

Australian Institute for Progress – Federal Election 2022

Seminar 17 August 2022

Summary of address by Dr Scott Prasser

This talk covers:

- **Understanding the election basics**
- **Know the election result facts**
- **Appreciate some electoral trends**
- **Explanation of the Coalition's failures**

The basics (Slide 1)

- **Know the results – not immediate or media assessment**
- **Stop blaming Morrison – too easy**
- **It's not the campaign stupid!**
- **Qld LNP not do anything special**
- **Learn the right lessons: next election**
- **Beware of 'crisis' scenarios**

Before considering the election 2022 – let's understand some basics.

First, take time to assess results, don't accept immediate reactions by both the media, the winners or the losers.

Second, don't take the easy route and blame it all on Morrison. As discussed later, the Coalition loss was a culmination of nine years of mistakes and two previous flawed leaders.

Third, do not over-focus on the election campaigns – their importance is exaggerated (see later).

Yes, the LNP did well in Queensland, but do not get too excited that it was because of the brilliance of their campaigning - appreciate that it was demographics, geography and the structure of the economy that were more important. And remember how poorly the LNP performs at the state level.

Take time to learn the right lessons from this election – winners and losers often don't and that affects the next campaign.

Don't be taken in by the hyperbole that the Coalition is especially in some sort of 'crisis' – this is a term used too frequently on just about every issue – it neither accords with the facts nor history. There have been bigger losses in the past.

The facts about the election (Slide 2)

- **No ALP landslide 2 seat majority & low primary vote**
- **Low 2PP swing 3.5%**
- **Remember 2016 – 14 seats lost**
- **ALP lost seats – in Qld & won no seats from LP – but margins ...**
- **LP losses: NSW/WA/VIC**
- **NP held firm-but gnawed by minor gps – 4 leaders**
- **Green/Teal – temporary or permanent?**

For goodness sake get the election results in perspective – this was no Hawke or Rudd landslide – the ALP has a slender two seat majority, a low primary vote that hardly moved and the swing against the Coalition was not as large as previous ones.

In Queensland the ALP won no seats from the LNP – a lesson for the state LNP?

Remember the damage to the Coalition under Turnbull in 2016 when 14 seats were lost thus reducing any room for error for his government and his successors.

The recent big Liberal losses were in NSW, Victoria and WA needs to be considered in the context of events prior to election such as unprecedented federal intervention into NSW, delays in pre-selections and policy ambiguity with Victorian Liberals.

On the Green/Teals - temporary blip or long last – again look to history.

Electoral lessons (and trends) (Slide 3)

- **Campaigns and advertising do not decide elections**
- **Sound economy not enough (or COVID)**
- **Spending on X+ = votes**
- **Opinion leaders (not community) - disdain for LP (inner city vs outer suburbia)**

The last couple of decades are highlighting some important electoral trends all parties need to be aware of as they think about the next campaign.

Foremost, is that election campaigns and advertising are not as important as parties and advertising agents and party staff think – they have a role – but how a government performs and shows resolve is what determines campaigns and the results. A lot of resources go into campaigning but too little into serious policy and networking effort (especially when parties are in opposition).

Another emerging lesson is that it's NOT the economy stupid - having a good economy is no longer a guarantee of electoral success. Howard in 2007, and Morrison in 2022 have shown that.

Nor is handling COVID a vote winner *per se* – look at the SA Marshall Government's 2022 defeat and nationally with Morrison, although some aspects of the Federal Government's responses to COVID were questionable – Australia has done better than most.

Also, incumbent governments, especially non-Labor ones, need to appreciate spending a lot of dollars on programs to match an opposition's promises or to appease some interest group, does not automatically translate into votes. This is partly the result of the increasing government intervention into more and more areas of policy and the resulting electorate's

expectation that government should/can 'fix everything' regardless of costs. The GFC and COVID spending sprees have accelerated this trend.

Lastly, the Coalition is losing institutional support – the professions, key interest groups, universities – key opinion leaders. Why and what should be done about it needs thought – but please do not jump to appeasement!

So, what went wrong for the Coalition parties (Slide 4)

- **Abbott landslide BUT... “no cuts” promise 2013**
- **Division within & organisational neglect**
- **Appeasement – enemy set the agenda**
- **Morrison – why was he there?**
- **Over-reactive – media driven & satisficing**
 - no counter narrative
 - no beliefs – nothing to fight for – backflips
 - no strategies/goals eg ABC
 - no difference – worked in Libs favour in the past
- **Conspiracy – women/religion?**
- **Keep your base but still need policy flexibility**
- **So 9 yrs in office ...and?**

The Coalition loss in 2022 should have been a result of long-term drivers – not just Morrison.

It started with the Abbott Government that came to office with a “no cuts to the ABC, no cuts to education, no cuts to welfare” platform which tied its hands. It was ill-prepared for office, nor did it prepare the electorate for what was needed.

There has been continuing internal division in both the parliamentary and organisational wings at federal and state levels (NSW and Vic especially and SA is not much better).

The high turnover of leaders (in the Nationals too) along with some of the behaviour of members and ministers reflected this and undermined one of the Coalition's once core strengths – stability, propriety and respectability.

While governing requires compromise, the Liberals made that their PRIME way of operating as retreat and appeasement – this is because they lacked any philosophical framework, seemed unsure of their values and what they stood for or even what they were against.

Consequently, the opposition and the media set their agenda, and the Coalition succumbed to every latest political fad. Their policy making was reactive, short-term focussed and characterised by repeated backflips.

Why even with the economy, where Liberals are supposed to be leaders, there was no economic reform agenda, and no leadership. Reforms announced one day, were abandoned the next.

Nor were there any strategies to tackle problems, just appeasement. For example, Liberals might complain about the ABC but in 9 years never had a strategy to address some very legitimate issues about this organisation – changing the chair was not a strategy, just tokenism.

The Coalition forgot that their greatest successes were when they differentiated themselves from their opponents – check out Menzies, Fraser and Howard.

Also, given the ongoing pile-on against Morrison over women's issues, Covid, taking family holidays, the bushfires and other matters, makes one wonder whether there was an organised conspiracy seeking to undermine him. Also, how much was this, and the way Morrison portrayed affected by his Pentecostal religion?

Last, the Coalition's drift to the left-middle has upset their base and while governing requires policy flexibility, you still have to work to keep your base close to you.

So, nine years in office and ask yourself what really has the Coalition achieved? – it will be the worse remembered Coalition government in history.

Do these quotes best reflect 9 yrs of Coalition govt? (Slide 5)

Is this the Coalition?

“It is the most grievous consequence of what we have done and of what we have left undone in the last five years – five years of futile good intentions, five years of eager search for the line of least resistance, five years of uninterrupted retreat ... five years of neglect ...”

Churchill attacking his own party and government in 1938 over appeasement.

*“We must be careful not to assign to this deliverance the attributes of a victory. **Wars are not won by evacuations.**”*

Churchill after Dunkirk – June 1940