

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 662#

WHAT DOES THE ELECTION RESULT MEAN FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION?

Mr Turnbull has scraped home and is announcing this as a mandate for the Coalition budget and policies. But, given a slim majority, the cross bench and adverse Senate, has he won an election or been given a poison chalice ?

Australian citizens wandered further and further away from the major parties. Why? Have they rejected the neo-liberal mess created by three decades of lib-lab governments?

If so, what does the diversified protest vote mean for the future of Public Education? In the immediate future, it means – no Gonski after 2017.

DOGS suspect that in Australia, as in England, many citizens have never been persuaded that they or their children have benefitted from the neo-liberal globalisation policies imposed upon them since the 1980s by the major parties. Even the mainstream media can no longer ignore completely the educational failures, public funding scandals, inequalities, and lack of private sector accountability in Australian education.

Much was made of the effect of the Mediscare campaign, but the mainstream media have to date ignored the effect of the Public School Vote. The Labor Party and the Greens know otherwise.

The AEU had no doubt of the effect of their campaign on Labor party successes. They noted that:

Exit polling by SKY News found that 63 per cent of voters rated education policy as “very important” as an issue, second only to health on 72 per cent, and well ahead of economic management. This backs AEU polling in marginal seats in the final weeks of the campaign which showed voters clearly supported Gonski and backed investing in schools ahead of Malcolm Turnbull’s cuts to company tax, Voters supported Gonski by a margin of 61.6 per cent to 17.4 per cent, and 63.6 per cent preferred it to company tax cuts. The Coalition’s arrogance in refusing to fund the essential public services that families rely on has come back

to haunt them....At least two winning ALP candidates, Mike Kelly (Eden-Monaro) and Emma Husar (Lindsay), have credited support for Gonski in the community as one of the as one of the key issues which got them elected.

Other electorates where the Gonski campaign had a local co-ordinator in place which recorded high swings away from the Coalition include: Gilmore, Dobell, Macquarie, Forde and Longman. These are regional or outer suburban seats, often with high numbers of low-SES students, where schools are major beneficiaries from targeted Gonski funding...

It is also clear that Gonski was an issue in Tasmania where there were huge swings against the Coalition leading to the loss of three seats. Under Malcolm Turnbull's plan not only would schools miss out on Gonski, but Tasmania's public schools would actually have their funding cut after 2017.

“During the election campaign individual public schools had many principals willing to stick their necks out and tell parents, through newsletters or leaflets, the facts about what Gonski was doing, and what their school would miss out on if they didn't get the full six years funding. We had teachers and school support staff prepared to go on the record, and go into the community and stand up and fight for their students.

What is to be Done?

One of the primary problems for the public sector has always been a political one.

The political problems for the private sector appeared solved in the 1960s by the DLP vote. Ever since, the public sector has been in trouble, attempting to counteract the unholy marriage of the old Protestant with the new Catholic establishment as their schools attract billions away from public schools. In the current parliament the Lib-Labs insist on being 'sector blind'. Consequently public education has only half-hearted support of the Labor Party and the Greens. DOGS says half-hearted because although they advocate funding for disadvantaged students, no-one is prepared to confront the 'religious sector'

Nevertheless, what is certain in the 2016 election is the decline in the old DLP vote from a high point of 9.8% in 1958 (a few years before the advent of State Aid to religious schools) to oblivion when their Senator Madigan resigned and they were de-registered for lack of members in July 2015. Although the DLP was reinstated on 1 March 2016 and stood candidates in the federal election, their vote rarely reached the 1% mark in any State. The days of the Gair/McManus/ Harradine blackmail are long gone. Or have they?

The DLP represented a departure from Labor of middle class Catholics. Over two decades however, many DLP supporters migrated their allegiances to the Liberal and National Parties. Where before 1975 Catholics were rare in the Liberal Party, the sectarian divide in party support has largely disappeared. The parents of prominent Liberals such as Tony Abbott and Andrew Robb were part of this DLP migration. The current right wing of the Liberal Party have their ideological roots in both the DLP and the Institute of Public Affairs.

Few people remember that Bob Santamaria was an admirer of Franco, the fascist dictator of Spain.

Meanwhile, since the emergence of Family First in 2004, broadly defined Christian parties have polled between 2.5% and 3%. As in 2013 four 'Christian' parties contested the 2016 election, Family First, the Christian Democrats, Australian Christians and Rise Up Australia. None have representation in the Senate.

According to Tim Colebatch in Inside Story, <http://insidestory.org.au/the-upside-of-the-falling-big-party-vote> Malcolm Turnbull and Coalition spin merchants in the media have told us that this was Labor's second-worst vote since Moses was found floating on the stream. They're right – but that's only half the story.

The half they're not telling us is that the vote for the Coalition is also at historic lows. On current figures, it is 42.1 per cent – and that is the equal third-lowest vote the Coalition parties have recorded in the twenty-eight elections of the postwar era. It is not one side of politics that has lost support from voters – it is both.

The following table illustrates the rise and rise of the protest vote in Australian politics.

THE RISE OF THE PROTEST VOTE

	Coalition %	Labor %	Others %	Notes
1949	50.3	46.0	3.7	
1951	50.3	47.6	2.1	
1954	46.8	50.6	3.2	
1955	47.6	44.6	7.8	<i>Labor Party split</i>
1958	46.6	42.8	10.6	<i>High point of the DLP: 9.4%</i>
1961	42.1	47.9	10.0	
1963	46.0	45.5	8.5	
1966	50.0	40.0	10.0	
1969	43.3	47.0	9.7	
1972	41.4	49.6	8.7	
1974	44.9	49.3	5.8	
1975	53.1	42.8	4.1	
1977	48.1	39.7	12.3	<i>Birth of the Democrats</i>
1980	46.3	45.2	8.5	
1983	43.6	49.5	6.9	
1984	45.0	47.6	7.5	
1987	46.1	45.8	8.1	
1990	43.5	39.4	17.1	<i>High point of the Democrats: 11.3%</i>
1993	44.3	44.9	10.8	
1996	47.3	38.7	14.0	
1998	39.5	40.1	20.4	<i>High point of One Nation: 8.4%</i>
2001	43.0	37.8	19.2	
2004	46.7	37.6	15.7	
2007	42.1	43.4	14.5	
2010	43.6	38.0	18.4	<i>High point of the Greens: 11.8%</i>
2013	45.5	33.4	21.1	
2016 *	42.1	35.2	22.7	

* at this stage of the count

Sources: elections.uwa.edu.au, aec.gov.au/Elections/Federal_Elections

The protest vote from the Greens is currently well organised and strongly represented. The DLP related vote has fragmented. Realistically, the only figure who could lead a right-wing counterpart to the Greens is Tony Abbott. But he already leads a far more substantial conservative group within the Coalition, and you would assume he is staying in parliament because he aspires to return at least to the ministry, and preferably to the leadership of the Liberal Party.

So the little parties of the right currently remain little parties. They officially directed preferences to each other at the Senate election. But as they didn't have the resources to staff more than a fraction of the 7500 polling booths, or advertise in the media, their votes have much effect when preferences are counted.

In most states, the small right-wing parties scored between them far more than the quota needed to elect a senator. But with no strategy to make that happen, it is not clear that any outside the Hanson camp will actually be elected. One Nation could be the only party of the right on the new Senate crossbench.

DOGS note that while the political group – the DLP - that initiated State Aid in the 1960s, together with their offspring, are in political disarray, and while the more public education friendly Labor Party and green senators have strong representation in the House of Representatives and hold the balance of power in the Senate, the outlook for public education is not as bleak as it might seem.

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