

## The 2024 ACT election - A restless electorate but reluctant to change

The election was conducted from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> of October, a shorter period than in 2020.

Both the ALP and Liberals retained their seats won at the 2020 election with the ALP having 10 and the Liberals 9. The Greens lost two, one each in Kurrajong and Murrumbidgee. The Independents for Canberra group won one in Kurrajong and an Independent (Fiona Carrick Independent) won one in Murrumbidgee. It was the first time independents had won seats since 1998. Three ministers lost their seats. As a result no party had a majority. The ALP and Greens were unable to come to an agreement to renew their coalition but the Greens agreed to support a minority Labor Government.

There was a substantial swing to independent candidates. Independents for Canberra received a swing of 8.56 per cent and Fiona Carrick Independent 13.1 per cent<sup>1</sup>. The former group fielded candidates in all five electorates while the latter only stood in Murrumbidgee. The ALP, Liberals and Greens all lost votes. The ALP obtained a vote share of 34.1 per cent (down 3.7 per cent), the Liberals (33.4, 0.4) and the Greens (12.2, 1.3).

### The Election context 2020 to 2024

- ◆ The Liberals changed their leader after the 2020 election, Alistair Coe was replaced by Elizabeth Lee with Jeremy Hanson as deputy. In 2024 Jeremy Hanson was replaced by Leanne Castley. Alistair Coe subsequently resigned from the Assembly to be replaced by James Milligan in a count back<sup>2</sup>
- ◆ Count backs were also used to replace Liberal Giulia Jones who resigned to be replaced by Ed Cocks and Greens member Johnathan Davis (resigning after an illegal sexual relationship) was replaced by Laura Nuttal
- ◆ Shortly before the election The Liberals disendorsed Elizabeth Kikkert, a sitting Liberal member for Ginninderra. The reasons given were alleged electoral fraud and poor workplace relations. She was subsequently endorsed as a candidate for Family First
- ◆ The ACT recovered from the Covid crisis with employment and economic activity growing strongly from October 2021, Economically the ACT did well with higher growth and less unemployment than most of Australia
- ◆ There were some administrative problems concerning IT systems, use of a consultancy by the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) and building contracts for a school that raised concerns about the competence and integrity of the ACT government
- ◆ The ALP won the federal election in May 2022 with two party preferred swings towards them in the ACT federal divisions. Also former international rugby champion David Pocock replaced Liberal Zed Seselja as an Independent
- ◆ As a result of David Pocock's success in the Senate and the creation of a large group of campaign workers there was speculation that a group would contest the ACT election under the name of Pocock independents. A group did eventuate under the banner of "Independents for Canberra". Although a staff member of David Pocock's office was a lead candidate (Thomas Emerson) for this group, Senator David Pocock himself was not actively involved.

### Election 2020 - the contestants

The 2020 election was contested by many parties. New groups included the Family First, Fiona Carrick Independent, Independents for Canberra, First Nations Party, and Strong Independents. However, 2020 contestants such as The Australian Federation Party, Australian Capital Territory, Canberra Progressives, Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party (ACT), Community Action Party and the Australian Climate Change Justice Party did not contest in 2024.

**ACT Labor** - The ACT branch of the Australian Labor Party. Australia's oldest party, founded in 1890 is the most successful in the ACT both at a Federal and Territory level. Basically a social democratic centre left party. Has governed the ACT since 2001 as a minority government, usually with the support of the Greens, except for the period 2004 to 2008 when it was a majority government. It was the first party to govern the ACT in 1989.

**Canberra Liberals** - The ACT division of the Liberal Party of Australia. Founded in 1944 but goes back to the merger of the Free Trade and Protectionist parties in 1909. A centre right conservative party. Governed the ACT in association with minor parties from 1989 to 1991 and again with the support of independents from 1995 to 2001.

**The ACT Greens** - ACT Greens, associated with the national Green party. First contested ACT elections in 1995 when they won a seat in the 7 member Molonglo electorate and another in the 5 member Ginninderra. Their best result was in 2020 when they won 6 seats, Although they supported the Liberals in 1995 they have since sided with Labor.

**Libertarian Party** - Formerly known as the Liberal Democrats. Believe in small government, low taxes and minimal regulation, has contested ACT elections in the past, but only contested one electorate this election - Ginninderra.

**Animal Justice Party** - A one issue party established in all states to campaign for animal rights. Contested all electorates.

**Belco Party** - formed by Bill Stefaniak a former Minister in the Kate Carnell Liberal Government (1995 - 2001) and Liberal leader 2006 to 2007. It was formed to promote the interests of the Belconnen community. Also inexplicably stood candidates in the Community of Gungahlin<sup>3</sup>

**Labour DLP** - a resurrection of the old Democratic Labor Party (DLP) which was formed out of the Labor split in 1955. Supports social conservatism, the family and is antipathetic to gender identity issues.

**Independents for Canberra** - a group of persons with some connection to the David Pocock Senate campaign in 2022. Were registered as a party to get a better position on the ballot paper. They hoped to harness the it's time feeling by being an alternative to the major parties. Their policy stance was generally progressive but left open the option to back the Liberals in the right circumstances. They contested all electorates.

**Fiona Carrick Independent** - Fiona Carrick stood in 2022 and polled well with 3,783 votes. Registered as a party to get a better ballot paper position resulting in an 2.7 per swing to get 7,302 votes, enough to be elected. She did not chose to be part of Independents for Canberra. Only contested one electorate - Murrumbidgee.

**Strong Independents** - Named after candidate Peter Strong who like the above two registered as a political party to get a better position on the ballot paper. Policies were term limits on politicians and citizen initiated referendums. Only contested one electorate - Kurrajong.

**Family First** - First founded in South Australia in 2002 and contested a number of State and Federal elections winning a number of Senate and State Upper House seats. Merged with Australian Conservatives but that party disbanded and Family First re-emerged. Contested all electorates. The party is socially conservative with roots in fundamental Christianity.

**First Nation Party** - Formed in 204 to represent indigenous people in the ACT

### **The results by Electorate**

Table I below outlines the results for each electorate and Table 2 the demographics for each.

**Table 1: The election outcomes 2024 (Percentages)**

	Yerrabi		Ginninderra		Kurrajong		Murrumbidgee		Brindabella		ACT	
	%	Swing	%	Swing	%	Swing	%	Swing	%	Swing	%	Swing
<b>Parties contesting the 2024 election</b>												
<b>ACT Labor (ALP)</b>	30.6	-3.5	37.2	-2.8	36.1	-1.8	33.2	-2.9	33.8	-6.9	34.1	-3.7
<b>Canberra Liberals (Liberal)</b>	36.9	-3.7	26.4	-0.4	24.3	-3.3	35.1	-0.5	43.2	4.7	33.4	-0.4
<b>The ACT Greens</b>	11.6	1.5	14.1	1.6	17.6	-5.4	9.3	-2.4	9.0	-1.8	12.2	-1.3
<b>Animal Justice Party</b>	0.7	-0.6	1.7	0.0	1.3	-0.2	1.3	-0.7	1.6	-0.6	1.4	-0.4
<b>Libertarians</b>	dns	dns	0.7	-0.1	dns	dns	dns	dns	dns	dns	0.1	0.0
<b>Family First</b>	2.0	2.0	4.6	4.6	1.2	1.2	1.6	1.6	2.5	2.5	2.4	2.4
<b>Independents for Canberra</b>	9.7	9.7	7.5	7.5	13.5	13.5	4.9	4.9	7.6	7.6	8.5	8.5
<b>Fiona Carrick Independent</b>	dns	dns	dns	dns	dns	dns	13.1	13.1	dns	dns	2.7	2.7
<b>Strong Independents</b>	dns	dns	dns	dns	2.3	2.3	dns	dns	dns	dns	0.4	0.4
<b>Belco party</b>	1.6	1.6	4.7	-4.7	dns	dns	dns	dns	dns	dns	1.3	-0.7
<b>First Nation Party</b>	2.8	2.8	dns	dns	2.7	2.7	dns	dns	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3
<b>Labour DLP</b>	2.4	-2.3	1.4	-1.0	dns	dns	dns	dns	dns	dns	0.8	-0.6
<b>Ungrouped</b>	1.6	-7.5	1.7	-4.7	0.5	-9.4	1.5	-13.1	1.0	-6.8	1.3	-8.2

Source: Elections ACT Webpage - dns Did not stand -

**Table 2: Demographic characteristics of ACT electorates**

	Yerrabi	Ginninderra	Kurrajong	Murrumbidgee	Brindabella	ACT
<b>Median age</b>	33	35	33	38	38	35
<b>Proportion never married</b>	34.7	39.8	52.5	33.6	34.5	39.3
<b>Proportion with Degree or diploma</b>	52.8	49.9	60.1	57.3	39.8	52.2
<b>Proportion Australian Born</b>	60.9	68.2	66.3	67.5	76.0	67.5
<b>Proportion with no religion</b>	37.4	44.6	52.3	42.1	41.5	43.5
<b>Proportion Catholic</b>	18.5	18.7	14.8	20.9	23.9	19.3
<b>Proportion in lower occupational classifications</b>	25.5	26.6	14.9	20.3	28.7	23.1
<b>Median income</b>	1,184	1,105	1,341	1,282	1,146	1,203
<b>Proportion living in flats</b>	11.8	14.4	46.2	16.0	6.5	19.4
<b>Proportion renting</b>	31.6	30.5	43.2	26.1	20.6	30.7

Source: ABS Census 2021 (1) Trades and technical workers, Sales Workers, Labourers and Machinery operators

**Yerrabi** - The northernmost seat in the ACT covering the community of Gungahlin as well as two suburbs in northern Belconnen. The area was developed from the 1990s onwards. Both the ALP and the Liberals suffered adverse swings of over 3.5 per cent, the Greens enjoyed a swing of 1.5 per cent. Independents for Canberra also polled well with 9.7 per cent. The Liberal vote share of 36.9 per cent was considerably greater than the ALP's 30.6. The Demographics such as those never married, persons with no religion and flat dwellers suggest a more conservative profile for this electorate. All sitting members were returned.

**Ginninderra** - The electorate that covers most of Belconnen, a community mostly developed in the 1960s to 1980s with some newer areas still being developed. It is a strong area for the ALP and Greens. The ALP suffered an adverse swing of 2.8 per cent whereas the Greens saw their vote increase by 1.6 per cent. The two ALP ministers topped the poll. The Liberal vote declined only slightly (0.4 per cent) despite problems with the dis endorsement of Elizabeth Kikkert and challenges from Family First, who endorsed Ms Kikkert. However, she was not elected being replaced by Liberal Chiaka Barry.

**Kurrajong** - This electorate covers the original or inner city central Canberra. Its demographics are quite different from the rest of the ACT. In all of the so called "hip" demographics<sup>4</sup> (of never married, flat dwellers, renters, no religion and lower Catholic proportion) this electorate is a classic case of "hip". Such electorates have a tendency to support Greens, the ALP and Independents. Certainly true for Kurrajong with the highest Green and Independent vote plus the second highest ALP vote. The Liberal vote was the lowest. All party leaders Andrew Barr (ALP), Elizabeth Lee (Liberal) and Shane Rattenbury (Greens) were from this electorate. Andrew Barr received 21.1 per cent or 1.3 quotas, Elizabeth Lee 14.0 per cent or 0.8 quotas and Shane Rattenbury 8.4 per cent or 0.5 quotas. All were re-elected. The Independent Thomas Emerson replaced Greens Minister Rebecca Vassarotti.

**Murrumbidgee** - A diverse electorate that includes some of the older parts of Canberra such as Deakin and Woden and some of the newest such as the Molonglo valley. It is decidedly unhip. As a consequence the Liberal vote was higher (35.1 per cent compared to 33.4 per cent for the ACT). The ALP and Green vote was lower than that for the ACT. An Independent Fiona Carrick won 12 per cent of the vote, a quota of 0.7 enough to get her elected and replace Emma Davidson of the Greens. Fiona Carrick contested the seat in 2020 and only narrowly missed getting elected.

**Brindabella** - The southernmost electorate in the ACT and includes Tuggeranong and the sparsely populated Namadji national park. It provided the Liberals with their best result 43.2 per cent or 2.59 quotas. They achieved a swing of 4.7 per cent. With that vote they should have been in "pole position" to win a third member. The Greens and Independents for Canberra had quotas of 0.54 and 0.46 respectively. However, the Independent preferences favoured the Greens who were able to retain their seat. It shows that the Liberals are politically isolated. The ALP suffered a swing of -6.9 per cent and a Minister, Mick Gentleman, lost his seat to another ALP candidate. Again it is an electorate with a less hip profile.

### **Voting history in the ACT**

Voting records exist for ACT local elections since 1967. There were elected bodies prior to 1967 but voting records are not available. From 1967 to 1982 they were advisory bodies only. Self government was introduced in 1989 and has continued since then in the same combined local and state government format. The number of seats was originally 17 increasing to 25 for the 2016 election. For the first two elections a modified D'Hondt voting system was used where the electorate was the whole ACT. It was replaced in 1995 by a Hare Clark Robson rotation system with one seven member seat and two five member seats. For the 2016 election the size of the Assembly was increased to 25 with five seats returning five members each.

In Table 3 (below) the average combined vote of the ALP and Liberals is 65.9 per cent which mainly reflects the low votes received by them in the pre self government era. Both the ALP and the Liberals have seen their vote improve. However, the ALP vote has declined over the last 20 years, from 46.8 per cent in 2004 to 34.1 in 2024. The last time Labor improved its

vote was in 2012 when they enjoyed a swing of 1.5 per cent.

**Table 3: Votes of Major parties in ACT Local Elections since 1967 (Percentages)**

<b>Election</b>	<b>ALP</b>	<b>Liberal</b>	<b>ALP-Lib</b>	<b>ALP+Lib</b>	<b>ALP swing</b>	<b>Lib Swing</b>
<b>ACT Advisory Council - 8 seats</b>						
1967	37.5	25.0	12.5	62.5		
1970	30.4	13.5	16.9	43.9	-7.1	-11.5
<b>ACT Legislative Assembly - 18 seats</b>						
1974	24.2	33.6	-9.4	57.8	-6.2	20.1
<b>ACT House of Assembly - 18 seats</b>						
1979	41.5	21.2	20.3	62.7	17.3	-12.4
1982	41.0	25.8	15.2	66.8	-0.5	4.6
<b>ACT self Government Legislative Assembly for the ACT - 17 seats</b>						
1989	22.8	14.9	7.9	37.7	-18.2	-10.9
1992	39.9	29.0	10.9	68.9	17.1	14.1
1995	31.6	40.5	-8.9	72.1	-8.3	11.5
1998	27.6	37.8	-10.2	65.4	-4.0	-2.7
2001	41.7	31.6	10.1	73.3	14.1	-6.2
2004	46.8	34.8	12.0	81.7	5.1	3.2
2008	37.4	31.6	6.0	69.0	-9.5	-3.3
2012	38.9	38.9	0.0	77.8	1.5	7.3
<b>Legislative Assembly of 25 seats</b>						
2016	38.4	36.7	1.7	75.1	-0.5	-2.2
2020	37.8	33.8	4.0	71.6	-0.6	-2.9
2024	34.1	33.4	0.7	67.5	-3.7	-0.4
<b>Average</b>	<b>35.8</b>	<b>30.1</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>65.9</b>	<b>7.1*</b>	<b>7.1*</b>

Source: Elections ACT, Australian Electoral Commission and the Canberra Times

\*sign ignored

The Liberal vote has also eroded since 2012 when they obtained 38.9 per cent, only bettered by their 1995 result of 40.5 per cent.

### **What factors contribute to success with Hare Clark Robson rotation?**

With Hare Clark the voter has to make two decisions: which party to vote for and then which candidate. Donkey voting is largely eliminated by the random rotation process where the candidate list on every ballot paper is different. It is generally assumed that name recognition helps a candidate obtain votes. Thus candidates who are incumbent, Ministers or in leadership positions will have an advantage.

Of the 25 successful candidates 19 were incumbents and eight were Ministers or Leaders.

However, not all persons in this group were re elected. Three Ministers lost their seats, Mick Gentleman who had 19<sup>th</sup> highest vote failed to get elected. Sometimes the inter party contest among candidates can be as hotly contested as the election itself. In Brindabella ALP voters preferred newcomers Caitlin Tough, and Taimus Werner-Gibbings to incumbent minister Mick Gentleman. Whereas ALP voters in Ginninderra strongly endorsed existing ministers Tara Cheyne and Yvette Berry.

**Table 4: Top 30 vote getters**

Candidate	Number 1 Votes	Party	Incumbent	Minister/Leader	Elected
BARR, Andrew	10,337	ALP	Yes	Yes	Yes
PARTON, Mark	9,606	Liberal	Yes	No	Yes
CHEYNE, Tara	7,813	ALP	Yes	Yes	Yes
BERRY, Yvette	7,727	ALP	Yes	Yes	Yes
HANSON, Jeremy	7,380	Liberal	Yes	No	Yes
LEE, Elizabeth	6,861	Liberal	Yes	Yes	Yes
CASTLEY, Leanne	6,745	Liberal	Yes	Yes	Yes
CARRICK, Fiona	6,691	Fiona Carrick Indi	No	No	Yes
PETTERSSON, Michael	6,495	ALP	Yes	No	Yes
STEEL, Chris	6,345	ALP	Yes	Yes	Yes
TOUGH, Caitlin	6,085	ALP	No	No	Yes
CAIN, Peter	5,782	Liberal	Yes	No	Yes
MORRIS, Deborah	5,780	Liberal	No	No	Yes
MILLIGAN, James	5,681	Liberal	Yes	No	Yes
PATERSON, Marisa	5,176	ALP	Yes	No	Yes
ORR, Suzanne	4,906	ALP	Yes	No	Yes
WERNER-GIBBINGS, Taimus	4,867	ALP	No	No	Yes
EMERSON, Thomas	4,817	Indi for CBR	No	No	Yes
GENTLEMAN, Mick	4,261	ALP	Yes	Yes	No
RATTENBURY, Shane	4,087	Greens	Yes	Yes	Yes
DANIELS, James	4,062	Liberal	No	No	No
MIKITA, John	4,032	Liberal	No	No	No
COCKS, Ed	4,027	Liberal	Yes	No	Yes
SINGH, Amardeep	4,019	Liberal	No	No	No
BARRY, Chiaka	3,601	Liberal	No	No	Yes
TANG, Nelson	3,542	ALP	No	No	No
STEPHEN-SMITH, Rachel	3,500	ALP	Yes	Yes	Yes
CLAY, Jo	3,426	Greens	Yes	No	Yes
BRADDOCK, Andrew	3,308	Greens	Yes	No	Yes
NUTTALL, Laura	3,244	Greens	Yes	No	Yes

Source: Elections ACT

**Number 1 votes count.** The 18 highest vote getters were all elected, the 30<sup>th</sup> highest vote getter was Greens candidate Laura Nuttall who was the last elected in Brindabella.

Given that incumbency and ministerial/leadership roles are assets why do others contest? There is always the possibility that, in certain circumstances, a party will get a third seat, an outcome that has occurred often in the past, though not in 2024. It provides a candidate with a chance to test their appeal for a future shot and the possibility that they may be elected in a count back when a sitting member resigns. Also of course some do knock off a sitting candidate. However, candidates who do poorly often do not stand again.

## Conclusions

In the lead up to the election there was a **lot of speculation about the it's time factor being significant**. Often referred to as the "forever government" the ALP/Greens Coalition had been around for awhile. The ALP had returned to government in 2001 as a minority government until 2004 when it became the ACT's only majority government. After 2008 it usually governed with Greens support. By 2024 the ALP had led the government for 24 years.

However, long term governments are common in Australia. The Liberals governed Australia from 1949 to 1972, 23 years. Labor governed New South Wales from 1941 to 1965, 24 years. The Liberal Country Party was in office for 27 years in the Northern Territory. Tasmania had a Labor government from 1934 to 1969, 34 years. Queensland and South Australia had long term Liberal Country governments for over 30 years, albeit with the aid of gerrymandering. Some commentators claim that these were quieter times but there is a dose of presentism here as those years covered "inconsequential" events such as the Second World War, the Cold War, threats of nuclear annihilation, rock and roll, the Vietnam War and sociological change.

So if there were to be change what would it be?

The election of Independent David Pocock to the Senate in 2022 (he replaced Liberal Zed Seselja) led to speculation about a similar move in the ACT election. Sometimes cited as Pocock Independents. A group **Independents for Canberra** was established to be led by Thomas Emerson, a senior staff member of David Pocock. However, Senator Pocock did not actively campaign for them. The group were generally considered progressive but appeared to be open to supporting either major party in forming a government.

The Liberal path to power seemed to be: to win an extra one or two seats, obtain more votes than the ALP and then if the Independents won two or three seats do a deal to form a government. But the Liberals did not win any extra seats and the Independents won only two. Only one of the independents was part of Independents for Canberra, Thomas Emerson. The other Fiona Carrick was not part of that group.

The Liberals are often seen as being socially conservative given the views of some of their members on issues such as voluntary assisted dying, abortion, drug reform and aboriginal issues. Given the ACT's general progressive stance on these matters such a position is seen as a negative for them, Elizabeth Lee was selected as leader to counter this perception as she was regarded as being more socially progressive. However, the Liberal vote was higher in 2012 and 2016 (Just over 38 per cent) when led by avowedly conservative leaders Zed Seselja and Jeremy Hanson. Even the very Conservative leader Alister Coe received a higher vote in 2020 than Elizabeth Lee in 2024. If the Liberals Adopted a social conservative but centrist economic policy they may not appeal to the ACT electorate. Alternatively if they went for a neo liberal small government stance coupled with progressive social policy that may not also be favoured by a city highly dependent on government activity. Although often ideology is not always a decisive factor in winning votes, Voters often look for capability and management skills. The Liberals have a problem with factionalism<sup>5</sup> that has produced frequent leadership changes and other crisis in the party. The withdrawal of a candidate's preselection in the election period did not help.

The ALP fared worse of any of the parties, suffering an adverse swing of 3.7 per cent reducing their vote to 34.1 per cent, the lowest since 1998 when they received 27.6 per cent. As well it was below their long term average of 35.8 per cent. Their long term in office has eroded their support considerably. Votes were lost to independents and other minor parties. Improving support levels will be difficult but not impossible. ALP leader Andrew Barr has been Chief minister for 10 years and is the longest serving senior politician in Australia. In the election he was the highest vote getter and only candidate to obtain more than a quota. The loss of votes was not enough to lose any seats but they were outvoted by the Liberals in three electorates: Brindabella, Murrumbidgee and Yerrabi.

The Greens also experienced a small swing against them of 1.3 per cent. They also lost two seats both held by Ministers: Rebecca Vassarotti in Kurrajong and Emma Davidson in Murrumbidgee. Both were lost to independents, the seat in Kurrajong was extremely marginal and could not survive a swing of 5.3 per cent against the Greens. In Murrumbidgee an adverse swing of 2.4 per cent was enough to lose the seat. In contrast the Greens improved their vote in Ginninderra by 1.6 per cent and in Yerrabi by 1.5 per cent. Despite an adverse swing of 1.8 per cent they managed to hold their seat in Brindabella. The Greens reaction to these fairly minor reverses was to pull out of the government and support the ALP from the cross bench.

Only time will tell if this decision was appropriate.

It was an election that should have had more frisson given the long term government and a coherent campaign by independents. Possibly the buoyant ACT economy, lack of proven mal administration and a Liberal party perceived to be ineffectual led to an almost status quo outcome.

Terry Giesecke  
December 2024

1. Only stood in one electorate, the ACT wide swing to this group was 2.7 per cent

2. Under the Hare Clark system there are no by elections as replacements are selected by recounting the preference votes of the retiring candidate

3. Two Belconnen Suburbs are in the Yerrabi electorate

4. About thirteen years ago a consultancy firm Urbis introduced to concept of hip and unhip sociological and lifestyle factors that may influence opinions. Urbis is a professional consulting firm operating in Australia, Asia and the Middle East advising on the use, development, investment and governance of property, cities and communities.

5. Factions need not be a negative for a party if managed well they can enhance policy development and debating skills among their members