

## An Albanese Labor Opposition – what will the ALP do now?

Scott Gartrell

---

After losing the ‘unlosable’ election, what are the lessons for Federal Labor? Two key insights are apparent: it would be a mistake for the Australian Labor Party (Labor) to interpret the May 18 election result as a major rejection of its policies and the Coalition victory should not be seen as a litmus test for future election campaigns and small target strategy.

Now that the dust has settled, the 46th Commonwealth Parliament is not significantly different from the 45th: a majority Coalition governs the House of Representatives. But after appointing the Speaker, in the now 151 seat House, the Coalition will only have a slim one-seat majority. That said, arguably four of the six crossbenchers are conservative leaning and likely to support the Government, particularly on supply and confidence.

So, after a furious contest, the numbers have shifted slightly to a 1.17 percent swing to the Coalition, on a two-party preferred basis. Not a comprehensive endorsement of the Coalition nor a complete rejection of the Labor Party.

Labor will, however, carry out a review of its policies and campaign, like any prudent Party should. The Party will for the moment make no commitments concerning any specific policy made during the May election campaigning period. This review should focus on both the policies brought to the election and the strategies used to communicate the Party to the electorate.

It is widely acknowledged that the policy platform Labor stood on was comprehensive and detailed, compared to the 1993 ‘Fightback’ policy agenda that then Liberal leader, John Hewson, put before the Australian people.

In the 2019 plebiscite, Labor over-looked two key things about election campaigns. A party needs to be razor sharp about their message and must deploy their best communicators. Bill Shorten struggled through-out his leadership with authenticity, and his polling as preferred prime minister reflected that. In fact, the preferred prime minister polling may have been the only accurate prediction of the May result.

So, what will the Labor Party retain in the policy cupboard?

Although small in its impact on Australians, it’s clear that cancelling the dividend imputation scheme was wildly unpopular and is unlikely to survive the review process. Another hard-fought policy was a combination of removing the capacity for investors to negatively gear, and their ability to reduce taxation on capital gains. This policy was formulated at the height of an unprecedented property boom in our major capitals and increasingly fraught as the housing market fell in historically significant terms. It was also created at a time when economic activity more generally became increasingly fragile.

The bulk of what policies are left, however, should remain. They are examples of what Labor is about – ensuring fairness and equity. Think of restoring penalty rates (the data suggests reducing them has not lead to the benefits claimed by the then Government); closing the gender pay gap in key industries like child care, health and aged care; and opposing a

# Dragoman

specialist regulator in the building industry (notwithstanding the recent controversy over Victorian Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union Secretary, John Setka).

Two other key policies will continue to be strengths for Labor:

- measures to reduce carbon, develop renewable energy industries in Australia and bring down the cost of energy; and
- leadership in addressing the infrastructure gap, particularly in our cities. Including improved public transport and targeted spending to improve the cost and liveability of our major metropolitan centres.

These two key policies are vital to being able to win back Queensland at the next election, and to strengthen support in regional New South Wales and Victoria. Labor will be clearer in its support for the coal mining industry but will also lead in providing an ongoing future to those communities as they transition to a post-coal economy. Other key policies, such as needs-based funding in education and increased funding for the health sector, may well be bi-partisan.

One final observation relates to what sort of a leader Anthony Albanese will be. What will be his imprint on the party he leads?

Albanese's views are deeply rooted in Labor thought – he is of the Party and movement. His early moves have demonstrated his openness to listening to the electorate and he has constructed a shadow ministry that reflects the diversity and strength of the caucus – formed without compromise.

He has a deep comfort with who he is and what he stands for and is an authentic communicator. While one of the best politicians of his generation, his leadership will be marked by doing the *right* thing rather than the *clever* thing. We can expect more bi-partisanship when it is required, but not at the expense of backing away from Labor's values.

Albanese is a social progressive with a nuanced understanding of the relative roles for government, business and the not-for-profit sector. Expect the Labor Party under Albanese to support tax cuts (perhaps not the third tranche) because of fairness, but also to provide the economy with necessary stimulus.



**Scott Gartrell** has over 35 years working in senior corporate roles, as well as the Commonwealth Public Service and with State and Federal members of Parliament. His work has predominately been in property, construction, infrastructure, professional services and health and ageing sectors. Scott serves as a member of The Ethics Centre and Prostate Cancer Foundation (NSW) Boards.