

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Labor needs more power in its swing

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Labor needs to get a swing to it to hold on to government and it needs voters to act on their long-standing dislike of Tony Abbott.

The JWS Research poll of eight marginal seats, commissioned by *AFR Weekend*, suggest neither is happening. Labor, on these numbers, will lose some of its most marginal seats, but not all of them.

The real message in the poll is that the seats Labor needs to win, if it is to win, are just not there. The polling is not yet suggesting an electoral rout for Labor, just a narrow loss of eight to 10 seats.

In many ways the poll reflects what you would expect to see in these particular seats on the back of current estimates of a national 48-52 two-party-preferred vote.

Assistant Treasurer David Bradbury's seat of Lindsay (margin 1.1 per cent), for example, and the Victorian seat of Corangamite (margin 0.4 per cent), have long been regarded as "gone" by both sides of politics. The poll confirms this. Mr Abbott's "sex appeal" comment this week about Liberal candidate Fiona Scott has only ensured her victory in Lindsay.

But two other ultra-marginal Sydney seats – Banks (1.5 per cent margin) and Greenway (0.9 per cent) – remain on a knife-edge. In the case of Greenway, the international focus on the nightmarish interview of Liberal candidate Jaymes Diaz appears to have helped keep Labor MP Michelle Rowland's hopes alive.

The two really ominous things in this poll are that it insists Labor will not pick up the sorts of seats it must win to have any chance of either offsetting other losses or, for the Labor hopefuls, actually gaining enough seats for a narrow Labor win.

Labor has been reasonably confident: for example, it stood a good chance in the seats of Brisbane and Macquarie. Not on these numbers.

The story in Forde is one all to itself: the Peter Beattie experiment has to date not only not worked but has been a catastrophe. But the really ominous figures out of the polling across the seats are those about the two political leaders. For the first time, they suggest voters are looking again at Abbott and deciding they might just like him after all, and are finding Kevin Rudd rather irritating.

Mr Abbott has spectacularly reversed the deficit on his personal standing across all these marginal seats, scoring vastly more favourable numbers than the Prime Minister.

Labor and Kevin Rudd are letting this happen.

The Rudd campaign lacks the vision and vigour of the youthful Kevin '07, replaced by a tired bloke talking about something or other.

The campaign even lacks a central message.

Mr Abbott is effectively just standing still, not saying anything and winning the day. He has announced very little policy and is now comfortable enough to suggest voters find the whole question of how the Coalition is going to pay for its promises as "boring". Three weeks to go. Labor stands on the precipice with its campaign stalling.