

## The Morgan Poll Review

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# ALP forges ahead

Australians feel less safe, more prosperous and more optimistic, and support for the Latham-led ALP is increasingly strong at 55 per cent, ahead of the L-NP at 45 per cent.

A special global study of almost 43,000 people in 51 countries conducted for the World Economic Forum by Roy Morgan International and Gallup International recently gathered global opinion on different aspects of prosperity and security.

The findings highlight very real safety concerns among people everywhere, with 75 per cent of Australians and 57 per cent of people worldwide holding the belief that their country is now less safe than it was ten years ago.

However, while more people around the world also believe that their country is less prosperous than it was ten years ago, in Australia a clear majority (66 per cent) feel that Australia is more prosperous today than it was in 1994. Only 19 per cent feel Australia is less affluent, and 15 per cent believe it to be about the same.

On another important question about their family's financial situation, the majority of Australians (56 per cent) consider their family to be more prosperous now than ten years ago. Only 27 per cent say the opposite is true.

In line with this positive sentiment, the Roy Morgan consumer confidence rating was 126 in January, the highest figure ever recorded for that month.

The Roy Morgan unemployment estimate for the December quarter was 7.9 per cent, down by just 0.1 per cent on the previous quarter. This quarterly result would have been lower were it not for the high monthly result recorded in December (8.8 per cent). As well as experiencing high

consumer confidence, Australians are also feeling optimistic about unemployment in the year ahead, with 61 per cent (up 6 per cent on the previous year) expecting unemployment to remain the same or to fall in 2004.

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dramatically. In late January, the ALP led the L-NP by 55 per cent to 45 per cent on a two-party basis.

Another important question is who the

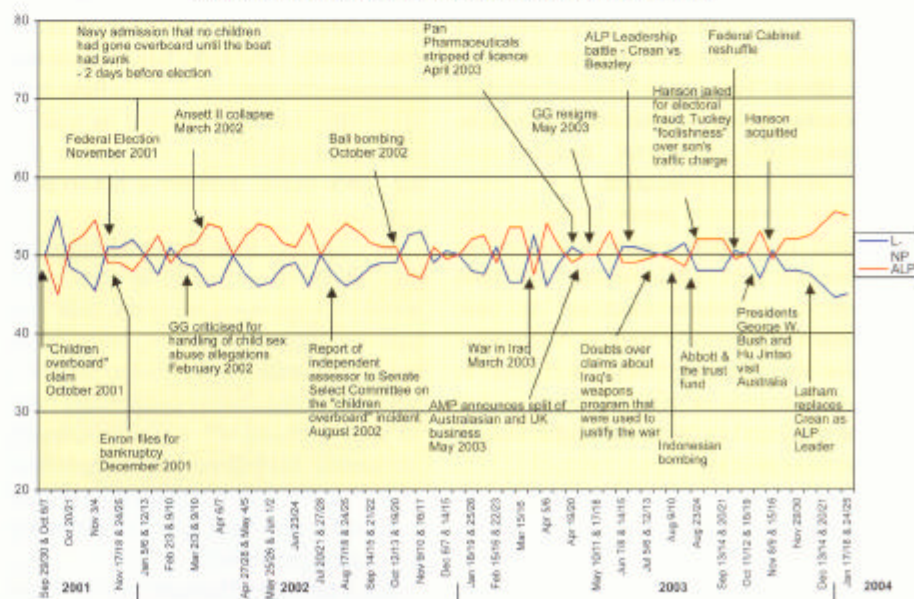
electorate thinks will win the next election. The majority of Australians still expect the L-NP to be returned - 55 per cent say it will win the next election against just 32 per cent who favour the ALP. However, in November 2003 the L-NP was favoured by a much larger margin - 68 per cent expected the L-NP to win, while only 22 per cent expected the ALP to win. Clearly the trend is moving against the L-NP.

However, Roy Morgan research analysis of polling trends has shown that telephone polls tend to be biased towards the party that people expect to win the next election and the party that receives the best publicity and media coverage. This is part of the reason telephone polls are not completely reflecting the swing in electoral support for the ALP.

#### ALP holding in the states

The ALP continues to enjoy strong

FEDERAL TWO-PARTY PREFERRED VOTING INTENTION OVER TIME



majority electoral support at state level. Indeed, in most states ALP support continues to increase.

In New South Wales in January, support for the ALP was up 4 per cent on the previous month to 64.5 per cent compared to the L-NP's 35.5 per cent. In Victoria, ALP support was up 2 per cent since December to 58.5 per cent; in Queensland, the Morgan Poll conducted just before the election was announced showed the ALP at 61 per cent, well ahead of the L-NP at 39 per cent.

In polls conducted up to December, ALP support was down 1 per cent in South Australia to 58 per cent and in Western Australia it was unchanged at 53 per cent. In Tasmania, ALP support was up 2.5 per cent to 52.5 per cent, with the L-NP at 23.5 per cent and others at 24 per cent.

A special analysis of federal voting intention over December/January shows the ALP is also ahead in every state. Support for the federal ALP ranges from 61 per cent in Tasmania, 57 per cent in NSW and 55.5 per cent in Victoria to 52 per cent in WA, SA and Queensland.

### The sleepers

Although the ALP is well ahead of the L-NP in voting intention, the indicators coming up to the next federal election are, in the main, lined up in the Howard Government's favour.

The first important indicator is the high level of consumer confidence. It is extremely rare to have a change of government when consumer confidence is above 100 - whereas a government going to the polls with a confidence rating below 100 is in a very precarious position.

Conversely, a government like the Howard Government of today, which is enjoying consumer confidence of 126 and is further supported by Australians' positive view in relation to their improved economic position and the country's prosperity, would typically be in a very strong

position.

The unusual component is residual anger and disapproval of Howard's stance in relation to the US and the war in Iraq, which is now being reflected in strong support for the opposition. Second, the

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clear and crucial strength of the ALP state governments may represent something of a double-edged sword.

The question of whether the electorate seeks, or is comfortable with, the same party in power both federally and at a state level, or whether it is more comfortable with the tension and balance of the current situation, is not a new one - it is one that has occupied the political analysts and

strategists for many years.

Today, the most important issues for the electorate are health (mentioned by 62 per cent of voters as one of the three most pressing issues the Federal Government should do something about) and education.

These issues come within the remit of both state and federal bodies.

The third most important issue for the electorate relates to defence and security. The L-NP tends to gain support when the electorate is concerned about national security, and the ALP gains support as these issues move into the background and more domestic issues come to the fore.

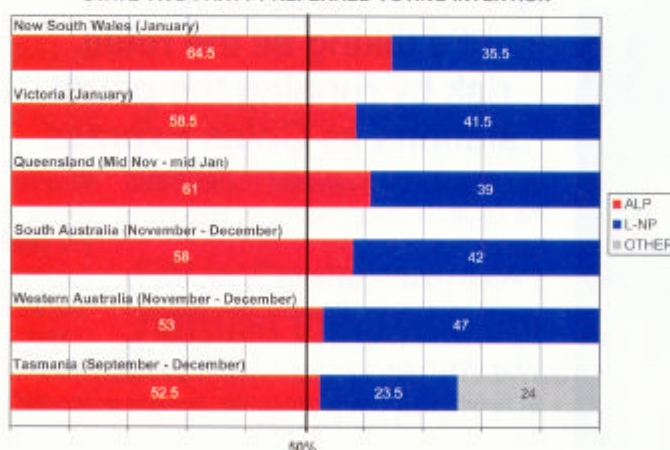
Clearly given the current state of global unrest and daily reports of trouble and security threats in various places around the world, global concerns and a global perspective will be important for some time to come.

Another issue, which has not yet crystallised along party lines, is the electorate's concern about corporate collapses and failures of corporate governance. The link to government has not been made with real strength - even though some questions have been asked about government regulators and their role, responsibility, and performance.

The next big issue is whether Australia is adequately funded for the retirement of the latest wave of retirees and is linked to concerns about security of superannuation investments. The electorate will be looking for the party with the solution.

But the biggest sleeper is the very real possibility that Prime Minister Howard, like President Bush in the US and Prime Minister Blair in the UK, will be called upon for a full inquiry into intelligence about weapons of mass destruction. No-one can be sure where such an inquiry would lead, who it would touch or what it would uncover - and the children overboard inquiry is still within living memory. ■

STATE TWO-PARTY PREFERRED VOTING INTENTION



ROY MORGAN CONSUMER CONFIDENCE RATING AND UNEMPLOYMENT ESTIMATE OVER TIME

