13. Victoria

Nick Economou

If recent national elections were anything to go by, there was a prospect that the 2010 contest would bypass Victoria. This was despite the fact that the newly installed Labor leader and caretaker Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, represented the western Melbourne suburban seat of Lalor, and some of the party conspirators who helped Gillard displace Kevin Rudd, such as Bill Shorten (MHR for Maribyrnong) and Senator David Feeney, were also Victorians. Victoria's apparently secondary importance to the national contest had hitherto been due to the rather limited contribution the State had made to the transfer of marginal seats between the major parties. The 2010 election looked as if it would be a case in point. The Victorian 'pendulum' ahead of this contest (see Table 13.1) showed that the proportion of Victorian lower-house divisions considered to be ultra-marginal (that is, capable of shifting their representational alignment with a two-party swing of between 0 per cent and 4 per cent) (see Hughes 1983, 218) was a mere seven seats (or 19 per cent). This contrasted with New South Wales and Queensland, where the proportion of ultra-marginal divisions was 27 per cent and 57 per cent respectively.

At the completion of the election, however, the result in Victoria proved to be critical to the matter of who had actually won. Victoria, which has proven to be something of a Labor stronghold since 1993, made two major contributions to the national result. First, it returned the first representative of a political party other than Liberal, Labor or Nationals to the House of Representatives in a general election in the postwar period when Adam Bandt from the Australian Greens was elected as the Member for Melbourne. Second, despite the loss in Melbourne, Labor was able to defend its ultra-marginal seats while wresting the seats of McEwen and La Trobe from the Liberal Party. These were the only instances of Labor winning seats from the Liberal Party in the 2010 election and allowed Julia Gillard to have enough House of Representatives seats to be able to negotiate with the crossbenchers (including Bandt) to form a minority government.

The Campaign

There were two campaigns going on in Victoria in this election. The main campaign was clearly the contest between Labor and the Liberal Party for the most ultra-marginal seats. The Liberal Party was hopeful of winning back

Deakin and Corangamite, both of which were narrowly lost at the previous election (Economou 2010). Labor, meanwhile, had its eyes on La Trobe in the outer south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne and the semi-rural seat of McEwen to the city's north. Both seats had just eluded Labor in 2007, with McEwen needing a determination in the Federal Court sitting as the Court of Disputed Returns (*Mitchell vs Bailey* [No. 2] 2008 FCA 692). The major-party leaders made visits to the State, but had very little to offer by way of policies or regional pork-barrelling designed specifically for Victoria. The exception to this was a bidding war to subsidise redevelopment of the Kardinia Park football ground—home of the Geelong Cats AFL club and not far from the eastern boundaries of Corangamite. Tony Abbott appeared to win this tussle when the committee of the football club sent a flyer to its members urging a vote for the Liberals—much to the chagrin of AFL chief executive officer, Andrew Demitriou, who took steps to have this endorsement withdrawn (*The Age*, 11 July 2010).

The second significant campaign in Victoria was the contest between Labor and the Greens for the seat of Melbourne. Doubts about Labor's ability to withstand the growing momentum towards the Greens in this historically safe Labor seat increased with the announcement by sitting member and Finance Minister, Lindsay Tanner, that he would be retiring from politics immediately. Labor preselected former Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) industrial advocate Cath Bowtell (*The Australian*, 5 July 2010). Bowtell was, however, done few favours by her Labor leaders. To the embarrassment of Julia Gillard, Victorian Labor Premier, John Brumby, used the election campaign period to announce that he would be committing his State Government to a 5 per cent emissions reduction and a 20 per cent increase in renewable-energy production (*The Age*, 21 July 2010). Gillard was also on the back foot on matters such as immigration, border protection and 'asylum-seekers'. Her decision to take a conservative position on these matters might well have been very damaging for Labor's chances in Melbourne with its concentrations of tertiary-educated, human-services-employed, young and affluent voters with social-progressive, post-materialist outlooks. Labor's approach to the national campaign appeared to be driving ever more former inner-city Labor voters to the Greens.

The Result

The notion of a two-dimensional campaign in Victoria was reflected in the results in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. In the case of the lower-house contest, the State-wide figures for Victoria are contained in Table 13.2, while the two-party swings for the ultra-marginal seats are contained in Table 13.1. Calculated by the Australian Electoral Commission as a contest between Labor and the Coalition, the Victorian two-party vote was counted to

be 55.3 per cent—a swing to the Labor Party of 1 per cent. Based on results for each seat, however, Table 13.1 shows a bit more volatility than the overall State-wide figures, particularly on primary votes. The swings away from the ALP on primary voting varied across the pendulum, with some seats recoding quite big swings. In terms of two-party swings, however, movement was not particularly significant, save for the big 10.7 per cent swing to the Greens in Melbourne. The biggest two-party swing to the ALP was 6.6 per cent in Julia Gillard's seat of Lalor, after which the adjacent division of Corio (which includes the regional city of Geelong) returned a 5.3 per cent two-party preferred swing to Labor. A 5.3 per cent swing in McEwen rewarded Labor with a gain of the previously Liberal-held seat. Labor also enjoyed two-party swings of 3.5 per cent and 3.4 per cent in the regional city-based seats of Ballarat and Bendigo respectively.

Table 13.1 The 2010 Federal Election: The Victorian ultra-marginal seats (per cent)

Labor seat and two-party vote swing	Coalition seat and two-party vote swing
Corangamite -0.4 Deakin +1 Melbourne -10.7 GRN gain	McEwen -5.3 ALP gain La Trobe -2 ALP gain Dunkley 4-3 McMillan -0.4 Aston -3.3 Gippsland +5.4 Casey -1.7

Table 13.2 2010 Federal Election Result, House of Representatives: Victoria

Party	Primary vote (%)	Swing on 2007	Seats won
ALP	42.8	-1.8	22 (net gain 1)
Liberal	36.4	-1.6	12 (net loss 2)
Nationals	3.2	+0.2	2
Greens	12.6	+4.5	1 (net gain 1)
Family First	3.1	+0.2	
Others	1.6		
Informal	4.5	+1.2	

Source: <vtr.aec.gov.au/HouseStateFirstPrefsByParty-15508-VIC.htm 15/9/2010>

Of the 21 Labor-held seats in the pendulum going into the 2010 election, two-party swings to the Coalition occurred in only three seats, including Corangamite (0.4 per cent, and not enough to see it change hands), Bruce (0.2 per cent) and Batman (1 per cent). Of the 16 Coalition seats, however, two-party swings against the Liberal Party and towards Labor occurred in nine seats, including the two that changed hands (McEwen and La Trobe, 2 per cent), with the next two biggest swings occurring in Aston (3.3 per cent) and Dunkley (2.5 per cent).

In contrast, the strongest swings to the Coalition were mainly in rural seats, although Kevin Andrews won a two-party swing of 2.7 per cent in Menzies on Melbourne's eastern perimeter. In The Nationals-held seats, meanwhile, sitting members enjoyed an increase in their margins in Gippsland (5.4 per cent) and Mallee (3.1 per cent).

Labor's result in the second campaign in Melbourne was, however, not so positive. The momentum towards the Greens being indicated in the opinion polls duly occurred (*The Age*, 19 July 2010). Table 13.3 outlines the Melbourne result and shows that Labor's primary vote fell to the very low level of 38.1 per cent—an 11.4 per cent decline on the 2007 result. In the two-party vote, the Greens won 56 per cent and secured two-party majorities in 30 of the electorate's 41 booths. Labor was able to win only those booths within which could be found Housing Commission flats with concentrations of Labor's migrant-based core constituency. Melbourne was a Labor loss, but the distribution of Greens' preferences in Corangamite (where the Greens polled 11.4 per cent), Deakin (12.9 per cent) and La Trobe (12.3 per cent) were crucial to reversing the result on primary votes and allowing Labor to win these seats.

Table 13.3 2010 Federal Election Result: Division of Melbourne

Candidate	Party	Percentage of vote	Swing
Georgina Pearson	Family First	1.5	+0.5
Adam Bandt	Greens	36.1	+13.3
Joel Murray	Aust. Sex Party	1.8	+1.8
David Collyer	Aust. Democrats	0.6	-0.8
Penelope Green	Secular Party	0.6	+0.6
Cath Bowtell	ALP	38.0	-11.4
Simon Olsen	Liberal	21.0	-2.4
Informal		3.6	+0.8
Bandt	Greens	56.0	
Bowtell	ALP	44.0	-10.7

Source: <<http://vtr.aec.gov.au/HouseDivisionFirstPrefsByVoteType-15508-228.htm>> (viewed 12 October 2010).

Meanwhile, the strongest Greens seats apart from Melbourne were all Labor seats, including Batman (23.5 per cent), Wills (20.6 per cent) and Melbourne Ports (20.6 per cent). The 2010 election demonstrated once again that the Greens vote is at its most concentrated in the inner suburbs of Melbourne (see Economou and Reynolds 2003). The weakest Greens performances were in rural divisions, including Gippsland (6.5 per cent), Murray (6 per cent) and Wannon (6 per cent), with Wannon the only seat to record a fall in the Greens' vote compared with 2007 (down 0.9 per cent). After the Greens, the next biggest movement by way of primary swing was in the informal vote, which rose by 1.3 per cent to 4.5 per cent—the highest informal vote for the lower house in Victoria since 1987.

The Senate

In addition to its historic win in Melbourne, the Greens also secured a seat in the Senate—the first time the Greens had won a Senate position in Victoria despite coming very close in the 2004 and 2007 elections. The 2010 contest was a half-Senate election in which those senators elected in the 2004 contest were defending their seats. The 2004 contest was the election in which the Greens polled 8.8 per cent but were denied a seat by the ALP directing its preferences to the nascent Family First Party, which resulted in the election of Steve Fielding (Economou 2006). In the 2010 election, however, Labor issued a group ticket vote (GTV) that directed preferences to the Greens. As it turned out, the Greens won 14.6 per cent (see Table 13.4) and thus secured a full quota, which meant the party's lead candidate, Richard Di Natale, was elected without the need for Labor preferences. This meant that the left-of-centre parties secured three seats between them: two for the ALP, and one for the Greens.¹

Table 13.4 2010 Federal Election Result, Victoria: The Senate

Party/ticket	Primary vote (%)	Quota	Seats
ALP	37.7	2.6	2
Liberal-Nationals	34.4	2.4	2
Australian Greens	14.6	1.0	1
Family First	2.6	0.1	
DLP	2.3	0.1	1
Australian Sex Party	2.2	0.1	
Other minor parties	5.2	0.4	
Others	0.3	0.0	
Informal	3.9		

Source: <<http://vtr.aec.gov.au/SenateStateFirstPrefsByGroup-15508-VIC.htm>> (viewed 15 September 2010).

There was another interesting twist to the result. At 34.4 per cent, the vote of the Liberal-Nationals Coalition was able to secure only 2.4 quotas. This meant that while Liberal Michael Ronaldson was returned, and Brigit McKenzie of The Nationals was elected (courtesy of the second position on the joint-party ticket), the third-placed Liberal on the ticket, Julian McGauran, was in real danger of not being returned. The Coalition ticket lost ground to the proliferation of right-of-centre minor parties that contested this election, whose accumulated vote was 9.3 per cent, or 0.65 of a quota. As the count unfolded, the significance of the cross-preferencing between the right-of-centre minor parties became apparent when the DLP ticket succeeded in getting ahead of Family First and finishing in second place to the ALP in the penultimate round of counting, with McGauran coming third. With Family First out of the count, the preferences

¹ The idea of 'left-of-centre' and 'right-of-centre' parties is explained in Bowler and Denemark (1993), and Mackerras (1993).

from the Coalition ticket flowed to the DLP and pushed its candidate, John Madigan, ahead of Labor’s Anthony Tow to secure the sixth Victorian seat. This was the first time since 1970 that a candidate running under the rubric of the DLP had been elected to the Senate from Victoria.

Conclusion

As it has been for so many federal elections in the past, this time, Victoria proved to be a very good State for the Labor Party, and the outcome in five electoral divisions proved to be crucial in allowing the Labor government to be returned, albeit as a minority administration. The notion of a strong regional variation within the national trend in this election can be highlighted by comparing the Victorian vote with the national result (see Table 13.5). Victoria was a very good State for the two parties of the left of centre: the ALP and the Greens. The State primary vote for both parties was higher than the national result, and Labor enjoyed a 1 per cent two-party swing compared with the 2.6 per cent swing against it in the national result. The swings were rewarded with seats: of the three seats that changed, two were to the ALP and one was to the Greens. Importantly, Labor defended its Victorian marginal seats. Labor did lose the seat of Melbourne to the Greens, and this was a major achievement for the minor party. In terms of securing executive power, however, the loss of Melbourne was not a disaster for Labor, as the newly elected Greens member stayed true to his campaign commitment and aligned himself with Labor in the event of a hung parliament. The left of centre also advanced in the Senate, rolling back the four–two right-of-centre outcome in the 2004 election by winning back the seat that had been surrendered by the ALP to Family First in that contest. Victoria, then, provided the basis upon which the ALP was able to retain government, and the Australian Greens was able to increase its parliamentary presence.

Table 13.5 Federal Election 2010, House of Representatives: Victoria and national compared

	ALP primary (%)	LNP primary (%)	GRN primary (%)	Others primary (%)	ALP tpv (%)*	Swing
Victoria	42.8	39.7	12.6	4.9	55.3	+ 1.0
National	37.9	43.5	11.7	5.0	50.1	–2.6

* tpv = two-party vote

Source: <<http://results.aec.gov.au/13745/Website/HouseResultsMenu-13745.htm>>

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