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Antony Green

**Update to Background
Paper No 3/05**

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by

Antony Green

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New South Wales By-elections 1965-2008

(This publication updates *New South Wales By-elections 1965-2005*, NSW Parliamentary Library Research Service Background Paper No 3/05)

Total number of by-elections and average number per year, 1941-2008

Period	Govt	Total	In seats held by			By-elections per year in	
			Govt	Oppn	Other	All Seats	Govt Seats
1941-1965	ALP	51	25	20	6	2.1	1.1
1965-1976	LCP	20	13	6	1	1.8	1.2
1976-1988	ALP	28	17	11	..	2.3	1.4
1988-1995	LNP	20	10	9	1	2.9	1.4
1995-2008	ALP	20	8	9	3	1.5	0.6
Totals		139	73	55	11	2.1	1.1

Note: Includes the four by-elections to be held on 18 October 2008

Of the 88 by-elections held since 1965, only 13 have produced a change in the party holding a seat. There have been three seats gained by the government of the day: Bathurst 1967, Earlwood 1978 and Clarence 1996. All three gains occurred in the first term of a newly elected government.

There have been five seats gained by Oppositions: Georges River 1970, Coogee 1974, Bass Hill 1986, Northern Tablelands 1987 and The Entrance 1992. The last four of these defeats took place in the final term of the government in office.

There were a further two seats that swapped between the Coalition parties: Oxley 1965 and Murray 1980. There was one seat lost by the Opposition to an Independent, Pittwater 2005, one Opposition gain from an Independent, Tamworth 2001, and one Government gain from an Independent, Murray 1973.

There have also been two cases where a departing Independent was succeeded by another Independent: North Shore 1988 and Dubbo 2004.

What is clear from the tables is that governments tend to have their best by-election results in their first term, while some of the biggest swings against governments occurred in the fourth term of the 1976-88 Labor government. However, the second term Askin government and first term Greiner government suffered poor by-election results which were not repeated at subsequent elections.

Notes on Swing Tables

The tables on the following pages show all by-elections since 1965. All swings are expressed as swings to or from the government, positive swing values meaning a swing to the government, negative swing values being a swing against the government. The tables have been subdivided by government and term. Two-candidate or two-party preferred swings are not available for all by-elections, and electorates where the absence of a major party candidate makes the primary vote swing meaningless have been indicated.

The idea that there is such a thing as an 'average' by-election swing implies there is such a thing as an 'average' by-election. Primary vote swings at by-elections have varied from -29.9 to +17.1, two-party preferred swings from -18.5 to +14.0. With such a range of results, any overall 'average' swing is meaningless.

Average Change in Vote where 2CP can be calculated 1965-2008

Years	Government	No. of By-elecs	% Primary Swing			% 2CP Swing Govt
			Govt	Oppn	Others	
1965-1976	Coalition	5	-5.6	+2.3	+3.3	-5.4
1976-1988	Labor	14	-9.8	+1.7	+8.1	-5.6
1988-1995	Coalition	6	-8.8	+4.1	+4.7	-6.8
1995-2008	Labor	7	-0.3	-4.8	+5.2	-0.5
1965-2008	Average	32	-6.9	+0.8	+6.1	-4.7

Source: Updated from Table 10, p.15 of the earlier publication. Includes 2CP estimates for by-elections between 1984 and 1988. Note that the % Primary Swings in this table have been calculated on a different basis to those in tables on the following pages. The above table only includes contests where a 2-candidate preferred count is available or can be easily calculated. Tables on the following pages also include primary swings in seats without a 2-candidate preferred count.

By-elections Missing Either Labor or Coalition Candidates 1965-2008

Period	Government	No Labor candidate	No Coalition Candidate
1965-1976 (20 by-elecs)	Coalition	1975 Lane Cove * 1975 Pittwater *	
1976-1988 (28 by-elecs)	Labor	1980 Ku-ring-gai 1985 Murray (Nat held) 1985 Gloucester (Nat held) 1986 Pittwater 1986 Vaucluse	
1988-1995 (20 by-elecs)	Coalition	1988 Vaucluse * 1992 Davidson * 1992 Gordon * 1992 Ku-ring-gai * 1993 The Hills * 1994 North Shore *	1988 Wallsend 1989 Liverpool 1990 Granville 1990 Heffron 1990 Smithfield 1990 Macquarie Fields 1994 Cabramatta
1995-2008 (20 by-elecs)	Labor	1996 Port Macquarie (Nat) 2002 Hornsby 2004 Dubbo (Ind held) 2005 Pittwater 2008 Port Macquarie (Ind held)	2001 Campbelltown * 2005 Maroubra * 2005 Marrickville *

Note: '*' indicates a by-election not contested by the Opposition. Table includes the four by-elections to be held on 18 October 2008

Coalition Government 1965-1976

Date	Electorate	Premier	Party Term	Swing Primary	Swing 2CP
6 Nov 1965	Bondi	Askin	1	+0.9	...
6 Nov 1965	Oxley (1)	Askin	1	-2.6	...
6 May 1967	Bathurst (2)	Askin	1	+7.8	...
Average (1st term)				+2.0	...
19 Apr 1969	Lake Macquarie	Askin	2	-6.2	...
14 Feb 1970	Murrumbidgee	Askin	2	+10.0	...
14 Feb 1970	Randwick	Askin	2	-5.1	...
14 Feb 1970	Upper Hunter	Askin	2	-9.6	-13.9
19 Sep 1970	Georges River (3)	Askin	2	-18.4	-11.1
Average (2nd term)				-5.9	-12.5
29 Jul 1972	Mosman	Askin	3	-11.1	...
18 Nov 1972	Charlestown	Askin	3	-0.9	...
17 Feb 1973	Armidale	Askin	3	(c)	...
17 Feb 1973	Byron	Askin	3	+1.5	+0.7
17 Feb 1973	Hawkesbury	Askin	3	-4.4	-2.4
6 Oct 1973	Murray (4)	Askin	3	(c)	...
Average (3rd term)				-3.7	-0.9
20 Jul 1974	Coogee (5)	Askin	4	+2.9	-0.1
20 Jul 1974	Goulburn	Askin	4	-2.1	...
8 Feb 1975	Lane Cove	Lewis	4	(b)	...
8 Feb 1975	Pittwater	Lewis	4	(b)	...
6 Dec 1975	Wagga Wagga	Lewis	4	-4.7	...
14 Feb 1976	Orange	Willis	4	-2.0	...
Average (4th term)				-1.5	-0.1
Average (Four terms)				-2.8	-5.4

Notes:

- (a) – No Government/Coalition candidate
- (b) – No Opposition/Labor candidate
- (c) – No Labor candidate at previous general election
- (1) – Oxley, Liberal gain from Country Party
- (2) – Bathurst, Country Party gain from Labor (Government gain)
- (3) – Georges River, Labor gain from Liberal Party (Opposition gain)
- (4) – Murray, Liberal gain from Independent
- (5) – Coogee, Labor gain from Liberal Party (Opposition gain)

Notable By-elections 1965-76

Bondi 1965: The Askin government appointed popular Labor MP Abe Landa as Agent-General in London in the hope of gaining his seat at a by-election and bolstering the government's slim majority. Labor nominated former Federal MP for the area Syd Einfeld as its candidate and retained the seat with almost no swing.

Bathurst 1965: Bathurst was gained by the Country Party on the death of former Labor Minister Gus Kelly, who had represented the district for almost four decades.

Georges River 1970: Problems with the education system and the delivery of urban services helped Labor to gain Georges River from the government. Labor retained the seat at the 1971 election, when the government was re-elected, though with significant swings against it in Sydney.

Coogee 1974: The Liberal Party won Coogee by just 8 votes at the 1973 election. The result was overturned by the Court of Disputed Returns and a by-election held in July 1974. The victory by Labor under new leader Neville Wran was reported as a significant Labor victory despite there being only a tiny swing against the government. The local result was worse for Labor than at the Federal election in May, and probably reflected the growing unpopularity of the Whitlam government.

Labor Government 1976-1988

Date	Electorate	Premier	Party Term	Swing Primary	Swing 2CP	
9 Oct 1976	The Hills	Wran	1	+0.8	...	
13 Jul 1978	Earlwood (1)	Wran	1	+7.2	...	
Average (1st term)				+4.0	...	
23 Feb 1980	Castlereagh	Wran	2	-4.3	...	
13 Sep 1980	Bankstown	Wran	2	-7.4	...	
13 Sep 1980	Ku-ring-gai	Wran	2	(a)		
13 Sep 1980	Murray (2)	Wran	2	-3.0	-6.9	
21 Feb 1981	Cessnock	Wran	2	-8.7	...	
21 Feb 1981	Maitland	Wran	2	-0.6	+2.9	
21 Feb 1981	Oxley	Wran	2	+0.8	+0.8	
21 Feb 1981	Sturt	Wran	2	+3.0	+3.0	
Average (2nd term)				-2.9	-0.1	
17 Apr 1982	Drummoyne	Wran	3	-13.5	...	
22 Oct 1983	Kogarah	Wran	3	-11.8	...	
22 Oct 1983	Maroubra	Wran	3	-7.1	-7.1	
22 Oct 1983	Marrickville	Wran	3	-9.6	...	
22 Oct 1983	Riverstone	Wran	3	-11.5	...	
Average (3rd term)				-10.7	-7.1	
2 Feb 1985	Murray	Wran	4	(a)		
2 Feb 1985	Peats	Wran	4	-10.7	-9.3	(est)
12 Oct 1985	Gloucester	Wran	4	(a)		
1 Feb 1986	Cabramatta	Wran	4	-15.7	-6.3	(est)
1 Feb 1986	Canterbury	Wran	4	-14.8	-9.3	(est)
1 Feb 1986	Kiama	Wran	4	-6.9	+1.6	(est)
31 May 1986	Pittwater	Wran	4	(a)		
31 May 1986	Vaucluse	Wran	4	(a)		
2 Aug 1986	Bass Hill (3)	Unsworth	4	-22.2	-17.5	(est)
2 Aug 1986	Rockdale	Unsworth	4	-17.1	-14.5	(est)
31 Jan 1987	Bankstown	Unsworth	4	-20.7	-3.2	
31 Jan 1987	Heathcote	Unsworth	4	-18.2	-8.3	(est)
23 May 1987	Nthn Tablelands (4)	Unsworth	4	-4.2	-4.2	
Average (4th term)				-14.5	-7.9	
Average (Four terms)				-8.5	-5.6	

Notes:

- (a) – No Government/Labor candidate
- (b) – No Opposition/Coalition candidate
- (1) – Earlwood, Labor gain from Liberal party (Government gain)
- (2) – Murray, National gain from Liberal Party
- (3) – Bass Hill, Liberal gain from Labor Party (Opposition gain)
- (4) – Northern Tablelands, National gain from Labor Party (Opposition gain)

Notable By-elections 1976-88

Earlwood 1978: The by-election was caused by the resignation of former Premier Sir Eric Willis. The size of the swing to Labor encouraged the calling of an early election in September 1978 at which the Earlwood swing was reflected across the state.

Drummoyne 1982: The Drummoyne by-election took place after a period when the state's electricity supply had been under stress. There was a considerable decline from the levels of Labor support at the state election in 1981.

Kogarah, Maroubra, Marrickville, Riverstone 1983: Four by-elections on the same day saw significant swings from the high levels of Labor vote at the 1981 election.

Bass Hill, Rockdale 1987: Bass Hill was the seat of retiring Premier Neville Wran, while Rockdale was being contested by new premier Barrie Unsworth who was transferring from the Legislative Council. The swings in both seats were huge, after preferences an estimated 17.5 percentage points in Bass Hill and 14.5% in Rockdale. For the first time in its history, Bass Hill left the Labor fold, but was re-gained by Labor at the 1988 election. Unsworth hung on to Rockdale by 54 votes and increased his majority at the 1988 election.

Bankstown, Heathcote 1987: Both by-elections were caused by the resignation of Labor MPs facing major legal difficulties, Ric Mochalski in Bankstown and former Corrective Services Minister Rex Jackson in Heathcote. The decline in the Labor primary vote came about partly because of the huge field of candidates nominating, 13 in Bankstown and 16 in Heathcote.

Coalition Government 1988-1995

Date	Electorate	Premier	Party Term	Swing Primary	Swing 2CP	
18 Jun 1988	Vaucluse	Greiner	1	(c)		
5 Nov 1988	North Shore	Greiner	1	-1.4	-3.1	(d)
5 Nov 1988	Port Stephens	Greiner	1	-10.3	-12.9	
17 Dec 1988	Wallsend	Greiner	1	(a)		
29 Apr 1989	Liverpool	Greiner	1	(a)		
23 Jun 1990	Granville	Greiner	1	(a)		
23 Jun 1990	Heffron	Greiner	1	(a)		
23 Jun 1990	Smithfield	Greiner	1	(a)		
1 Sep 1990	The Hills	Greiner	1	-26.0	-18.5	
3 Nov 1990	Coffs Harbour	Greiner	1	-29.9	-16.0	
3 Nov 1990	Macquarie Fields	Greiner	1	(a)		
Average (1st term)				-16.9	-12.6	
18 Jan 1992	The Entrance (1)	Greiner	2	-3.8	-4.9	
2 May 1992	Davidson	Greiner	2	(b)		
22 Aug 1992	Gordon	Fahey	2	(b)		
22 Aug 1992	Ku-ring-gai	Fahey	2	(b)		
28 Aug 1993	The Hills	Fahey	2	(b)		
5 Feb 1994	North Shore	Fahey	2	+3.6	+5.9	
9 Apr 1994	Vaucluse	Fahey	2	+3.4	+0.2	
27 Aug 1994	Parramatta	Fahey	2	-11.0	-9.5	
22 Oct 1994	Cabramatta	Fahey	2	(b)		
Average (2nd term)				-2.0	-2.1	
Average (Two terms)				-9.4	-7.4	

(a) – No Government/Coalition candidate

(b) – No Opposition/Labor candidate

(c) – Uncontested by-election

(d) – Liberal/Independent contest used in calculating swing

(1) – The Entrance, Labor gain from Liberal Party (Opposition gain)

Notable By-elections 1988-95

North Shore, Port Stephens 1988: Both by-elections were conducted at the end of the government's first year in office at a time when changes to the education system and increases in government charges were damaging to the government. In North Shore, Independent Robyn Read maintained the support of retiring Independent Ted Mack. In Port Stephens, the decision of the Liberal candidate to challenge the state election result in the Court of Disputed Returns back-fired when the subsequent by-election produced a 12.9% swing to Labor.

Coffs Harbour 1990: Retiring MP Matt Singleton had been dropped from the Greiner cabinet, and the Coffs Harbour by-election was held after the release of the ICAC report into north coast land development. The fall in National Primary vote was 29.9 percentage points, 16.0% after preferences. Half of the lost National Party vote returned at the 1991 state election.

The Entrance 1992: The narrow victory of Liberal MP Bob Graham at the 1991 election was challenged and overturned in the Court of Disputed Returns. The Greiner government's hold on office was made even more difficult by the 4.9 percentage point swing that delivered The Entrance to Labor.

Parramatta 1994: The Parramatta by-election was caused by the death of the sitting Labor MP Andrew Ziolkowski. The Labor Party nominated his widow Gabrielle Harrison as its candidate. Unwise attacks on Harrison by the Liberal candidate were among the factors that created a 9.5% swing to Labor, reversing the good results recorded by the Liberal Party at by-elections over the previous year.

Labor Government 1995-2008

Date	Electorate	Premier	Party Term	Swing Primary	Swing 2CP
25 May 1996	Clarence (1)	Carr	1	+17.1	+14.0
25 May 1996	Orange	Carr	1	+14.8	+13.8
25 May 1996	Pittwater	Carr	1	-5.7	...
25 May 1996	Southern Highlands	Carr	1	-7.5	...
25 May 1996	Strathfield	Carr	1	-6.7	-2.3
30 Nov 1996	Port Macquarie	Carr	1	(a)	
20 Dec 1997	Sutherland	Carr	1	-2.8	+0.2
Average (1st term)				+1.5	+6.4
3 Feb 2001	Campbelltown	Carr	2	(b)	
8 Sep 2001	Auburn	Carr	2	-12.9	-11.1
8 Dec 2001	Tamworth (2)	Carr	2	+2.4	...
23 Feb 2002	Hornsby	Carr	2	(a)	
Average (2nd term)				-5.3	-11.1
20 Nov 2004	Dubbo	Carr	3	(a)	
17 Sep 2005	Macquarie Fields	lemma	3	-13.3	-12.4
17 Sep 2005	Maroubra	lemma	3	(b)	
17 Sep 2005	Marrickville	lemma	3	+1.4	-5.6 (c)
26 Nov 2005	Pittwater (3)	lemma	3	(a)	
Average (3rd term)				-6.0	-9.0
18 Oct 2008	Cabramatta	Rees	4		
18 Oct 2008	Lakemba	Rees	4		
18 Oct 2008	Port Macquarie	Rees	4	(a)	
18 Oct 2008	Ryde	Rees	4		
Average (4th term)					
Average (Four terms)				-1.3	-0.5

(a) – No Government/Labor candidate

(b) – No Opposition/Coalition candidate

(c) – Labor/Greens contest used for calculating swing

(1) – Clarence, Labor gain from National Party (Government gain)

(2) – Tamworth, National gain from Independent

(3) – Pittwater, Independent gain from Liberal Party

Notable By-elections 1995-2008

Clarence 1996: Five by-elections were held on 25 May 1996 following the departure of three state MPs to Commonwealth politics and the resignation of two former Fahey government Ministers. In Clarence, former Fahey Minister Ian Causley had retired to contest and win the Federal seat of Page. He defeated Labor MP Harry Woods, who then contested and won the Clarence by-election for Labor, increasing the Carr government's majority from one to three.

Macquarie Fields 2005: Macquarie Fields was held by retiring Planning Minister Craig Knowles. The by-election was conducted in the aftermath of the retirement of Premier Bob Carr. The Liberal Party did not nominate candidates for the Maroubra and Marrickville by-elections, held the same day. The by-election saw a 13.3% decline in Labor's primary vote, 12.4% after preferences.

Pittwater 2005: The Pittwater by-election was held following the resignation of Liberal Leader John Brogden. The Labor Party did not nominate a candidate and the Liberal party lost the seat to Independent Alex McTaggart. The Liberal Party primary vote fell 22.2% percentage points, the two-candidate preferred swing was 25.5%. The Liberal Party re-gained the seat at the 2007 election.