lawley who was reduced from 2.2 to 1.7 per cent; and Albert Jacobs in Ocean Reef, which fell from 4.4 to 2.7 per cent.³ A uniform two-party swing of only about 2.5 per cent was necessary for Labor to govern in its own right.⁴ The seats Labor needed to win or retain were Albany, Balcatta, Morley, Forrestfield, Kimberley, Kwinana, Mt Lawley, Pilbara, Riverton, and Wanneroo.⁵ Both parties were keen to gain underdog status and Opposition Leader Mark McGowan, who had replaced Eric Ripper in January 2012, ruled out the prospect of an Alliance with the National Party.⁶ Premier Barnett also dampened speculation that the Liberals would govern alone if the opportunity arose.⁷

NATIONALS

The Nationals launched their campaign as early as October 2012 in Toodyay, a small town to the east of Perth. The major calls for the party were made in mid-2012, not least being Leader Brendan Grylls' risky decision to forego his safe Central Wheatbelt seat to contest the Labor held seat of Pilbara.⁸ Incumbent Pilbara member and long serving Labor MLA Tom Stephens held the seat with a comfortable 7.2 per cent two-party preferred margin, but had signalled his intention to resign at the next election. The Nationals' Agricultural Region MLC Mia Davies was pre-selected to compete for Grylls' Central Wheatbelt seat, and MLC Wendy Duncan also sought to move to the Assembly seat of Kalgoorlie. Striving to win Kalgoorlie was also risky for the Nationals, although their stakes improved when the retiring former Labor Minister turned Independent John Bowler gave public support to Duncan. The Nationals had won widespread rural support for the delivery of the Royalties for Regions policy, yet encountered internal dissent as the campaign unfolded, particularly in their heartland Agricultural Region. Former Leader Max Trenorden, an MP since 1986, gave consideration to running against Davies in the Central Wheatbelt, but eventually ran as an Independent in the Legislative Council. Trenorden and his supporters contended the

3 Daniel Emerson, 'Rumblings after Redistribution', *West Australian*, 13 October 2012, p. 21.

4 Antony Green (2011), 2011 Redistribution WA: Analysis of Final Electoral Boundaries, Perth, WAn Parliamentary Library Election Papers Series) October, p. 6.

5 Daniel Emerson, 'The 10 crucial seats that will decide who governs', *West Australian*, 12 January 2013, p.16.

6 See Gareth Parker, 'Labor rules out Nationals tie', *West Australian*, 26 December 2012, p. 11.

7 Daniel Emerson, 'Rumblings after redistribution', 13 October 2011, p. 21.

8 Alex Massey, 'Power play for the Pilbara', *The Weekend West*, 22-23 December 2012, p. 50.

party was losing its direction by its failure to support keeping three grain freight rail lines operating in the eastern wheatbelt. This stance was given substance when Hamish Cowan, publicly supported by his brother the former Nationals' Leader Hendy Cowan, joined the ticket. The metropolitan press considered the challenge may be successful, particularly given the Nationals' reluctance to have their policies costed, despite Grylls' claim that they would be paid from Royalties for Regions Funds.⁹ As it turned out the election results for the Nationals were good, but they did lose the strategic balance of power position in the Legislative Assembly.

GREENS (WA)

The Greens (WA) chose 21 January 2013 to launch their 'True Progress' campaign on the steps of Parliament with the promise of 'a cleaner, more sustainable, more affordable and more caring campaign.'¹⁰ Giz Watson had decided to leave the relative safety of her North Metropolitan seat in the Legislative Council and stand for the South West Region. Despite having gained above 11 per cent of the primary vote for both Houses at the 2008 election, there was a realisation that the Greens would struggle to hold their four upper House seats. Both national and state polling indicated, at least temporarily, that the Greens had slipped to a primary vote of about eight per cent. Another factor was former national Greens Leader Bob Brown's retirement in mid April 2012. Brown's replacement Christine Milne, had struggled to achieve her predecessor's favourable ratings.

LABOR LAUNCH

Mark McGowan officially launched Labor's state election campaign on 28 January 2013 suggesting it was time to draw a close to the 'phony campaign', declaring a 'referendum on priorities'. Privatisation or asset sales in health and water were opposed by Labor and concerns were raised about the State's mounting debt and the government's focus on discretionary projects such as the Elizabeth Quay development on the Perth Esplanade. Commitments to better education and health were reiterated, although *Newspoll* data showed Labor was no longer the preferred party to handle these policy areas. Despite Eric Ripper's record as Treasurer during Labor's previous period of office, the polls gave the Liberals a clear lead on which party could better manage the economy.¹¹ However, Labor took the front foot early in the campaign with its 'Metronet' rail proposal that was said to 'permeate the psyche of congestion-weary motorists looking for a way out'.¹² Labor also pushed the issue of rising household costs, such as electricity and water, which had emerged in the May 2012 budget as a problem for the Government. Metronet, which featured a line to the airport, captured the electorate's mind like few other issues

9 Gareth Parker, 'Nationals refuse to let promises be costed', *West Australian*, 5 March 2013, p. 7.

10 See *Bunbury Mail*, 21 January 2013.

11 'Newspoll :ALP no longer seen as best choice for health, schools', *The Australian*, 12 February 2013, p. 6.

12 Gary Adshead, 'Labor is on track with its Metronet promise', *West Australian*, 31 January 2013, p. 18.

in contemporary times. The Government responded with its proposal for a Metropolitan Area Express (MAX) light rail network and track to the airport. Treasurer Troy Buswell dubbed Labor's project 'Metronot'¹³, claiming it would cost \$6.4 billion, a figure reportedly calculated by the Public Transport Authority.¹⁴ McGowan countered that the project would cost \$3.8 billion, and would create almost 4000 jobs in construction and supply.¹⁵ Then two weeks before the election, in an attempt to demonstrate integrity in budgeting, McGowan stated Labor would axe key Barnett projects to fund Metronet. These included the Burswood Stadium and the MAX light rail, as well as withdrawing the government's equity contribution to the Oakajee Port and Rail project, and indefinitely deferring plans for a new museum.¹⁶ The Liberal Party's own forecasts on MAX were not 'watertight' as the Treasurer indicated that it would be partly funded from federal sources, which were assumed rather than guaranteed. Another weakness for the government in the transport debate was its failure to build the promised Ellenbrook rail link in West Swan, a seat that Labor was struggling to hold. Headlines such as 'rail flop to punish Libs'¹⁷ were good news for incumbent Labor MLA Rita Saffioti, who went on to hold the seat with a 2.5 per cent increase in her primary vote. However, late in the campaign Labor was disappointed when the West Coast Eagles and Fremantle Dockers football clubs went public with their support for the Burswood Stadium, rather than Labor's plan to rejuvenate the 'traditional home of football' at Subiaco Oval.¹⁸

LIBERAL LAUNCH

When the Liberal Party launched its campaign on 17 February, then federal opposition leader, Tony Abbott, gave the keynote address. In Abbott's view, the Barnett Government had 'become a model for all governments that we run or hope to run, right around our country'.¹⁹ Moreover, Barnett's electoral success was the first in a series of defeats for Labor governments, including New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and the Northern Territory. Barnett was proud to appear with Mr Abbott, using the latter's appearance as a point of attack on Labor, which had pointedly kept Prime Minister Julia Gillard out of the campaign picture. In a pitch to parents, Barnett promised to spend \$57 million to appoint 15 child health nurses in government schools with every child receiving a health check. Premier Barnett also signalled his intention to develop a 'science culture' in the state's economy, based on mining, petroleum and agriculture, with a new office for Science to be established within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. Barnett was able to contend that the WAn economy was expected to perform at above trend levels as high as 6 per cent

13 Gareth Parker, 'Metronet costed at \$5.246b', *West Australian*, 1 March 2013.

14 'PTA costs Metronet at \$6b' Buswell, AAP, 15 February 2013.

15 Corey Stephenson, 'Labor's Metronet to create 4000 jobs', *WAtoday.com.au* producer, 10 February 2013 p.1.

16 Gareth Parker, 'Labor wields axe to fund rail', *West Australian*, 14 February 2013, p. 8, and Beatrice Thomas and Gareth Parker, 'Subiaco stadium shift rouses rivals', *West Australian*, 15 February 2013, pp. 6-7.

17 Daniel Emerson, 'Rail flop to 'punish Libs'', *West Australian*, 4 March 2013, p. 12.

18 'Stadium by 2017-AFL stars back Libs Burswood plan', *The Australian*, 8 March 2013.

19 Natalie Gerritsen, 'Barnett is role model for Abbott', *Australian Financial Review*, 18 February 2013, p. 9.

in 2012–13²⁰ and that he had led a ‘good ethical’ government that had taken strong positions on schools, health and law and order.²¹

The amalgamation of local government bodies did not emerge as a major issue in the campaign, despite the fact that three mayors from the western suburbs offered their candidacy as Independents to try to weaken the government’s resolve to reduce the number of metropolitan municipalities from 30 to about 12. The government spoke in terms of seeking an electoral mandate, but gave an indication it would not force amalgamations.²² Meanwhile, Premier Barnett’s pre-election vow to revitalise Scarborough, Leighton and Port beaches appeared to gain widespread support from local councils, community groups, beachgoers and businesses.²³

The perennial election theme of law and order emerged with the demand by the Police Union for the major parties to commit to recruiting an extra 800 officers over four years. McGowan promised an extra 500 police officers, while Barnett spoke of 350 more officers with the claim that 180 had been added during 2009 and 2010. Barnett then upped the stakes indicating that ‘his first legislative priority would be to set minimum jail terms for adult home invaders committing serious physical or sexual assaults’.²⁴ He then asserted that McGowan’s reluctance to say he supported mandatory minimum jail terms was ‘entirely consistent with Labor’s soft approach to crime’.²⁵

The commencement date for the caretaker conventions coincided with the issue of the writs in February. Soon after, the Government was compelled to negotiate with the Australian Nurses Federation, who claimed the caretaker conventions were ‘neither legally binding nor inflexible rules’. Anxious to avoid industrial action, Barnett agreed to an in-principle 14 per cent pay rise from 1 July 2013 with no loss of conditions, which was seen as a strategic ‘back down’. Yet on the other hand, when the WAn Prison Officers Union sought a 15.5 per cent wage rise, the Premier ruled out making an offer during the caretaker phase.²⁶

THE LEADER’S DEBATE

The Leader’s debate followed negotiation concerning its format as well as number, with the opposition seeking as many as three. Calls for the inclusion of Nationals Leader Brendan Grylls or the Greens (WA)’s Giz Watson were ignored. Eventually, on 19 February a panel of five political journalists was moderated by ABC newsreader James McHale. A range of

20 *Government Mid-year Financial Projections Statement*, December 2012, Government of WA, p.1.

21 Gareth Parker, ‘Premier puts science front and centre at campaign launch’, *West Australian*, 18 February 2013, p.1.

22 Bret Christian, ‘Lib revolt clouds mergers’, *Cambridge Post*, 21 September 2013, p. 1/75, see also Michael Hopkin, ‘Colin Barnett ‘lied’ to voters over council mergers’, *The Reporter* (online), 13 July 2013.

23 Kate Campbell and Jacqui Bahr, ‘Battle lines drawn in the sand’, *West Australian*, 28 January 2013, p. 6.

24 See Beatrice Thomas and others, ‘Barnett puts crackdown on crime top of agenda’, *West Australian*, 7 February 2013, p. 11.

25 P. Taylor and N. Perpetch, ‘Buswell claims the credit as debt risk fails’, *The Australian*, 8 February 2103, p. 8.

26 Kim Macdonald, ‘Prison Officers go on strike’ *West Australian*, 1 March 2013.

predictable questions were answered by Barnett and McGowan, who remained 'unscarred' with neither landing 'a knockout below'.²⁷ The campaign featured other public debates, which while informative were not judged to turn the electoral tide. On 26 February both Leaders addressed an Australian Christian Campaign Lobby forum, where both reiterated their position that in the event issues such as euthanasia and same-sex marriage were debated in Parliament, members should be permitted a conscious vote. The Premier opposed such legislation while the Opposition Leader expressed his support.²⁸

The Premier's health came into focus in the last week of the campaign, with rumours surfacing that he was unwell and would eventually hand over the Premiership to controversial Treasurer Troy Buswell. Even on election-eve Buswell was in the throes of a very public defamation action against Adele Carles, the Independent Green MLA for Fremantle with whom he had previously had a personal relationship.²⁹ The Premier advocated a mutual settlement between the two and was annoyed about queries about his health and commitment to a full term of office. Barnett questioned the source of the rumours and was prompted to declare that at 62, 'I am healthy, I have not had a day in hospital in my life [and] I don't think I have had a day off work in the last three years.'³⁰ He announced his intention to serve until the next fixed date election of 11 March 2017.³¹ The Polls indicated the Liberal tide was strong, but some strict guidelines were imposed on Liberal candidates for the campaign, including instructions to be circumspect with the media and avoid getting drawn into issues out of their immediate area of responsibility or electorate.³² Presumably this was to include the judicious use of social media, which had emerged for the first time on a wide and often significant scale.

'ALL OVER BAR THE VOTING' IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

For fifteen months before the election the opinion polls favoured the Liberal and National Alliance. The only real sign of improvement for Labor came in May 2012 when new Opposition Leader Mark McGowan enjoyed better readings than his predecessor Eric Ripper.³³ However, by October 2012 Labor's ratings had slumped. Prior to the election *Newspoll* and *Galaxy* confirmed Labor's electoral troubles in two party terms, with Barnett still well ahead of McGowan as preferred Premier.³⁴ At the same time federal Labor was proving to be a major 'drag' on state Labor, after having secured only 31 per cent of the primary vote in WA at

27 Gareth Parker, 'Leaders debate line-ball as both show strengths and weaknesses', *West Australian*, 20 February 2013, p. 1.

28 Kate Emery, 'Leaders tackle some tricky moral queries', *West Australian*, 26 February 2013, p. 7.

29 Gary Adshead, 'Decision time in Freo melodrama', *West Australian*, 24 January 2013, p. 21.

30 Jonathan Barrett and Julie-Anne Sprague, 'Ageist jibes get under Barnett's 'young' skin', *Australian Financial Review*, 7 March 2013, p. 7.

31 Daniel Emerson and Gareth Parker, 'I'm not sick: Barnett', *West Australian*, 6 March 2013.

32 Cited in Brentan Holmes, 'WAn State Election 2013', Commonwealth Parliamentary Library, p. 8

33 Gareth Parker, 'Barnett's honeymoon over as reality bites', *Weekend Australian*, 14-15 July, 2012, p. 6.

34 Paige Taylor and Nicholas Perpitch, 'Barnett stretches pre-poll margin', *Australian* 14 January 2013, p. 1,6 & Joe Spagnolo, 'Barnett tipped to wipe Labor off map', *Sunday Times*, 24 February 2013, p. 4.

the 2010 federal election. Heated debate over the distribution of GST revenues, displeasure with the Commonwealth mining and carbon taxes, and the vexed issue of asylum seeker boats continuing to reach the WAn coastline, resulted in a low Federal Labor primary vote in the published polls. Then on the morning of the state election the *Newspoll* read as 58–42 per cent to the Liberals in the two-party preferred vote.³⁵ Professor John Phillimore observed the situation appeared to be ‘all over bar the voting’.³⁶ It is noted that by polling day, some 15 per cent of the electorate had voted early through postal and pre-poll voting, and in fact only 72.25 per cent of voters cast an ‘ordinary’ vote at a polling station.

The ABC’s resident psephologist Antony Green calculated the final two-party preferred vote at 57.2 per cent to the Coalition and 42.8 per cent to Labor. Green’s summary of the state-wide totals is reproduced below in Table One.

Table 1: WA General Election, 9 March 2013: Legislative Assembly first preference votes state-wide³⁷

Party	Seats Won	Change	Votes	% Votes	Swing
Liberal Party	31	+8	557,917	47.10	+8.71
Labor Party	21	-6	392,470	33.13	-2.70
Greens WA	-	-	99,437	8.40	-3.52
National Party	7	+2	71,694	6.05	+1.18
Independent	-	-4	33,028	2.79	-1.55
A.C.	-		21,451	1.81	-0.77
Family First	-		7,039	0.59	-1.35
Unaffiliated	-		1,439	0.12	+0.12
C.E.C.	-				-0.11
Formal			1,184,475	94.00	-0.68 Change
Informal			75,577	6.00	0.00 Same
Total Votes			1,260,052	89.21	+2.73 Change
Roll			1,412,533		

A.C.-Australian Christians, previously Christian Democratic Party; C.E.C.-Citizens Electoral Council. Note: The Change column is based on the 2011 redistribution and takes account of the Fremantle by-election. Compared to the actual results of the 2008 election, the change column would read Liberal (+7), Labor (-7), National (+3) and Independent (-3).

35 Paige Porter and Nicolas Perpetch, ‘Barnett’s Libs storm towards second term’, *Weekend Australian*, 9–10 March 2013, p1,8.

36 John Phillimore, ‘WAn Election: All Over Bar the Voting’, *The Conversation* (online), 5 March 2013.

37 Antony Green (2013), ‘2013 WAn State Election: Analysis of Results: Election Paper Series No. 1/ May 2013’, WAn Parliamentary Library and Information Services, p.5. Permission kindly granted to publish the results. Statistics cited are from this source unless otherwise indicated.

The electoral win was one of the most convincing in WA outside the depression and war, with the result seen as 'the biggest loss by an opposition to a government since 1917'.³⁸ Malcolm Mackerras still called it a 'respectable loss' noting Labor's 'extraordinary ability to sandbag its seats, as the Coalition had wasted a sizeable share of its votes'³⁹ in as many as 20 seats. If the two-party vote had have prevailed across the State, Labor would have been relegated to some 18 seats. Perhaps the most outstanding example of this sandbagging was former Olympian Peter Watson, the Labor Member for Albany since 2001, who defied the trend and won with a swing in his direction of 1.8 per cent.

Nevertheless, the Liberal Party gained six seats from Labor in the Legislative Assembly in addition to two previously held by Independents to attain a majority in its own right. Brendan Grylls' win in the Pilbara was a significant achievement for the Nationals, who improved their seat count by two, but were denied the 'balance of power status' that had prevailed in the previous Parliament. Wendy Duncan won the seat of Kalgoorlie with the help of Labor preferences, but a close contest in the seat of Eyre cost them a vital seat as Labor preferenced the sitting Liberal Graham Jacobs rather than the National's local favourite Colin De Grussa. In fact, rather than preferencing the Nationals over the Liberals, for the 2013 election Labor exercised discretion as to the direction of preferences on a seat by seat basis. In three of the seats that Labor preferenced the Nationals, there was an average flow of preferences of 79.2 per cent. In the four seats that Labor preferenced the Liberal over the National Party member, there was an average flow of preferences of 55.2 per cent.⁴⁰ Predictably, in the seat of North West Central, Labor preferenced against former Labor member Vince Catania who controversially defected to the Nationals in 2009. In Moore, a seat vacated by former Speaker Grant Woodhams, Labor directed its preferences to the National's Shane Love to help him come from behind the Liberal's Chris Wilkins on the first preference count. Despite these preference choices, some Labor insiders expressed concern about the spread of the Nationals' influence.

Proof that parties 'How to Vote' cards can be significantly defied by voters took place in the newly named seat of Warren-Blackwood in the state's south west, where the Minister for Agriculture and Food, Forestry and Housing, Terry Redman campaigned with the realisation that both the Greens (WA) and the Labor Party⁴¹ opposed his support for GM canola farming. Both parties changed their preference choice to the high profile Liberal candidate Paul Colyer. Redman had reportedly almost conceded when it became clear that he had 33.5 per cent of the first preference count and 53.1 on a two two-party preferred vote basis to ensure his victory. This occurred with the help of a significant share of Green and Labor preferences, not expected from a reading of the 'How to Vote' cards.

Another surprise defeat was John Hyde in the seat of Perth, not considered at risk in numerous tabulations of key seats. A well resourced local campaign, including large-scale bill boards by challenger Eleni Evangel, resulted in a 10.2 per cent two party swing to

38 Malcolm Mackerras, 'Sandbagging key to limiting losses', *The Weekend Australian*, 22-23 June 2013, p. 18.
39 *ibid.*

40 Refer aforementioned paper by Antony Green, '2013 WA State Election: Analysis of Results', p. 3.

41 Labor's Disallowance Motion on GM Canola in the Legislative Assembly was defeated on 10 March 2010.

the Liberals. It was later speculated that Labor's campaign of opposing the Liberal's 'Perth-centric' policies may have militated against Hyde who was disappointed at his party's opposition to a new Perth Museum. In the nearby seat of Mount Lawley, Liberal candidate Michael Sutherland won with a swing of 9.6 per cent, which brought into question the wisdom of recycling former Labor Minister Bob Kucera as a candidate. Kucera had lost Labor pre-selection in 2008 on the basis that he was too old, and apparently could not over-come his absence from the last election.

Labor was unable to make inroads even when an incumbent faced a problem. In the days prior to the election newly appointed Minister for Corrective Services Murray Cowper was confronted with an allegation that he had failed to obtain approval to clear vegetation. However, Cowper was able to improve his primary vote in the seat of Murray-Wellington by nearly five per cent.⁴² There was some comfort for Labor when Mick Murray held the seat of Collie-Preston by just 56 votes, and veteran former minister Michelle Roberts won in Midland by a margin of only 24 votes. Significantly too, Labor's Josie Farrer in the Kimberley stayed ahead of her rivals, with a jump in turnout from 62 to 73 per cent reflecting a keen contest. Farrer, a local indigenous woman, retained the seat following the retirement of Carol Martin, the first indigenous woman elected to an Australian parliament.

Other retirements however, did not bode well for Labor. The seat of Belmont, held by retiring former Labor Leader and respected Treasurer Eric Ripper, was lost to Glenys Godfrey with a 13.2 primary vote jump to the Liberals. In Balcatta, where veteran John Kobelke had retired, a swing of 9.5 per cent two party preferred to Liberal Chris Hatton was recorded. Clearly enunciating the party line helped the Liberal team in expected close contests. Mike Nahan had won Riverton in 2008 by a handful of votes and in 2013 had a swing of 13.6 per cent in his favour after the 2011 redistribution. Nahan faced a serious challenge from Hannah Beazley, the daughter of Labor stalwart Kim Beazley, reinforcing the plight of the Labor brand in WA, which was unable to make ground even with high profile candidates.

The capacity of other incumbent first term Liberals to gain swings in their direction helped the Party to gain a majority of 31 seats in the 59 seat Legislative Assembly. Key seats were Jandakot, where high profile Parliamentary Secretary Joe Francis increased his vote by 10.9 per cent and Southern River, comfortably retained by Liberal Peter Abetz following his success in 2008. In Forrestfield Labor's Andrew Waddell faced the poll with a slender 0.2 per cent margin and after only one term lost the seat to his 2008 Liberal opponent Nathan Morton. The latter increased his primary vote by 5.5 per cent, with the two-party preferred vote margin at 52.1 to 47.9 per cent.

First term member Paul Miles in Wanneroo sat on a 1 per cent margin, but won his seat with a primary vote jump of 11.8 per cent, or 10.2 per cent in two party preferred terms. In neighbouring Joondalup, a 'key battleground' seat,⁴³ newcomer Jan Norberger had a surprisingly comfortable victory over three-term Labor incumbent Tony O'Gorman. Even the high profile John Quigley, the Shadow Attorney General renowned for his electoral appeal,

42 See Daniel Emerson, 'Private eye hunts DEC leaker', *West Australian*, 17 June 2013, p. 5. The Department of Environment and Conservation later apologised that the evidence found its way to the Labor party.

43 Beatrice Thomas, 'Offerings galore in seat to win', *West Australian*, 1 March 2013, p. 26.

had a two-party preferred vote swing against him in the newly named seat of Butler. This pattern was replicated in Ocean Reef, where first term Liberal Albert Jacobs secured 65.1 per cent of the primary vote, the second highest for the Party behind John McGrath in South Perth with 67.0 per cent. Liberal Andrea Mitchell had a primary vote of 60 per cent in Kingsley, marginally below Police Minister Liza Harvey, who captured 61.8 per cent of the primary vote with a high 12.1 swing in two-party preferred terms. Following the 2011 redistribution, the seat of Morley was shown as a Labor gain with sitting Liberal Ian Britza running for the second time against former television personality, Reece Whitby. Britza surprised everyone with an astounding 14.7 per cent increase in his vote amidst debate about the influence of former Labor member, the late John D'Orazio.⁴⁴

Bassendean, a safe Labor seat previously held by Martin Whitely was comfortably won by Dave Kelly, a former union secretary who had to carry a 5.2 per cent swing against Labor in that seat. Kelly had been pre-selected ahead of Whitely, who was vocal in his criticism of the influence of the union movement in the party, although he did indicate that Kelly had the credentials to be an effective parliamentarian. Successful Peter Watson had also complained about Labor's penchant for parachuting union officials into plumb Labor seats⁴⁵ and high profile former Minister Alannah MacTiernan decried the undue influence of the unions in Labor Party affairs.⁴⁶ McGowan reportedly said he would attempt to represent wider community interests and not 'sectional interests' in his position as party leader.⁴⁷ Only four seats, namely Churchlands, Albany, Rockingham and Central Wheatbelt, recorded a two-party swing to Labor.

INDEPENDENTS

The outcome in 2013 was marked by the absence of Independent members, whose influence had been most discernible in the 38th 'hung parliament'. Dr Elizabeth Constable retired from the seat of Churchlands as the longest serving woman in the WAn Parliament. Across her 22 years in the Assembly, Constable achieved substantial majorities in consecutive polls and was succeeded by the well-credentialed Liberal Sean L'Estrange. Dr Janet Woollard lost the seat of Alfred Cove after winning four close polls from 2001, heavily dependent of preferences. She was a high profile parliamentarian who arguably suffered electorally when family matters drew adverse media criticism. In 2013 she was not preferred by the Labor Party and most of the other candidates, and lost the seat to Liberal Party newcomer, Dean Nalder, grandson of former Country Party Deputy Premier Crawford Nalder. Another Independent John Bowler, who regularly voted with the National Party, retired from the seat of Kalgoorlie. Finally Adele Carles, who was elected for the Greens (WA) in the seat of Fremantle at a by-election in 2009, lost her seat. Carles, who became an Independent Green in 2010 after her relationship with Liberal Treasurer Troy

44 See Beatrice Thomas, 'D'Orazio legacy lives on as son backs Lib', *West Australian*, 13 February 2013, p. 7.

45 Beatrice Thomas and Amanda Banks, 'ALP Union roots not to blame', *West Australian*, 13 March 2013.

46 Beatrice Thomas, 'MacTiernan hits out at ALP power plays', *West Australian*, 3 April 2013, p.5.

47 Beatrice Thomas, 'McGowan vows to fight union push for control', *West Australian*, 2 April 2013, p.6.

Buswell became public, was no match for Simone McGurk, a former Unions WA secretary, who comfortably recaptured Fremantle for Labor.

Attempts by high profile local mayors in the blue ribbon seats of Cottesloe and Nedlands yielded a poor result. Their promising campaigns lost momentum when it became clear that the incumbent government would be returned.⁴⁸ Cottesloe Mayor Kevin Morgan secured only 11.4 per cent of the primary vote compared to Premier Colin Barnett's formidable 64.7 per cent. In nearby Nedlands Mayor Max Hipkins faced Environment Minister Bill Marmion, but was unable to secure a win with a primary vote of only 13 per cent. Further proof that Independents had at least temporarily lost electoral appeal was exhibited in Kwinana where Labor Deputy Leader Roger Cook, with the experience of a term in Parliament, easily thwarted the challenge from Kwinana Mayor Carol Adams, who in 2008 went much closer to defeating Cook. Moreover, the persistent criticism of a 'hung parliament' in Canberra, with prominent Independents supporting the Gillard Labor government in office, did not auger well for Independents seeking entry to Parliament in the West.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

The swing to the Liberal Party in the Assembly was also replicated in the Legislative Council where the state-wide vote was 47.6 per cent, a rise of some 8 per cent. Labor's vote slipped in the Council by 3.63 per cent, compared to a drop of 2.7 per cent in the Assembly. In the North Metropolitan Region the party secured 4 of the 6 seats with Peter Katsambanis, a member of the Victorian Legislative Council from 1996 to 2002, gaining the fourth seat for the Liberals. Fortunately for Labor, it retained its existing 11 seats. However, the Greens (WA) suffered a state-wide 2.7 per cent decline which resulted in the loss of two seats in the Council.

Whilst standing candidates in both houses helps to ensure the distribution of 'how to vote' cards, the proportional representation voting system in the Legislative Council is a better means of securing seats for so called 'minor parties'. However, no group of voters appeared to singularly support the Greens in that House. The Nationals' vote was 4.88 per cent, whereas in the Assembly it was a higher 6.05 per cent.⁴⁹ Notably the Nationals' upper House vote across the state was 3.33 per cent below that of the Greens, but with a return of three more seats. Clearly vote weighting was still having an impact in the Legislative Council.

The newly registered Shooters and Fishers Party candidate Rick Mazza, one of 41 on the Legislative Council ballot paper, narrowly gained a seat in the Agricultural Region. Mazza's first preference vote was 3.29 per cent (and initially 0.2300 of a quota), but with surplus votes from the major parties, and votes from eliminated minor candidates, he was able to achieve a quota (about 14.2 per cent of the vote). Interestingly, a slightly higher first preference of 3.71 per cent in the Mining and Pastoral Region did not yield a seat for the Shooters and Fishers, a party that advocated for small government, with their key policy being that law abiding citizens should have the right to own firearms for legitimate purposes.

48 Kate Bastians, 'Liberal blue puts Nedlands at risk', *West Australian*, 15 January 2013, p.11.

49 The result in the Legislative Assembly was attributed in part to an outstanding personal vote in Wagin by Terry Waldron, the Minister for Sport and Recreation; Racing and Gaming.

Table 2: WA General Election 9 March 2013: State-wide total first preference votes Legislative Council⁵⁰

Party	Seats Won	Change	Votes	% Votes	Swing/Change
Liberal Party	17	+1	583,500	47.62	+8.02
Labor Party	11	-	398,260	32.51	-3.63
Greens (WA)	2	-2	100,624	8.21	-2.87
National Party	5	-	59,804	4.88	-0.44
AC	-		23,877	1.95	-0.37
S and F	1	+1	21,765	1.78	+1.78
Independents	-	-	19,658	1.60	+0.37
Family First	-	-	16,760	1.37	-1.15
Unaffiliated	-	-	975	0.08	-0.17
Others Parties	-	-	0	0.00	-1.55
Formal			1,225,223	97.17	
Informal			37,706	2.83	
Total/Turnout			1,126,929	89.27	+2.92
Roll			1,412,533		

AC-Australian Christians; S and F-Shooters and Fishers

Former National, Max Trenorden, a sitting MLC leading 'an Independent' ticket was unsuccessful, although his first preference vote was 6.59 per cent (and initially 0.4614 of a quota). As Malcolm Mackerras observed, the system is called 'proportional representation', but is really 'semi-proportional'.⁵¹ The Nationals, as in the previous Parliament, held a balance of power in the Council, with the Liberal's Barry House again elected President, a position that holds a casting rather than deliberative vote.

Another feature of the Legislative Council's election result was the return of six women for the-East Metropolitan Region. Consequently, the ratio of women in the Council remained high at 41.7 per cent, although below the 47.1 per cent of the previous Parliament. Notably the representation of women in that House has remained the highest of any legislature in Australia, with the national average in upper Houses being 36.4 per cent. Conversely, the number of women in the Legislative Assembly had remained at 22 per cent, compared with the national average in lower Houses of 25 per cent.⁵²

50 Antony Green, '2013 WAn State election: Analysis of Results: Election Paper Series No. 1/May 2013', WAn Parliamentary Library and Information Services, p.31. Permission kindly granted to publish the results. A.C. Australian Christians; S and F. Shooters and Fishers

51 Malcolm Mackerras, 'Sand bagging key to limiting losses', *The Weekend Australian*, 22-23 June 2013, p. 18.

52 Composition of Australian Parliaments by party and gender, as at 26 June 2013, Commonwealth Parliamentary Library.

REFLECTIONS ON THE FIXED-TERM ELECTION

As in recent elections the 'Presidential' type campaign was conducted with much focus on the party leaders, accompanied by the omnipresent publication of opinion polls. Notably though, *Westpoll* was not published as regularly as for previous elections. Fixed election dates supposedly facilitate carefully considered pre-selection procedures for political parties. On this occasion, some pre-selections were carried out quite late, with Trenorden's dissident political group in the Agricultural Region forming too late to gain party registration. In the Legislative Assembly the results overwhelmingly favoured the Liberal Party, particularly in the metropolitan seats with 49.8 per cent of the primary vote, a swing of 11 per cent. The National Party increased its primary vote in non-metropolitan seats by 4.8 per cent to reach 24.1 per cent of the country vote. Labor was soundly defeated with its primary metropolitan vote dropping 2.6 per cent to 35.8 per cent, whilst its non-metropolitan vote dipped to 25.2 per cent. Nevertheless Mark McGowan, although behind Barnett in the polls for preferred premier, was given credit for managing a solid campaign. Key Labor Party insiders and political analysts have backed McGowan to remain in the job as 'he was never expected to win against a strong first term-government, solid economic conditions and a federal Labor party on the nose with voters'.⁵³ The seat deficit required to be overcome to win in March 2017 is less than that surmounted by Geoff Gallop in 2001, following Labor's poor result at the 1996 election. An issue for Labor in 2017 will be whether to court Greens preferences. The Greens (WA) 8.9 metropolitan vote dropped 4.3 per cent, with non-metropolitan at 6.9 per cent, a lowering of just 1.1 per cent.

Parliament was prorogued on 14 December, which meant some four months elapsed before its resumption on 11 April 2013. Despite being returned to power, the government found it difficult to deliver the State Budget in May. Its postponement to August 2013 was accompanied by much criticism and more than a few headaches, with news that Woodside had decided not to go ahead with a gas processing plant at James Price Point. In June the Oakajee Port and Rail development was suspended, and it was revealed that over \$250 million dollars had been lost trying to regenerate the Muja power station near Collie.⁵⁴ By the end of June, the Government had introduced 10 Bills and used its numbers to have nine declared urgent. Late in June, ahead of the 8 August budget, the Treasurer introduced a bill to make the Insurance Commission of WA subject to dividend provisions. However, the government failed to obtain the absolute majority it needed to pass the bill in the Assembly ahead of the long winter recess.⁵⁵ Former Minister Rob Johnson, dumped from Cabinet in the previous Parliament, described the situation as 'shambolic' with the organisation of the business of the Legislative Assembly being its worst for 20 years.⁵⁶ Moreover, another former Minister Graham Jacobs trenchantly criticised Barnett for awarding substantial pay

53 Julie-Anne Sprague and Natalie Gerritsen, 'McGowan to keep job', *Australian Financial Review*, 11 March 2013, p. 10.

54 Ian Cook, 'GST Rebuff and credit downgrade add to Barnett's *annus horribilus*', *The Conversation*, 23 September 2013.

55 Gareth Parker, 'Comedy of errors sinks cash grab', *West Australian*, 21 June 2013, p. 4.

56 Gareth Parker, 'Johnson attacks party 'shambles'', *Weekend West*, 22–23 June 2013, p. 6.

rises to his Ministerial staff. This decision seemed out of kilter with the Premier's comments in late May 2013 that around 1000 public servants faced the axe.

Was it too early to suggest that the pattern of governance in 2013 was the product of an unusually comfortable government majority on the floor of both chambers? Or was the date of the election a factor? Should the set date be either in November of the previous year, or early in February? In an interview conducted in September 2013, Barnett, who had just received news that WA's Triple A credit rating had been downgraded to AA+, conceded 'it had caught him off guard' but added 'elections are a big distraction, [they] use up an enormous amount of energy...[and] you always need a bit of good luck in politics.'⁵⁷ Another view proposed by Jennifer Hewitt in the *Australian Financial Review* was that Colin Barnett is 'proving an unlikely political case study in second-term blues'.⁵⁸

There is no doubt the first fixed date election assisted the operational planning at the WAn Electoral Commission.⁵⁹ Resources were directed to increasing enrolment, particularly for youth and facilitating early voting by post (5.91 per cent), early voting in person (6.29 per cent) as well as absent voting (9.46 per cent). Mobile voting was expanded for mining and regional areas and institutions such as hospitals. These figures all increased so that ordinary votes at the polling station on the day constituted about 72.25 per cent of the total vote. Turnout rose from 86.48 per cent to 89.22 per cent with informal votes remaining at 6 per cent for the Assembly and 2.3 per cent for the Council. The record state-wide vote for the Liberal party meant that it was the major beneficiary of public funding at the rate of \$1.73 per valid vote for each House. Although the official donations to the parties needed to be considered in the light of later published annual figures, what was more readily available was the scale of the electoral expenditures for the political parties. On this measure the Liberal Party spent nearly twice as much as Labor, and well ahead of the National and the Greens (WA).⁶⁰ It was a reminder that the Liberal Party, with Colin Barnett as its leader, had a 'once in a century' electoral performance being ahead on nearly all the indices that count.

57 Antony Deceglie, 'Messy times but I'm right', *The Sunday Times*, 22 September, 2013, p. 4. The credit agency Standard and Poors judged the government to have 'limited political will' when it came to returning the budget to surplus'. Barnett disputed this claim.

58 Jennifer Hewitt, 'Barnett's second term blues', *The Australian Financial Review*, 9 October 2013, p. 2.

59 See 2013 'State General Election: Strategy and Service Commitments, April 1912', WAn Electoral Commission.

60 WAEC, <http://www.elections.wa.gov.au/candidates-and-parties-funding-and-disclosure/election...> Accessed 23/07/2103. Liberal Party expenditure, \$5,141,459 dollars; Labor Party expenditure, \$2,756,512 dollars.