

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Abbott on brink of victory

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Mass appeal ... Liberal candidate for western Sydney seat of Lindsay Fiona Scott, pictured on Friday, is leading Labor's David Bradbury. **Photo: Rob Homer**

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Labor's election prospects look grim according to a poll of eight of the most marginal electorates that shows it will struggle to take any seats off the Coalition on September 7 to offset its own expected losses.

The poll of four Labor and four Coalition seats in NSW, Queensland and Victoria shows if the election were held now, Labor would lose seven and Tony Abbott would become prime minister.

The JWS Research poll, conducted exclusively for *AFR Weekend* on Thursday night, sampled the Labor-held seats of Lindsay, Greenway and Banks in Western Sydney, and Corangamite in Victoria. It canvassed the Coalition seats of Brisbane and Forde in Queensland, Aston in Victoria, and Macquarie in NSW.

Labor would, at best, hold on to Greenway, and lose the other seven.

The Labor losses would include Forde, where former Queensland Labor premier Peter Beattie, drafted last week in a supposed coup, is on track to be thrashed by Coalition incumbent Bert van Manen. In Lindsay, Assistant Treasurer David Bradbury is in deep trouble against Liberal Fiona Scott, whom Mr Abbott said this week had "sex appeal" in a widely criticised remark. Ms Scott leads on a two-party basis by more than 10 per cent.

The poll shows Prime Minister Kevin Rudd is vastly more unpopular than Tony Abbott in every seat polled.

ELECTION DOOM SEEMINGLY AWAITS

“There is strong anti-Labor and anti-Rudd sentiment in western Sydney,” said JWS Research managing director John Scales.

“An inability to win seats from the opposition in Queensland or Victoria, coupled with the likely loss of seats in Western Sydney and Victoria, means election doom seemingly awaits Labor.”

Struggling for traction at the end of the second week of the campaign, the poll is another blow to a government already battling morale problems and disagreements in its campaign headquarters and concerns whether voters are listening to Mr Rudd.

Acknowledging on Friday that Labor was the underdog and “in the fight of our political lives”, Mr Rudd has targeted marginal Liberal seats as must-wins for Labor.

Last week he announced Mr Beattie would be the Labor candidate in Forde, held by a 1.6 percentage point margin by the Liberal-National Party’s Mr van Manen.

The poll, which sampled 568 people in Forde, indicates the move has backfired. Mr van Manen is trouncing Mr Beattie on a two-party preferred basis by 60 per cent to 40 per cent.

‘TOUGHEST FIGHT OF MY POLITICAL LIFE’

This 10-percentage point lead represents a two-party swing of 8.4 per cent to the Coalition in Forde since the 2010 election. Mr van Manen is beating Mr Beattie on the primary vote by 54 per cent to 33 per cent, while the Greens are on 4 per cent and 9 per cent are undecided. The primary vote swing to Mr van Manen since the 2010 election is 9.9 per cent.

Mr van Manen said he was taking nothing for granted while Mr Beattie tweeted in response:

“I am facing the toughest fight of my political life with an AFR poll showing a thrashing in Forde. I am a fighter and will never give up.”

The poll shows that Mr van Manen has a 49 per cent approval rating in Forde and a 19 per cent disapproval rating, giving him a net favourability rating of 30 per cent.

By contrast, Mr Beattie has a 35 per cent approval rating and a 51 per cent disapproval rating, giving him a net favourability rating of minus 16 per cent.

Similarly, in Forde, Mr Rudd has a net favourability rating of minus 18 per cent whereas Tony Abbott’s net favourability rating is just minus 1 per cent.

MOST MARGINAL COALITION SEAT IN NSW

The recruitment of Mr Beattie was meant to ensure Labor won Forde and lifted its vote across Queensland where it needs to win at least six Coalition seats if it is to have a hope on polling day. But it will struggle to win any more in Queensland.

In the seat of Brisbane incumbent Teresa Gambaro leads by 54.1 per cent to 45.9 per cent. Brisbane is the most marginal Coalition seat in Queensland.

Macquarie, in the Blue Mountains, the most marginal Coalition seat in NSW, was the first seat Mr Rudd visited after he became Prime Minister again and is considered a must-win by Labor.

But the poll of 710 voters shows incumbent Liberal Louise Markus has stretched her two-party lead over Labor challenger Susan Templeman by 3.8 points to lead by 55.1 per cent to 44.9 per cent.

Aston, in Victoria, is held by Liberal MP Alan Tudge and he is being challenged by Labor's Rupert Evans.

The poll of 577 Aston voters shows Mr Tudge has stretched his lead since the election by a massive 12.7 per cent to lead on a two-party basis by 63.4 per cent to 36.6 per cent.

FIONA SCOTT'S PROSPECTS SKYROCKETED

Of the Labor-held seats polled, Lindsay looks like a thumping win for the Liberal Ms Scott.

Since the last election, the poll of 578 Lindsay voters shows there has been a 9.6 percentage point primary vote swing against Mr Bradbury. He trails Ms Scott in the primary vote by 35 per cent to 57 per cent. On a two-party basis, Ms Scott leads by 60.7 per cent to 39.3 per cent, representing a two-party swing to the Coalition of 10.7 per cent. Liberals sources said the internal polling showed Ms Scott's prospects skyrocketed after Mr Abbott lauded her sex appeal.

The polls show Mr Rudd and Mr Bradbury are deeply unpopular in the seat. In Lindsay, Mr Rudd has a net favourability of minus 28 per cent while Mr Abbott's net favourability is plus 19 per cent.

Ms Scott has a net favourability of plus 27 per cent while Mr Bradbury's rating is minus 11 per cent.

Mr Scales said Lindsay was as good as lost for Labor.

In Greenway, the most marginal Labor seat in NSW, Labor has a strong candidate in Michelle Rowland who in 2010 beat the Liberal Jaymes Diaz.

GREENWAY TOO CLOSE TO CALL

Mr Diaz has been preselected again and gaffed in the first week of the campaign by being unable to cite the Coalition's asylum-seeker policy.

The poll of 570 Greenway voters found Ms Rowland ahead of Mr Diaz by 51 per cent to 49 per cent on a two-party basis, representing a swing to Ms Rowland of just 0.1 per cent since the last election. This makes the seat too close to call and Ms Rowland's personal appeal may be her salvation. The poll shows she has a net favourability rating of plus 5 per cent while Mr Diaz's rating is minus 8 per cent. In Greenway, Mr Rudd has a net favourability rating of minus 15 per cent and Mr Abbott is plus 3 per cent. Mr Scales said poor candidate choice could cost the Coalition Greenway. In the Labor-held western Sydney seat of Banks, veteran MP Daryl Melham is trailing the Liberal candidate David Coleman by 47.2 per cent to 52.8 per cent on a two-party basis, representing a swing against Mr Melham since the election of 4.3 per cent.

Again, Mr Rudd appears part of the problem. The poll of 542 Banks voters shows he has a net favourability of minus 13 per cent while Mr Abbott is minus 2. Mr Melham is plus 6 and Mr Coleman plus 11.

Corangamite, held by Labor's Darren Cheeseman, is the most marginal seat in the country. The poll of 587 Corangamite voters shows Mr Cheeseman trailing the Coalition's Sarah Henderson by 53.3 per cent to 46.7 per cent on a two-party basis. This represents a swing of 3.6 per cent against Mr Cheeseman since the 2010 election. Those polled were presented with both the party and the name of the candidate to ensure maximum accuracy. In total, 4739 people were sampled and the margin of error is 4.2 per cent.