Back to the 1950s: the 2019 NSW Election*

David Clune and Rodney Smith

Honorary Associate, Department of Government and International Relations, University of Sydney.

Professor of Australian Politics, Department of Government and International Relations, University of Sydney.

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INTRODUCTION

The 23 March 2019 State election provided opportunities for two important shifts in NSW politics. First, the Premier, Gladys Berejiklian, had the opportunity to become the first female NSW Premier to contest a general election successfully. Second, the Liberal and National Parties had the opportunity to challenge the idea of NSW as a 'Labor state' by winning three elections in succession, something the Coalition had not done since 1971. Alongside these opportunities to redefine the state's politics for the 21st century, much of the major party contest in the election had the distinctly older tone of a 1950s-style campaign, with two no-frills party leaders engaged in a competition to entice voters with promises of more and better infrastructure, concessions and services.

THE NSW GOVERNMENT'S ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

In the period leading into the 2019 State election, the NSW economy performed strongly relative to the other states; however, it began to show some signs of weakening. The NSW seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in February 2019 of 4.3 percent compared favourably with the national rate of 4.9 percent and was towards the lower end of the range of NSW joblessness since the 2015 State Election.[1] In mid-

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[1] Australian Bureau of Statistics, *6202.0 – Labour Force, Australia, May 2019*. Accessed at: https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6202.0May%202019?OpenDocument

2018, NSW per capita Gross State Product (GSP) was $74,955, above the Australian per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) figure of $73,267 and the per capita GSP of all states except Western Australia. Despite the confident predictions of the NSW Treasurer in the *2018-19 Budget Papers* that NSW would continue to experience relatively high growth in per capita GSP, the annual percentage increase to July 2018 in NSW was the lowest of all states and territories at 1.0 percent.[2] It is likely to have fallen further before the 2019 election, given Australia's overall contracting per capita GDP.[3]

The economic growth that did occur in NSW was uneven. The construction sector, driven partly by the NSW Government's heavy investment in public infrastructure projects,[4] contributed strongly. By contrast, the NSW agriculture sector contracted significantly, largely due to the long-term drought.[5] To the extent that swinging voters judge governments retrospectively on their economic performance, rather than voting on probable future economic conditions,[6] the economic position of NSW gave voters little cause to punish the Coalition, although voters in rural and regional areas had stronger reasons than those in Sydney.

A CHANGE OF PREMIER

Premier Mike Baird's popularity had soared after his comfortable re-election in March 2015. At one stage, 'Magic Mike' was the most popular Premier in the country, according to Newspoll, with an approval rating of 63 percent.[7] In about the middle of

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[2] Australian Bureau of Statistics, *5220.0 - Australian National Accounts: State Accounts, 2017-18* (accessed at: https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/5220.02017-18?OpenDocument); NSW Government, *Budget Statement 2018-2019. Budget Paper No. 1*. Circulated by The Hon. Dominic Perrottet MP, Treasurer, and Minister for Industrial Relations. 2018 (accessed at: https://www.budget.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/budget-2018-06/Budget_Paper_1-Budget_Statement_UDPATED_2.pdf

[3] Stephen Letts, 'Australia's Economy Just Entered Recession on a Per Capita Basis', *ABC News*, 7 March 2019. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-03-06/gdp-q4-2018/10874592;

[4] NSW Government, *Budget Statement 2018-2019. Budget Paper No. 1*.

[5] Australian Bureau of Statistics, *5220.0 - Australian National Accounts: State Accounts, 2017-18*.

[6] M. Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting in American Elections*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981.

[7] AAP, 'Baird Australia's Most Popular Politician', *The Australian*, 25 September 2015. Accessed at: https://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/latest/baird-nations-most-popular-politician/news-story/53cbcf4e92c5e2906e06e7831b858bbb

2016, he began to encounter political turbulence and the tone of media coverage abruptly changed. Baird was portrayed as unresponsive and out of touch. By the end of the year, he was 'on the political ropes with his approval ratings pummelled … The conviction politician who had been admired for making unpopular decisions if they were right for the state was labelled an arrogant leader who did not listen to his constituents'.[8]

Two issues precipitated Baird's rapid decline in favour.   Local government amalgamations have been political poison for Premiers since at least the 1940s. Baird, believing that good policy is good politics, initiated a comprehensive program of council mergers. There was widespread hostility in response, particularly in country areas.

Added to this was Baird's decision to ban greyhound racing, after a damning report on the sport from former High Court Judge Michael McHugh. The decision generated a growing public backlash, with even many of those not directly affected believing a complete ban was an unnecessary over-reaction. Bowing to public pressure and an intense media campaign from powerful commentators such as Radio 2GB's Alan Jones, Baird reversed his decision in October. However, it was too late to arrest the slide in his popularity. In January 2017, Baird resigned and was replaced by Treasurer and Deputy Liberal Leader Gladys Berejiklian.

The obvious successor, Berejiklian was unopposed for the Leadership. The new Premier was an astute veteran who had demonstrated high level skill in the Transport and Treasury portfolios.   Determined and hard-working, she was unflappable in adversity. Hardly charismatic, Berejiklian's challenge was to sell herself to the voters as safe, trustworthy and competent.

ONGOING POLICY PROBLEMS

Although Berejiklian defused the issues that caused Baird's downfall, she detonated a damaging controversy with her decision to demolish and rebuild the ANZ and Allianz sporting stadiums. The Government was forced to backtrack on the demolition of ANZ but the dismantling of Allianz at Moore Park went ahead, commencing during the

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[8] Sarah Gerathy, 'NSW Premier Mike Baird Went from Popular to Polarising in 2016'. *ABC News*, 22 December 2016. Accessed at: https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-12-22/nsw-premier-mike-baird-went-from-popular-to-polarising-in-2016/8139520

election campaign. 'Schools and hospitals before Sydney stadiums' became Labor's slogan.

Other issues were hurting Berejiklian. Her cabinet contained a number of poor performers. The rapid pace of high-rise development in suburban Sydney led to an angry backlash from local residents. Although a large number of major infrastructure projects were underway, Berejiklian had not cut any ribbons at opening ceremonies. A signature project, the CBD and South East light rail, was over-budget and behind-schedule. In August 2018, Liberal MP for Wagga and Parliamentary Secretary, Darryl Maguire, was forced to resign over revelations by ICAC of corrupt conduct. At the resulting by-election on 8 September the Liberals lost Wagga, which they had held since 1957, to Independent candidate Joe McGirr with a swing of 29 percent.

A CHANGE OF OPPOSITION LEADER

As Opposition Leader, Labor's Luke Foley had performed well in the 2015 election campaign. He went on to exploit the Government's growing problems, particularly over the stadiums. Foley astutely portrayed the Liberals as obsessed with privatisation and more interested in the balance sheet than the battlers.[9]

Rumours had long circulated in Macquarie Street of inappropriate sexual behaviour by Foley towards a journalist. In October 2018, Corrective Services Minister David Elliott, during a heated parliamentary exchange with the Opposition Leader, said: 'I have not had a little bit too much to drink at a party and harassed an ABC journalist'. On 8 November 2018, ABC journalist Ashleigh Raper issued a statement saying that after a Christmas party at Parliament House in 2016, at a bar in the city, Foley had 'put his hand through a gap in the back of my dress and inside my underpants. He rested his hand on my buttocks. I completely froze'. Raper had steadfastly remained silent about the incident but after the revelations in Parliament had no choice but to speak out. Foley denied the claim but was forced to resign the leadership.[10]

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[9] On the 2015 election, see D. Clune, 'The Accidental Leaders Play Their First Gig: The 2015 NSW Election'. *Australasian Parliamentary Review*, 31(2) 2016, pp. 6-18.

[10] *NSW Parliamentary Debates*, 18 October 2018; 'Daley "Very Unhappy" Over Foley's Press Conference, Backs Journalist'**,** *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 November 2018; Sarah Gerathy*,* 'Luke Foley Backs Down on Threat to Sue ABC Over Journalist Ashleigh Raper's Sexual Harassment Allegations', *ABC News*, 28 November 2018.

Deputy Leader Michael Daley had long harboured leadership ambitions and had the support of the ALP right faction. Another right-winger, Chris Minns, also entered the contest, though more to stake a claim for the future than in the hope of winning. On 10 November, Daley was victorious by 33 votes to 12. A left-wing Legislative Councillor, Penny Sharpe, became Deputy Leader.[11]

A solicitor, Daley was elected MP for Maroubra in September 2005 after Bob Carr retired as Premier. He showed early promise, particularly given the lack of talent on the Government backbench, and became a minister in September 2008. Daley looked the part and was a good retail politician of the old-fashioned, populist variety. He was more in the mould of a 1950s Labor leader such as Joe Cahill or Pat Hills than more intellectually-inclined and issues-oriented leaders like Carr and Foley.

DIVISION IN THE GREENS

The Greens entered the campaign bitterly divided. The NSW branch has long been split between a Marxist-influenced hard left faction associated with former Senator Lee Rhiannon, and the moderate environmentalists who were more in the tradition of former Federal Leader Bob Brown. On 13 November, Greens MP for Newtown, Jenny Leong, used a statement in Parliament to strongly attack the leader of the moderate Greens, Jeremy Buckingham MLC, over allegations of sexual harassment of a Greens' staffer in 2011. Leong called for Buckingham to step down from the Greens ticket for the 2019 election.[12] He had already been relegated to an unwinnable position, as had fellow moderate MLC Dawn Walker. The leader of the hard left, Legislative Councillor David Shoebridge, and MP for Balmain, Jamie Parker, supported Leong. MP for Ballina, Tamara Smith, had an each way bet, publicly supported Leong but privately telling Buckingham her speech was nonsense. Moderate Greens upper house members Cate Faehrmann, Justin Field and Dawn Walker rallied to Buckingham's side.[13]

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[11] Nick Sas and Philippa McDonald, 'NSW Labor Elects Michael Daley as New Leader After Luke Foley's Resignation', *ABC News*, 11 November 2018.

[12] *NSW Parliamentary Debates*, 13 November 2018.

[13] Deborah Snow, 'Power and Privilege: #MeToo Takes Parliament into Uncharted Waters', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 November 2018; 'Jeremy Buckingham Won't Quit, Plans to Contest the March Election', *Sydney Morning* Herald, 16 November 2018.

Buckingham denied the harassment allegation and refused to step down. In December 2018, the Greens' State Delegates Council passed a motion demanding that he vacate his position on the Legislative Council ticket. Buckingham subsequently left the Party and unsuccessfully sought re-election as an Independent.[14] After the election, Field announced he was leaving the Greens to serve the remaining four years of his term as an Independent.[15]

THE MAJOR PARTY CAMPAIGNS

Going into the March 2019 election, the Government had 52 of the 93 seats in the Legislative Assembly, with the Opposition holding 34. Labor needed a uniform swing of just under nine percent to gain a majority in its own right, which was a formidable task. There were seven crossbenchers in the lower house: three Greens, one Shooters Fishers and Farmers Party (SFF), and three Independents (Alex Greenwich, Joe McGirr and Greg Piper). The opinion polls predicted a close race, consistently showing a two-party preferred vote of 50 percent to 50 percent, or a 51 percent to 49 percent lead to either the ALP or the Coalition. This led to much speculation about the possibility of a hung parliament.[16]

Both sides staked out their positions early and did not greatly deviate from them during the campaign. The Government largely ran on its record. It had a good story to tell. Unemployment was low, government debt was negative, the infrastructure budget for the next four years was close $90 billion. Major projects underway included the Westconnex and Northconnex motorways, Sydney Metro, the largest public transport project in Australia, and the CBD and South East light rail. Thanks to Baird's privatisation of the electricity industry, the Government's coffers were overflowing. Berejiklian's message was not to jeopardise all this by electing Labor. She reminded the electorate of the factional brawling, policy paralysis and corruption that marked the final years of the last ALP Government in NSW.

[14] Lisa Visentin, '"Ripping Up My Membership": Jeremy Buckingham Quits "Toxic" Greens to Run as an Independent', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 December 2018.

[15] Alexandra Smith, 'NSW Greens MP Quits Party to Sit on the Crossbench', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 April 2019.

[16] See, for example, Tim Boyd, 'Hung Parliament Looms Over NSW', *Australian Financial Review*, 20 March 2019.

At her policy launch in the western suburbs seat of Penrith on 10 March, the Premier made a number of new commitments. She promised 4,600 extra teachers and $120 million to improve before and after school care. Bankstown-Lidcombe Hospital would be redeveloped at a cost of $1.3 billion, the palliative care workforce boosted, and 5,000 more nurses and midwives employed. Eight new schools would be built and 31 upgraded. The Coalition promised to build a metro rail line from St Marys to Sydney's second airport at Badgery's Creek at a cost of $2 billion.[17]

The Nationals faced problems in rural and regional areas. In spite of the fact that $9 billion had been allocated for regional infrastructure projects,[18] there was a perception that they were not doing enough for their base. The serious drought affecting all of NSW exacerbated this feeling. The Government's signature policy of privatisation was unpopular with rural dwellers who were often dependent on services provided by the state. The greyhound and local government decisions left a legacy of rural resentment. The stadiums controversy fostered the belief that the Government was too Sydney-centric. At a by-election in November 2016, the Nationals lost the previously safe seat of Orange to the SFF with a primary vote swing of 34 percent against them. The SFF launched a major assault on Legislative Assembly seats, hoping to exploit the Nationals' vulnerability.

Deputy Premier and Nationals Leader John Barilaro counter-attacked with an intensive campaign, highlighting the Government's achievements and dispensing largesse wherever he went. Up to and including his policy speech on 24 February, he made $5 billion worth of commitments. This led to him being nicknamed 'Pork Barilaro'. As well as a plethora of roads and bridges, the Nationals promised a 'nation-building, long-term water security program'. They also committed to giving rural seniors an annual $250 travel card.[19]

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[17] Bellinda Kontominas and Sue Daniel, 'NSW Election Battlelines Drawn as Liberals, Labor Launch Campaigns', *ABC News*, 10 March 2019; NSW Parliamentary Budget Office, *Budget Impact Statement: Coalition*, 18 March 2019 (accessed at: https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/pbo/Pages/2019-Budget-Impact-Statements.aspx).

[18] NSW Government, *NSW Budget 2018-19: Regional Overview*. Sydney: NSW Treasury, 2018. Accessed at: https://www.budget.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/budget-2018-06/NSW%20Budget%202018-19%20-%20Regional%20Overview.pdf

[19] Lisa Visentin, '"We Are the Underdogs": NSW Nationals Warn of "Insidious Threat" as They Fight to Hold onto the Bush', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February 2019.

The Opposition Leader initially struggled to gain momentum and attention. His main line of attack was the stadiums. Daley promised to stop the demolition of Allianz Stadium. He claimed the demolition was misuse of public money that should have been spent helping ordinary people who were doing it tough. The issue ignited three weeks from polling day when Daley took on influential radio commentator Allan Jones, promising to sack him and most members of the Sydney Cricket Ground Trust, which strongly supported the rebuilding of Allianz. Daley's stature was boosted as a politician who was unafraid to stand up to a powerful broadcaster and an elite board.[20]

Daley's policy launch at Revesby in the marginal Liberal seat of East Hills was on the same day as the Government's. His message was that the 'only way to fix things is to change this government before our hospitals are sold, before they privatise the rest of our electricity network and hike up prices even further — before it becomes easier to get a seat in a stadium than it is on a bus'. Daley promised to spend $250 million on mental health and hire more front line health care workers. Lower nurse to patient ratios would be mandated. Nepean Hospital would be upgraded at a cost of $1 billion and a new hospital built in in Sydney's northwest. Labor would put $2.7 billion into public schools. Early childhood education would be funded for three-year-olds and school children would travel free on public transport. In a swipe at the Nationals, Daley pledged $1 billion to improve rural water security.[21]

To fund his commitments and keep the budget in surplus, the Opposition Leader proposed to tax luxury cars and boats, scrap a number of tax concessions, and abandon some of the Government's major infrastructure projects, such as the western harbour tunnel, the northern beaches link, the south west metro, the F6 freeway extension and, of course, Allianz stadium. [22]

The Premier stayed 'on message' and rarely slipped up, but sometimes came across in the media as wooden. Brad Norington commented: 'Berejiklian seems a sincere politician trying to do her best, but could she sell free ice creams? In public she has

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[20] Esther Han, '"You're Sacked", Labor Leader Michael Daley Tells Alan Jones and SCG Trust', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 March 2019.

[21] Kontominas and Daniel, 'NSW Election Battlelines Drawn'.

[22] NSW Parliamentary Budget Office, *Budget Impact Statement: ALP*, 18 March 2019. Accessed at https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/pbo/Pages/2019-Budget-Impact-Statements.aspx

often looked uncomfortable'.[23] Wisely, she did not try to create a false, flashy persona but relied on her positive image as a 'safe pair of hands'.

Daley was articulate and appealing on the campaign trail but increasingly prone to gaffes about basic facts as the campaign progressed. As an inexperienced, untried leader who had to persuade the electorate to trust him as Premier, this was particularly damaging. Norington commented on election eve:

> Intense scrutiny is suddenly focussed on the credibility of Labor Leader Michael Daley and how a government led by him would manage the nation's largest state economy. The sense that NSW Labor's funding commitments are light on detail, vague, not fully costed or still to be worked out has been demonstrated by Mr Daley's inability on repeated occasions to provide clear answers. Stumbles made by the NSW Opposition Leader during a televised debate with Premier Gladys Berejiklian on Wednesday night, rated by some as a disaster, deflated Labor insiders. [24]

The Opposition Leader's campaign finished disastrously. On 18 March, the Liberal Party leaked to the media a video of Daley at a forum in September saying: 'Our young children will flee and who are they being replaced with? They are being replaced by young people from typically Asia with PhDs. There's a transformation happening in Sydney now where our kids are moving out and foreigners are moving in and taking their jobs. And I don't want to sound xenophobic, it's not a xenophobic thing, it's an economic question'.[25] The Opposition Leader was universally condemned for racism. Labor officials were concerned that his comment would adversely affect the Party in seats with a large Chinese population. Daley was forced to issue an apology. The furore dissipated any momentum Labor might have had in the lead up to polling day.[26]

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[23] Brad Norington, 'Premier Struggles to Project Her "Authenticity" to Voters', *The Australian*, 16-17 March 2019.

[24] Brad Norington, 'NSW Election: Michael Daley is Leader with a Vague Idea but Little Detail', *The Australian*, 22 March 2019.

[25] Lisa Visentin, 'Michael Daley Claims Foreigners Taking Young People's Jobs', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 March 2019.

[26] Alexandra Smith, Lisa Visentin and Esther Han, '"I Meant No Offence": Daley Apologises for Asian Comment as He Fights for Key Seats', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 March 2019.

THE RESULTS

The Coalition recorded a first preference Legislative Assembly vote of 41.6 percent, down 4.1 percent from its 2015 result. Its two-party preferred vote was 52.0 percent, a more decisive victory than any of the published opinion polls had predicted, but a swing of 2.3 percent to Labor. Despite its two-party preferred gain, Labor won just 33.3 percent of first preferences, down 0.8 percent from 2015. The Coalition won 48 Legislative Assembly seats (Liberals 35 and Nationals 13) to the ALP's 36, giving the Government a slim but workable lower house majority (see Table 1).[27]

Labor held all its Assembly seats but gained only two from the Coalition. It won Coogee in Sydney's eastern suburbs, a seat that Liberal MP Bruce Notley-Smith had won in 2011 and 2015 but that Labor had held before then since the mid-1970s. Labor's Janelle Saffin took Lismore on the NSW north coast, where the popular and long-serving National MP Thomas George, who only just held the seat in 2015, had retired. Saffin had previously been a Member of the NSW Legislative Council and more recently the Member for the NSW north coast House of Representatives Division of Page.

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[27] For full details, see NSW Electoral Commission, NSW State Election Results 2019: Legislative Assembly—Formal Vote by Representation. Accessed at: https://vtr.elections.nsw.gov.au/la/state/formal

Table 1.   23 March 2019 Legislative Assembly Election Summary Results

Party	First preference votes (%)	Swing from 2015 (%)	Seats contested	Seats won	Seats change 2015-18
Liberal	32.0	-3.1	73	35	-2
National	9.6	-1.0	20	13	-4
Labor/Country Labor	33.3	-0.8	93	36	+2
Greens	9.6	-0.7	93	3	0
Shooters, Farmers and Fishers	3.5	3.5	25	3	+3
Sustainable Australia	1.5	1.5	54	0	0
Keep Sydney Open	1.5	1.5	42	0	0
Animal Justice	1.5	1.4	48	0	0
One Nation	1.1	1.1	12	0	0
Other[a]	6.4	-1.1	64	3	+1
Total	100.0	n/a	n/a	93	n/a

[a]Combined parties and Independents each with less than 1.0 percent of the state-wide vote.
Source: Compiled from NSW Electoral Commission, NSW State Election Results 2019: Legislative Assembly—Formal Vote by Representation. Accessed at: https://vtr.elections.nsw.gov.au/la/state/formal; NSW Electoral Commission, NSW State Election Results 2015: Legislative Assembly – Formal Vote by Representation. Accessed at: http://pastvtr.elections.nsw.gov.au/SGE2015/la/state/formal/index.htm

Labor's failure to win more seats on a 2.3 percent two party preferred swing was unsurprising, given that the pre-election pendulum put only three Coalition seats

(Lismore, East Hills and Upper Hunter) within range on such a statewide swing.[28] Equally importantly, as Table 2 shows, Labor failed to make strong two-party gains in any electoral region of NSW. The strongest average two-party swing against the Coalition (4.4 percent) was in northern Sydney electorates, where sitting Liberals simply had their comfortable winning margins shaved. The average anti-Coalition swing of 3.4 percent in western Sydney electorates was not enough to threaten sitting Liberal MPs. The closest any of them went to losing their seats was in Penrith, where Stuart Ayres's two-party vote was reduced to 51.3 percent. An average anti-Coalition swing of 3.1 percent in Central Coast electorates saw Labor strengthen its hold on three seats; however, it lost ground in the one seat in the area that it did not hold (Terrigal). In the other regions, the average swings were negligible and in some cases favoured the Coalition.

Another pattern evident in Table 2 is the loss of first preference votes by the major parties across most regions of the state. The Coalition lost first preference votes in all regions except southern Sydney and the old Hunter and Illawarra coal and steel belt. Labor dropped first preference votes in inner and southern Sydney, as well as coastal and inland rural NSW. The major parties' losses were particularly heavy in inland rural seats, where the Coalition first preference vote fell 10.9 percent and Labor's 7.2 percent. The major beneficiary there was the Shooters Fishers and Farmers Party, which won two seats from the Nationals (Barwon and Murray) and easily retained Orange, first taken from the Nationals at a November 2016 by-election. Independent Joe McGirr, who had won Wagga Wagga from the Liberals at a September 2018 by-election, retained his seat, as did Greg Piper in Lake Macquarie and Alex Greenwich in Sydney.

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[28] Antony Green, 'NSW Votes: Pendulum'. Accessed at: https://www.abc.net.au/news/elections/nsw/2019/guide/pendulum

Table 2.   2019 NSW Legislative Assembly State Election Results by Region

	Inner Sydney	Northern Sydney	Southern Sydney	Western Sydney	Central Coast	Hunter/ Illawarra	Rural Coastal	Inland Rural
Liberal-National average first preference vote (%)	33.5	55.2	49.4	39.3	39.6	29.1	43.4	44.9
Liberal-National average first preference swing (%)	-2.5	-6.3	0.8	-4.2	-4.1	0.0	-1.7	-10.9
Labor average first preference vote (%)	35.7	19.2	34.3	41.7	41.4	47.2	22.4	18.1
Labor average first preference swing (%)	-0.7	2.1	-1.0	1.1	0.6	1.1	-2.3	-7.2
Liberal-National two party preferred vote versus Labor (%)	45.6	67.7	56.4	48.5	46.9	36.7	53.2	65.5
Liberal-National two party preferred swing versus Labor (%)	1.5	-4.4	0.3	-3.4	-3.1	-1.0	0.4	-0.6
Greens average first preference vote (%)	17.5	12.3	7.4	6.0	9.1	9.8	12.0	4.9
Greens average first preference swing (%)	-1.3	-2.2	-0.3	-0.2	-0.1	0.1	-1.0	-0.7
'Other'[a] average first preference vote (%)	13.8	13.2	8.9	12.9	9.9	14.0	12.2	32.0
'Other'[a] average first preference swing (%)	4.5	6.3	0.5	3.3	3.7	-1.3	5.0	18.8

[a]Combined parties and Independents with less than 1.0 percent of the state-wide vote each.
Source: Compiled from NSW Electoral Commission, NSW State Election Results 2019: Legislative Assembly – Formal Vote by Representation. Accessed at: https://vtr.elections.nsw.gov.au/la/state/formal; NSW Electoral Commission, NSW State Election Results 2015: Legislative Assembly – Formal Vote by Representation. Accessed at: http://pastvtr.elections.nsw.gov.au/SGE2015/la/state/formal/index.htm

The Greens were unable to profit from the erosion of the major party primary vote. They held their three existing seats (Ballina, Balmain, Newtown) but their first preference vote fell by 0.7 percent to 9.6 percent across NSW (see Table 1). On average, the party lost votes in every region, including a 1.3 percent loss in its bastion of inner Sydney electorates. Its only negligible gain came in the Hunter and Illawarra (see Table 2).

In the election for the Legislative Council, the Coalition won 34.8 percent of the vote and the ALP 29.7 percent. As a result, the Government forces in the Council fell from 20 to 17, while Labor's increased from 12 to 14 (see Table 3). Both major parties experienced swings against them, with the 7.8 percent swing against the Coalition much larger than the swing against it in the lower house election. With Liberal MLC John Ajaka remaining President after the election, the Government's numbers on the floor of the Council dropped to 16. This means that it will normally need five crossbench votes to win divisions.

Table 3.   2019 Legislative Council Votes and Seats

	Inner Sydney	Northern Sydney	Southern Sydney	Western Sydney	Central Coast	Hunter/ Illawarra	Rural Coastal	Inland Rural
Liberal-National average first preference vote (%)	33.5	55.2	49.4	39.3	39.6	29.1	43.4	44.9
Liberal-National average first preference swing (%)	-2.5	-6.3	0.8	-4.2	-4.1	0.0	-1.7	-10.9
Labor average first preference vote (%)	35.7	19.2	34.3	41.7	41.4	47.2	22.4	18.1
Labor average first preference swing (%)	-0.7	2.1	-1.0	1.1	0.6	1.1	-2.3	-7.2
Liberal-National two party preferred vote versus Labor (%)	45.6	67.7	56.4	48.5	46.9	36.7	53.2	65.5
Liberal-National two party preferred swing versus Labor (%)	1.5	-4.4	0.3	-3.4	-3.1	-1.0	0.4	-0.6
Greens average first preference vote (%)	17.5	12.3	7.4	6.0	9.1	9.8	12.0	4.9
Greens average first preference swing (%)	-1.3	-2.2	-0.3	-0.2	-0.1	0.1	-1.0	-0.7
'Other'[a] average first preference vote (%)	13.8	13.2	8.9	12.9	9.9	14.0	12.2	32.0
'Other'[a] average first preference swing (%)	4.5	6.3	0.5	3.3	3.7	-1.3	5.0	18.8

[a]Combined parties and Independents with less than 1.0 percent of the state-wide vote each.
Source: Compiled from NSW Electoral Commission, NSW State Election Results 2019: Legislative Assembly – Formal Vote by Representation. Accessed at: https://vtr.elections.nsw.gov.au/la/state/formal; NSW Electoral Commission, NSW State Election Results 2015: Legislative Assembly – Formal Vote by Representation. Accessed at: http://pastvtr.elections.nsw.gov.au/SGE2015/la/state/formal/index.htm

The minor parties that held Legislative Council seats going into the election had mixed fortunes (see Table 3). The Greens won 9.7 percent of the vote, comparable to the party's 2015 vote but lower than its 2011 result, meaning the loss of its fifth seat. Field's subsequent defection in April 2019 to sit as an Independent reduced the Greens to three seats. For the first time since 1981, Fred Nile's Christian Democratic Party did not win a seat, although Nile, who was not up for re-election, remains an MLC. The Shooters Fishers and Farmers Party increased its vote to 5.5 percent, comfortably winning a quota to retain its two seats. The Animal Justice Party added a second seat. Despite only winning 2.0 percent of the first preference vote, preference flows and exhausted ballots meant that the Party's Emma Hurst was eventually elected with 0.6 of a quota after the 343rd and final count.

The other three MLCs elected after the final count included One Nation's Rod Roberts, who ended up with 0.59 of a quota. He joined NSW One Nation Leader Mark Latham, who had easily won a full quota and was elected after the first count. One Nation, which had not contested the previous NSW election and had not won a seat in the NSW Legislative Council since 1999, emerged as one of the clear winners from the election.

The election left the Government confronting a much more complex Legislative Council than had been the case in 2011-15 or 2015-19. It is tempting shorthand to think of the

Christian Democrats, One Nation and Shooters Fishers and Farmers as forming a right-wing bloc in the Legislative Council that will hand the Government the five extra upper house votes that it needs to pass its legislative program. Given the differences between these minor parties, the reality is likely to be considerably more complex.

CONCLUSION

The 2019 NSW state election was hardly a clash of ideologies or visions. It was a 1950s-style campaign with Government and Opposition striving to outbid each other in providing concessions and services. As soon as one side made a commitment, the other usually matched it. Towards the end of the campaign it was estimated that the Government had made promises worth $28 billion and Labor $24 billion.[29] There was some policy differentiation. Labor promised to end privatisation and re-regulate electricity prices. The Opposition had stronger policies on the environment and climate change. A Labor government would be significantly more generous to the unions and the public sector. On the whole, however, the election was an echo of 1950s consensus politics. It was dominated by some traditional rules: appeal to the middle ground, alienate as few groups as possible, massage the 'hip pocket nerve' in Ben Chifley's famous phrase.[30]

Berejiklian, in her quiet, steady way, out-campaigned Daley. His over-concentration on the stadiums issue was a mistake. Labor failed to differentiate itself with an alternative policy vision. The Premier was able to persuade enough voters that the Government had significant achievements to its credit and was better equipped to deliver more in the future. Although there was some dissatisfaction with the Coalition, Labor could not convince the electorate that it was a superior alternative.

In our edited book on NSW Labor in government from 1995 to 2011, we speculated that the Liberal Party's inroads into Labor's heartland in 2011 might be the beginning

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[29] Alexandra Smith, 'Labor Will Spend More than Coalition, but Save More Too, independent Costings Show', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 March 2019.

[30] On 1950s electioneering, see M. Hogan and D. Clune (eds.), *The People's Choice: Electoral Politics in Twentieth Century NSW*, Volume 2. Sydney: Parliament of NSW and University of Sydney, 2001.

of a more permanent realignment in NSW politics.[31] The regional analysis in this article indicates that the Liberals now have a secure base in western Sydney. Although Labor has won back the seats it lost in 2011 in the Hunter and Illawarra, the 2019 results in those regions showed no swing against the Liberal Party. In the traditionally swinging seats in southern Sydney, there was a slight increase in the Liberal vote. If, as seems likely, the Coalition serves a full term until March 2023, it will have been in office for 12 years, a period exceeded in NSW only by the ALP from 1941-65 and 1995-2011. While it would be premature to call contemporary NSW a natural Coalition state, Labor's claim to be the natural party of government in NSW seems to have receded into history.

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[31] David Clune and Rodney Smith (eds.), *From Carr to Keneally: Labor In Office in NSW 1995-2011*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2012.