SURVEY OF ELECTION ISSUES ✈ ELECTORAL REFORM

August, 1974.

Summary of Findings of Survey on Electoral Issues

At the end of August, the Morgan Gallup Poll found the following support for the Political parties in Australia:

L-CP	..	50%
DLP	..	3
ALP	..	42
AP	..	3
Independent		2
		100%

In August 1974, additional questions were included in the Morgan Gallup Poll to establish bench-marks on elector's attitudes to electoral issues and their present attitude toward different parties.

Chance of Changing Mind and Voting for a Different Party

At the end of August 14% said they were very likely or fairly likely to change their mind and vote for another party. At that time, the Morgan Gallup Poll found that L-CP had support of 50% of electors. Only 10% of those L-CP voters said there was some chance they would change their mind and vote for another party. Of ALP voters (42% of electors) 16% said there was some chance they would change their mind and vote for another party, compared with 29% of DLP voters, 45% of Australia Party voters and 36% of Independents and minor party voters. Analysis by age shows that 18% of those aged 20-29 said they were very likely or fairly likely to change their vote, compared with 15% of those aged 30-49, 12% of those aged 50-69 and 9% of those aged 70 and over.

This result doesn't,however, mean that there are more younger swinging voters than swinging voters in other age groups. (See Appendix A on swinging voters). It means that younger people more readily admit (or are more aware) that they may change parties.

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Issue Which Would Cause Voters to Switch

If a Federal election were being held, 25% said the chief issue which would cause them to vote for a particular party would be the parties ability to control inflation or cost of living. This was given by 29% of those people who intended to vote L-CP, compared with 22% of ALP voters, 20% of Australia Party voters and 25% of DLP voters. The next most important issue was controlling unions and strikes, which was mentioned by 10% of electors. Of L-CP voters, 13% mentioned this, compared with 17% of Australia Party voters, 8% of DLP voters and 5% of ALP voters. Of all people, 15% mentioned a social service as the most important issue, such as education, pensions, health services, help for the aged, aid for the under-priveleged. Of ALP voters, 26% mentioned these social services, compared with 11% of DLP voters, 7% of Australia Party voters and 7% of L-CP voters. Analysis by age shows that people aged 20-29 are most concerned about inflation (33%), compared with 22% of those aged 30-49, 18% of those aged 50-69 and 16% of those aged 70 and over. People aged under 50 are more concerned about controlling Trade Unions than are people aged over 50. People aged over 50 are more concerned about social services than younger people. Of people who said there was some chance that they would change their vote, 35% said the one issue which could cause them to vote for a particular party was to control inflation or control cost of living. Of people unlikely to change their vote, 25% mentioned control of inflation or cost of living as the main issue.

People with an income of less than $4,000 a year were most concerned with social services, while for income groups over $4,000 a year, control of inflation or cost of living was the most important issue.

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Which Three Issues Considered Important

Respondents were then shown a list of 25 issues and asked which three were most important to them.

The following are the issues mentioned by more than 10% and analysed by voting intention:

	All electors	ALP	AUST.	L-CP	DLP
	%	%	%	%	%
Restrain & control price increases	35	41	29	31	41
Be tough with unions with bad strike records	33	23	38	43	23
Restrain & control wage demands ..	26	23	23	29	45
Help finance families to buy a home	22	23	21	20	21
Full employment	18	21	8	15	27
In addition to pensions, do more for the needy and aged	17	19	10	16	7
Control interest rates ..	13	11	8	16	6
Strengthen Australia's defence forces	13	4	8	21	11
Spend more on Education ..	13	16	13	10	6
Limit foreign ownership of Australian companies	11	15	22	8	11
State Government's to co-operate better with the Federal Government	11	13	19	9	5

It can be seen from the above table that ALP voters are chiefly concerned with controlling prices (41%), while DLP voters are chiefly concerned with controlling wages (45%), and L-CP voters (43%) and Australia Party (38%) are chiefly concerned with being tough with the unions. Helping home finance was equally important for voters of all political parties. Full employment was considered important by 27% of DLP voters, compared with 21% of ALP voters, 15% of L-CP voters and only 8% of Australia Party voters. ALP voters are more concerned than L-CP voters about social services, such as health schemes, hospitals, education and doing more for the aged. L-CP voters were concerned

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more than ALP voters with controlling interest rates, strengthening defence, decentralization out of cities, and making the Public Service more efficient. Australia Party voters are more concerned than either L-CP or ALP voters with foreign ownership, state co-operation and pollution. Both Australia Party voters (14%) and DLP voters (19%) were more concerned than either ALP voters (8%) or L-CP voters (4%) with doing more for Aboriginals.

Whether Hold an Election

In late August when electors were asked whether there should be another election, 70% said the ALP should see out their three-year-term, 24% said hold another election and 6% 'couldn't say'. Of ALP voters, 91% said they should see out the term, compared with 83% of Australia Party voters, 64% of DLP voters and 52% of L-CP voters. The chief reasons given for the ALP seeing out its term were "the ALP should be given a chance to prove themselves", "the people elected them to finish their term", "elections are costly", and "it takes time to implement policies".

Most people who said they felt there should be another election said that the Government was ineffective; they were not satisfied with the present Government. Analysis by age shows little difference. People living in the country were slightly more in favor of another election than people in the city. (29% compared with 21%).

The question was repeated last weekend, October 12, 13. Only half the sample is now in the office. Answers of electors show that 2 out of 3 still believe the ALP should see out its 3-year term.

Whether Electoral Reform

When respondents were asked whether there was a need for reforming the electoral system in Australia, 39% of electors said there was, 48% said there wasn't, and 13% were undecided. Of ALP voters, 50%

said there was a need for electoral reform, and 62% of Australia Party voters said there should be electoral reform. Only 29% of L-CP voters said there should be electoral reform and only 34% of DLP voters said there should be electoral reform. Analysis by age showed that more people in all age groups said they were against electoral reform than said they were for electoral reform. Swinging voters, however, were more in favor of electoral reform than other electors. Of the swinging voters, 47% said there was a need for electoral reform, 40% said there wasn't and 13% were undecided. Of people who said there should be electoral reform, most mentioned there should be first-past-the-post voting or non-preferential voting (17% of all electors). The next most important reform suggested was one-man-one-vote (8% of all electors).

The above questions should be repeated at regular intervals to measure trends.

Appendix A:

A NEW LOOK AT THE SWINGING VOTER

Compiled by

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What This Paper Contends About Swinging Voters

Of Australia's 8,232,000 million electors, as many as 35% (1-in-3) may be "swinging voters" i.e. people who at some time between elections definitely change their minds as to which party they would vote for "if an election were held today".

Former Beliefs as to Size of the Swinging Vote

Judging by the maximum rise or fall in the vote for L-CP and A.L.P., over several years, many political analysists concluded that not more than 10% of electors were genuine "swinging voters", no matter what they might say at parties and in pubs. That belief was questioned in January, when the "Social Barometer" (conducted by Probe Pty. Ltd) announced that of 1,472 electors surveyed at the end of 1973, 19% said they would then vote differently from the party they voted for at the 1972 Federal election.

New Evidence of Big Swinging Vote

Evidence that Probe's 19% of swinging voters, far from being an exaggeration, was in fact an understatement, is proved by analysis of answers in a "Double Interview" survey conducted by the Roy Morgan Research Centre Pty. Ltd., between August and October 1973. That Double-Interview survey was conducted primarily to measure the "casualness" of the readership of the major newspapers and magazines. That, in turn, was needed to measure the reach and frequency of their readership.

People, however, were also asked their then voting intention. That was done both in the original interviews and again in the re-interviews 4-6 weeks later. An astonishing 18% gave different voting intentions in the two surveys. This doesn't include the people who switched from the Liberal Party to the Country Party and vice-versa. Applying the Beta curve used to estimate the per annum frequency of switching, the number is as high as about 35%.

Further Evidence

There may be no connection between when people decide how to vote and whether they are swingers. For instance, a person who never decides until election eve may always vote the same way. Nevertheless, a finding by the Morgan Gallup Poll provides some evidence that the swinging vote is somewhere between 20% and 40%.

Of 2,236 electors interviewed soon after the May election, 14% said they had not decided how to vote until some time in the 2 weeks before voting day. Another 8% decided 3-4 weeks before voting day, and 15% a few months before it. Only 58% had decided "a long time ago", which seemed to class them definitely as non-swingers.

Answers in the Double Interview survey have been analysed by demographic characteristics. The following table compares the profiles of swingers as classified by the Double-Interview survey, with profiles of electors as obtained by the Morgan Gallup Poll.

	Electors in Morgan Gallup Poll	"Swingers" in Morgan "Double Interview" Survey
	%	%
Sex		
Men	49	48
Women	51	52
	100	100
Age		
Under 20 ..	4	4
20-34	34	34
Total under 35	38	38
35-44	19	19
45+	43	43
	100	100
Occupation of Household Head		
White collar ..	48	42
Blue collar ..	52	58
	100	100
Religion		
Catholic ..	25	28
Protestant ..	66	61
None, Other Xian	8	10
Others ..	1	1
	100	100
Where Live		
Capital cities	63	72
Country areas	37	28
	100	100

It can be seen that there are more swingers in the capital cities than in the country, and slightly more blue collar workers are swingers than white collar workers. The significant finding, however, is that the age analysis of the swinging voter shows that the age of the swinging voter is similar to the age of the voting population. This would suggest that there is no evidence that any political party should concentrate more on any particular age segment of the community than another. If any extra effort was going to be made, then it would be advisable to concentrate on the blue collar workers living in the capital cities and larger urban areas.

The detailed computer report shows political parties which electors said they would switch to and from. Their answers are analysed by all demographics and media habits - newspaper, magazines, TV and radio.