

Too soon to call, but the demographics favour Labor

Poll position
You would be mad to bet against Scott Morrison. But a significant number of aspirational voters are sticking with Labor at the ages they normally begin to vote for the Coalition.



John Black

We're now almost six weeks out from a May 21 election, or four weeks out if you're voting early. That's a hint, folks, if you want the pain in your head to stop.

While the demographic and political cards are still stacked in support of the Australian Labor Party, Prime Minister Scott Morrison has already started to whittle away Labor's early lead: from 55-45 a month ago to 54-46 a week ago, to 53-47 on Monday.

It happened in 2019 and, as I warned in my last column, it's way too early to organise the sympathy cards for Morrison. Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese is looking a little passive-aggressive on the campaign trail. Like it's his turn to be PM because, as his deputy Richard Marles keeps telling us, the other bloke is a shocking fibber.

Well, we all twiggled to that a while back, Dick. But it kind of comes with the job, and now it's Albanese's net satisfaction scores which are sliding back into negative territory.

So, plan B may be called for some time soon here, Albo, starting with learning the current economic stats.

Morrison, on the other hand, wears his big negative satisfaction scores as badge of honour. As long as the Coalition two-party preferred vote is moving his way, he couldn't care less.

Sensitivity is not his long suit. On Monday, after Albanese failed to recall key economic indicators, Morrison had the look of a junkyard dog which has just sunk his jaws into a late-night intruder trying to steal his food bowl.

And he's not for letting go. No, sir.

The electoral mathematics confronting both leaders are unchanged. Presuming the Coalition wins back Hughes from Liberal renegade Craig Kelly, it can't afford to lose a seat in net terms if it wants to retain government.

This is, unless it wants to start playing nice with Voices MPs such as Zali Steggall, Rebekha Sharkie and Helen Haines, and any other professional women elected for Voices on May 21.

Labor is on 69 and needs to win a net



The trend suggests Fiona Martin will lose the seat of Reid in Sydney. PHOTO: JAMES ALCOCK

There is also some evidence that the Greens vote is flatlining as its younger supporters hit their 30s and start voting Labor.

seven seats to form a government.

To assess the state of play as of Monday, we took the statewide state anti-Coalition swing from the most recent polls available and adjusted it down for the national swings in Newspoll of 4.5 per cent two-party preferred to Labor.

For marginal individual seats, we adjusted its 2019 two-party preferred votes for the retirement of popular sitting MPs in 2022. We also took into account some 2019 campaign horror shows in both Labor and Coalition seats. These one-off pre-selection gaffes or social media indiscretions are

invariably corrected by a different candidate at the following poll, in this case 2022. Here's the tally board at the start of week one.

NSW: Labor gains Reid on the state swing, and Lindsay and Bennelong. Labor lost 10 per cent of the vote in 2019 from its preselection fight in Lindsay and should regain at least 2 per cent. John Alexander took about 5.6 per cent of Labor's to/wo-party preferred vote last time, which should return to Labor in 2022.

Victoria: Chisholm to ALP on the state swing, plus Casey, when adjusted for the loss of Tony Smith's personal vote in 2022.

Queensland: No gains for Labor here on a uniform state swing.

South Australia: Boothby, which is now close to a certain Labor seat on 2019 figures with the retirement of Nicole Flint.

Western Australia: Swan, Pearce and Hasluck.

Tasmania: Bass and Braddon.

In the Northern Territory, Lingiari becomes nominally Liberal National Party after the loss of Warren Snowdon. But the seat is very volatile in terms of its

demographics and is a nightmare to organise logistically. I ran a Labor Northern Territory campaign once.

This leaves the ALP up 11 and down one, with a net gain of 10, taking it to 79 and a working majority.

The Coalition would be 66 after these losses to Labor and the gain of Lingiari. It could also lose more seats to Voices candidates or independents such as Rob Priestly in Nicholls, Victoria.

We'll know more on these as the campaign progresses and more credible seat polls become available.

Ironically, as the forecast pro-Labor swing drops in the polls, there is less chance of local ALP candidates eliminating Voices candidates in safer Liberal seats.

We point out, however, that with a swing of about 5 per cent two-party preferred to Labor, the range of swings is likely to be up to 25 per cent. And, as always, it is the range of swings rather than the average that determines the outcome.

On the demographics publicly available to date, the Voices candidates are attracting primary vote swings from families in the top income quartile.

Professional women normally voting Liberal are moving straight from the Coalition to Voices, rather than to Labor. Although this is cold comfort to Coalition MPs who lose their seat to Voices candidates.

There is also some evidence that the Greens vote is flatlining as its younger supporters hit their 30s and start voting Labor. This age cohort trend also seems to be boosting the Labor vote among those aged 35-49, the age at which a significant number of aspirational Labor voters normally begin to vote for the Coalition.

But not this time. At least not yet. However, you'd be a mug to bet against a junkyard dog.

John Black has pioneered demographic and political profiling in Australia since the early 1970s and is a former Labor senator for Queensland. He is executive chairman of profiling company Australian Development Strategies.

Albo can't be all things to Greens and the bush

Rural appeal
Putting 'farmer' in front of a talking point won't win Labor the regional seats it needs to form government.



Barnaby Joyce

When Anthony Albanese and the Labor Party write or talk about regional Australia, it leaves a lot to be desired.

Any mention of regional Australia by Albanese comes in the form of a Labor Party talking point with the word "farmer" or "regional" added for good effect.

Regional Australia is asking Labor to put a bit more thought into what is the plan for us, rather than demand we bend to them.

We want a real competition for the vote in regional Australia. But until Labor cuts the Greens and their policies loose, we will have that political battle with minor parties.

The Nationals and Liberals say let's build Hells Gates Dam, Urannah Dam and Dungowan Dam, on top of the work we're already doing in building Rookwood Weir, Scottsdale Irrigation Scheme and a plethora of other water projects to deliver water security across our nation and expand our agricultural capacity. The Labor Party is either silent or sneering.

It says the agricultural visa is not needed while abattoirs, orchards and dairies need workers.

Labor says green policy is the future while current green regulations burden regional Australia far beyond what is experienced in the capital cities.

Labor says it believes in farmers and then threatens a further 450-gigalitre cut in water allocations for Murray-Darling farmers and, more importantly, the towns these farmers support.

Labor says it believes in the coal industry. But deputy leader Richard Marles is on the record as saying it is a "good thing" that coal jobs will be lost and the industry closed



Labor has to choose between inner-city and regional seats. PHOTO: ALEX ELLINGHAUSEN

down. Labor says it is a competent economic manager while not being able to point to any current replacement to earn our nation the money that our second biggest export does.

Writing in *The Australian Financial Review* on Monday, Albanese was merely ticking a box by "speaking" to regional Australia, issuing a patronising plea from a party that has left Chifley's Bathurst far behind as a fading black-and-white photo on the mantelpiece of memorabilia.

It has now moved to the inner suburbs and there it does quite well with Greens

preferences. It says it is not involved with the Greens while relying on their preferences to have any chance in the election.

If Labor wants to take regional Australia seriously, then don't wait for the Nationals and Liberals to seal the third road across Australia, east to west. Rather, beat us to it. Don't sneer at new dams.

Get your state colleagues in Queensland to approve them, saying you also support their construction. Demand security for the water licences that underpin the shops in basin towns and cities.

Labor cannot win without regional seats and Labor won't win inner-city seats with a genuine regional policy platform.

Labor has lost regional seats. It is slipping in the outer suburban seats and its members have resigned themselves to a competition with the Greens policy in the inner suburban seats.

Independents in financially conservative seats will be called out on the Tony Windsor prospect of supporting one of the most left-leaning Labor alternatives in recent history. You can't be all things to all people in policy, or there is lack of authenticity.

The Labor Party needs to make a choice. Media adviser-written opinion pieces that try to walk both sides of the fence will be called out, and do nothing but add to the growing cynicism as to Labor's belief in the world away from Newtown, St Kilda and Ultimo.

Barnaby Joyce is Deputy Prime Minister of Australia and Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development.

Do liberals need a wolf at the door?

Ross Douthat

The idea that Vladimir Putin's war against Ukraine will be a restorative tonic for Western liberalism, touted hopefully in the first few weeks of war, has taken sharp blows in recent days.

First came the election in Hungary, where Viktor Orban's conservative populist government won a sweeping popular majority, despite—or, more likely, because of—Orban's relatively dovish approach to the struggle in Ukraine. Then came the presidential election polling out of France, where Marine Le Pen is suddenly climbing in second-round polls, threatening Emmanuel Macron with a shocking upset.

Le Pen will probably still lose, not least because her past friendliness to Putin will get more attention. But there is no sign the war has prompted a vast revulsion against nationalism or populism, a stampede back to the liberal establishment.

Another possibility, however, is that the Ukraine war could help the liberal establishment in the long run by encouraging an internal reassessment of what liberalism itself should seek to be.

For example, a writer who seemed overly hopeful about the liberal-revival scenario in the first days of the war, Francis Fukuyama, is now arguing in a *Foreign Affairs* essay that the heroic resistance of the Ukrainians should teach liberals a lesson about the virtues of national identity.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

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