



# RESEARCH NOTE

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## By-elections 37th Parliament

The Wentworth by-election held on 8 April 1995 was the eighth House of Representatives by-election held during the term of the 37th Parliament (the Parliament elected at the 1993 election). This represents the second largest number of by-elections held during the term of any Parliament since Federation, the largest number, ten, occurred during the 20th Parliament (1951-53).

The Canberra by-election resulted in the largest swing (16.2% in two party preferred terms) against the government in any by-election since 1949. It was also only the tenth occasion since 1949 that a seat has changed hands at a by-election.

In four of the eight by-elections held during the 37th Parliament, the government continued the practice of not standing a candidate in safe opposition held seats. In the four by-elections where a two party preferred vote can be calculated, the average swing against the Keating Government was 7.3%. In only one seat, Fremantle, was there a swing to the government.

In all by-elections held since 1949, where a two party preferred vote can be calculated, the average swing against the government is 3.7%. In government held seats the average swing against the government is 5.1%.

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### What is the Average By-election Swing

The swing against the government at the Canberra by-election was 16.2%. Coincidentally, the swing to the government at the McPherson (Qld, 1981) by-election was 16.2%. This begs the question of what is the average swing that could be expected in a by-election and what should be regarded as a good or bad result.

If we assume that by-election swings conform to what statisticians refer to as a normal distribution, then a measure of the range of swings expected (based on past events) can be calculated. The measure is called the standard deviation. There are two chances in three that any swing will be within one (plus or minus) standard deviation of the average.

#### By-election Swings 1949-1995

	All By-elections	By-elections in Government Seats
Observations	59	41
Average swing	-3.7%	-5.1%
Standard deviation	6.4	5.7
Range of swings		
- low	+2.7%	+0.6%
- high	-10.1%	-10.8%

Based on past by-election swings there are two chances in three that the swing in a by-election will be in the range of +2.7% to -10.1% for all seats and +0.6% to -10.8% for government held seats.

Given the above, almost any by-election result (except exceptional results like Canberra for instance) can be regarded as being within the range of swings that could be expected at a by-election.

