

18 March 2024

Game on***The Election.***

Two weeks on – one week to go. How is it all shaping up?

In one sense, the die has already been cast. Many have already made up their mind and have already voted. A number also have made a decision on a single issue, whether it be the stadium, forestry or health.

Still, that hasn't stopped the major parties from continuing to release a raft of policy positions, as they refine their arguments for a last-minute appeal before the election next Saturday.

What an extraordinary campaign it has been so far. For starters, the major parties are becoming minor players, and the minor players and independents are becoming major players. The majors have exhausted themselves telling the electorate how bad the other mob is, and it seems the electorate is believing both of them and turning off them both.

The negative ads have been intriguing. The Liberals have a traffic light ad, which displays the Labor logo, warning us to avoid a coalition of chaos, which is a bit rich considering the chaos that has been caused by them. Not to be outdone, Labor has a negative ad which looks for all the world like a Liberal ad, complete with the Liberal logo and name. One could be forgiven for believing each is batting for the other side. They certainly have been talking about the other side - a lot.

Also, as a somewhat academic exercise it is rather intriguing to consider what could have happened in 2021 if the election was for a 35-seat house. A superficial analysis would suggest the following result:

	BRADDON	BASS	LYONS	FRANKLIN	CLARK	TOTAL
Libs	4	4	4	3	2	17
Labor	2	2	3	3	2	12
Greens		1		1	1	3
Other	1				2	3

The reason for the higher number of Independents is because the quota would have been at the lower figure of 12.5%, allowing them to stay in the count, and obviously there have been changes since, with Tucker and O'Byrne finding themselves on the crossbench, which would have lowered the majors by one each and boosted the number of independents to 5.

So, an interesting base for a comparison come Saturday.

For much of the campaign the two majors have been pretty much in lockstep, with similar policies being released on the same day – health one day, education the next, childcare the one after that. It was as if one had advance notice of the other's program of policy releases, and was releasing a similar policy to neutralise the effect of the other.

And then one day, Labor released its “Gamechanger” No-deposit housing policy and the Liberals its chocolate fountain, followed by a ban on ambulance ramping. What a contrast that all was!

(As an aside, the housing issue is a supply-side issue. Increasing demand without increasing supply is only going to make it harder to obtain a house, while the whole idea of banning ramping is bizarre).

Policies continued to be rolled out, in a somewhat random fashion, and without much of a coherent theme. A "Strong Plan" is basically a meaningless phrase, particularly considering that the Liberals have been in power for 10 years and face the continuing criticism that if the "Strong Plan" is so important now, why weren't these things done before. On the other side, Labor is finding it difficult to find traction with its "A Better Future" message.

Meanwhile, the Greens were out there promising utopia, in contrast to the Jackie Lambie (JLN) network, which was out there promoting the fact they had **no** policies and didn't actually need them. A rather novel approach, if I might say so. At least they cannot be criticised for not keeping them.

The JLN is gaining traction, and the government now sees the JLN as a major threat. It has now turned its attention to them, condemning them for their approach. It has been hard-hitting, it has involved some duplicitous behaviour with websites, and has roused the ire of the network's namesake. It will most likely have a minimal effect on the JLN vote, but the ramifications will be long-lasting, and will have a far greater effect if and when it comes time to sit down with them to negotiate a coalition. Because all pundits believe they will be at the table.

There has been some odd-ball behaviour. The caretaker provisions are such as to ensure any decisions made during this period do not bind a future government, thus the proviso placed on election promises "if elected, we will...".

And yet it would seem that that spirit has been broken as contracts have been signed involving the Marinus project while the Whaleback Windfarm project on the west coast has been declared a "Major Project". Even though the two major parties might be in common accord on such matters, it is a presumption, as it may not be the gameplay in any coalition.

Hidden away in the Liberals policy document is a list of lollipops by electorate - some 227 grants to community groups and organisations totalling over \$18m., and no doubt targeted. It would be of interest to understand the criterion/criteria used in determining these grants, and why it was that it was the director of the Liberal campaign, not a candidate, was involved in their announcement. Very odd!

And now the Premier has announced he is going to legislate for loyalty.

"We're going to change the law so MP's who quit their party lose their seat in parliament!"

Whoever came up with this idea is totally out to lunch. It smacks of desperation and of a government wedded to punishment. It is obviously intended to control his own troops, who walked on him, but it is so open to interpretation as to make it meaningless.

It is totally autocratic, something akin to regimes such as China or Russia. One would think it would be anathema to anyone of a small "l" liberal disposition, and in practical terms one could drive the Liberal's launch truck/tractor through the gaps in the prosecution of such a policy.

Loyalty is something that is earned, rather than demanded.

So, one week to go. The tactics mentioned above might just work. Who knows?

Before us will be the launch of the AFL team which is of course a totally non-political event, but no doubt will be covered extensively in the daily AFL-support magazine, otherwise known as the Mercury, with obvious political overtones/undercurrents. As for the timing - extraordinary!

Remember, on Saturday, we must vote for seven candidates to make our vote a valid one.

I suspect the fun and games will actually start after the election, as the various players work to determine who actually wins government.

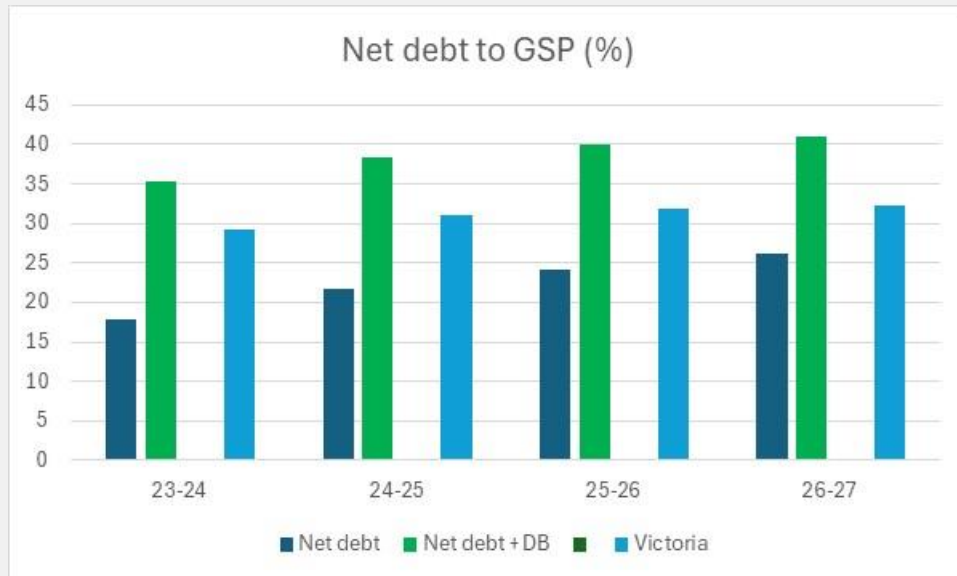
Foremost in their minds should be the financial state of the State.

The Treasurer would have us believe that all is well in finance land, he quotes figures to back his argument, and is disparaging of any who would have the temerity to suggest that all is not a bed of roses.

However, his figures are selective, and conveniently omit certain liabilities, such as the very large liability associated with the defined benefit superannuation scheme, which is unfunded and must be paid for.

It is often said that Victoria is in a difficult situation with spiraling debt, and comparisons made with Tasmania being in a far healthier situation.

The following graph is derived from figures presented by John Lawrence in his blog *tasfintalk.blogspot.com* and shows a far less rosy picture.



In this graph, the figures in dark blue reflect the Treasurer's presentation (i.e. excluding certain debt liabilities), the figures in green with ALL liabilities added, and the light blue the equivalent position in Victoria.

As one can see, it will require a sober reflection after the series of promises made in the election campaign. Being able to offer cost-of-living relief in such a circumstance will be difficult. It will require some deft footwork, and some difficult if not sound policy decisions.