

**WORKING TITLE: Australia Votes, then it's the Senate's turn**

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**Elections are only the start of policies, that's why proper scrutiny needs to be given to senate candidates and parties.**

Technically this election is about whether the parliament should pass two pieces of obscure industrial relations legislation. Politically, of course, the election is more about whether it is better to have a company tax cut or spend the revenue on health and education. However, on both fronts, it is not a vote for Bill Shorten or Malcolm Turnbull that will finally determine either of these issues.

The public's votes on July 2 are just the start of the process. The Senate will decide the fate of major promises of both parties. If the current national opinion polls are to be believed, and the election is won by only a handful of seats by the Coalition, even legislation put to a joint sitting will be dependent on the numbers in the Senate.

It is why we need more scrutiny on the Greens. It is why we need more discussion of Senator Xenophon (and his team), Senator Lambie, Glenn Lazarus, and others likely to have a say in the post double-dissolution Senate.

Whether Australia lowers its company tax rate will not ultimately be determined by who wins the prime-ministership. The level and design of corporate taxes will be determined by the 45th parliament. And while the proposed cuts to business taxes are the cornerstone of the Coalition's economic narrative, the public remains deeply sceptical about the policy, with every opinion poll on the topic showing it is one of least popular policies of any political party.

The chance of these tax cuts passing parliament in the form that the Coalition proposes would appear low, if they have a chance of passing at all. There seems little incentive for Labor, the Greens or populist crossbench senators to vote to implement a policy they oppose and, even more importantly, which the public is not clamouring for.

Similarly Bill Shorten's plans for legislation to extend the deficit reduction levy on high income earners face a post-election hurdle. In the event of a Labor win, would a populist Senate crossbench vote to put up income taxes with a Liberal/National Opposition defending their base against such a tax hike?

If Shorten were Prime Minister, it would be the Senate that ultimately decided the details and design of any scheme to deliver the commitment to 50 per cent of Australia's energy being sourced from renewables by 2030.

### *Senate will decide*

While there has been much economic debate about the budget's fiscal position and the likely impact of each side's policies on the budget deficit, it is the Senate that will ultimately determine billions of dollars' of spending and revenue measures that will materially affect the economy. While some have blamed the Senate for a worsening fiscal position, in the new parliament could it be the Senate that improves the bottom line by stopping or limiting the proposed company tax cut?

The focus on the leadership of the two prime ministerial contenders is completely understandable – Australian society will be shaped by their characters, outlooks and vision. But when it comes to the actual outcomes, our constitution says something different; two equal parliamentary chambers decide those outcomes. The constitution deliberately made it hard to make new laws – it is not chaos, it is stability.

If the last Senate could ruin government plans, there is no reason to think the next one will not do the same. There's no excuse to be surprised by the predictable.

While elections reset political debates, they do not end them. John Howard had to negotiate his GST, and the next prime minister will have to negotiate much of their budget.

Despite this double-dissolution election being called because of votes cast in the Senate, the election coverage hasn't been about the Senate. One advantage of the long election campaign should be to give a better airing and understanding of the likely post-election parliamentary dynamics, with Senate candidates and parties subjected to tighter scrutiny on exactly where they stand.

A Senate leaders' debate would not only provide voters with a new insight into the real working of their parliament, but it would flush out the likely strategies and priorities of the major Senate players. Tony Abbott famously declared that he would "never do a deal with a minor party", and then achieved little. John Howard made major concessions to the Democrats to get his GST through a 'hostile Senate'. Would a newly elected Coalition government be willing to negotiate with the Greens or Xenophon to get half of their company tax cuts through or would they demand all or nothing. It would be nice to know before the election.

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