



# RESEARCH NOTE

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## South Australia Election 2002

The 2002 South Australian election was held on 9 February. The Liberal Party had held office since 1993, led successively by Dean Brown, John Olsen and Rob Kerin. Since the 1997 election, party defections had left the Government dependent upon five independents and a National Party member. One defector had been Liberal, Peter Lewis. Kerin had replaced Premier Olsen, who resigned on 19 October 2001 over the 'Motorola affair'. To gain a majority, the Labor Party under Mike Rann needed to win five seats, but three seats and the support of others might see it come to power.

### The Government's record

Apart from the declining popularity of Premier Olsen, several controversies had severely weakened the Government's standing:

- despite promises to the contrary, the Government had privatised the electricity supply. Unfortunately this had been followed by periods in which an ageing infrastructure had brought about a number of blackouts. Power bills had also risen substantially
- the 'Motorola affair' inquiry had found Olsen had given 'misleading, inaccurate and dishonest evidence' to an earlier inquiry<sup>1</sup>
- the sale of the South Australian TAB had caused substantial losses for the State
- the upgrade of the Hindmarsh Soccer Stadium for Olympic soccer games had suffered an enormous blowout in costs; and
- within two months of the National Wine Centre's opening

in October 2001, the new tourist facility was being bailed out by the Government.

It was clear that former Premier Olsen had been determined to delay the election date as long as possible. In the event, Kerin's announced date was earlier than it need have been—though the Opposition pointed out that this was still four years and 121 days since the 1997 election.

### The contest

Kerin hoped to take advantage of a remarkable Liberal improvement in the opinion polls since the resignation of Olsen.<sup>2</sup> Polls taken throughout the campaign, however, began to suggest that the final margin would be close, leading observers to speak of a probable hung parliament.

The Liberal Party made play of differences in the leadership of Kerin and Rann. The Prime Minister summed up the approach when he contrasted the 'quintessential good bloke' with the 'apparatchik of a political machine'.<sup>3</sup> Kerin was often seen tieless and in shirtsleeves.

In policy terms, there was little between the two parties. They were concerned to keep the Budget tight, they spoke of the need to reinvigorate the Murray River, they expressed their concerns over law and order, they promised more schoolteachers for State schools. In noting the similarities between them, an observer noted that most policies on both sides were recycled, labelling it a 'second-hand election'.<sup>4</sup>

To a marked extent, the election fitted the typical Australian State campaign. The incumbent promised

more of the same, the Opposition was accused of promising more than it could deliver and of threatening to bankrupt the State; both accused each other of playing fast and loose with their policies' figures. The Government still used the State Bank collapse of 1992 as a warning to voters to avoid the Labor Party, while the Opposition claimed that re-election of the Government would mean a continuation of the selling-off of the State's assets.

Each party worked hard to gain an advantage. As in the Commonwealth election, the Premier refused to have more than one public debate with his opposite number. Labor meanwhile launched its campaign only six days before polling day, and was accused by the Liberals of issuing policies too late for voters to be able to check them. At the conclusion of the campaign, Adelaide's *Advertiser* was critical of Kerin for promising 'more of the same', and recommended the Rann team to voters, as it held 'some promise of imagination coupled with financial responsibility'.<sup>5</sup>

### The outcome

In the *House of Assembly* election there was a small shift in votes, giving the Labor Party 23 seats and the Liberal Party 20 seats. There was a single National victory, and three independents were successful. Neither major party gained an absolute majority.

In 1997 the Australian Democrats gained a record vote of 16.4 per cent and had nearly won an Assembly seat. In 2002 they spoke of winning Heysen, and more Legislative Council seats, but their vote fell by 8.9 per cent, they challenged in no Assembly seat, and

won no new positions in the upper house.

The losers included the ALP deputy leader, Annette Hurley, who had left her safe seat to contest the marginal seat of Light. Ralph Clarke MHA, who had been expelled by the Labor Party, was also defeated. Jane Lomax-Smith, former Lord Mayor of Adelaide, whose candidacy had received much publicity, narrowly won the seat of Adelaide.

At first, the three independents and the National Party MP seemed likely to keep the Kerin Government in power, but after a highly emotional few days' discussion, the Independent MP for Hammond, Peter Lewis, announced his support for Labor. Labor had already signed a compact with Lewis promising to work towards significant changes to the State's government and parliament. The compact also promised to address 'the urgent needs of rural South Australia'. Ironically, the Liberal Government had earlier signed the same compact with Lewis.

The *Legislative Council* ballot paper was large, due to the nomination of a multitude of minor party and independent candidates. The Liberals won five seats, Labor won four, and the Australian Democrats and the Family First Party each won a single seat. With only seven of 22 seats, the Government will need assistance to pass legislation.

### The Lewis Compact

Much of *Peter Lewis' Compact for Good Government*, was taken from the *Independents' Charter Victoria 1999* signed by Victorian independents and the Labor Party.

Lewis said he was willing to support a government which undertook to promote 'open and accountable government', improve 'the democratic operation of Parliament', establish plans and strategies to deal with 'the urgent needs of rural South Australia', 'co-operate meaningfully' with independent MPs, and 'improve Ministers' and MPs' codes of conduct'.

As part of the reform of Parliament, Lewis will be seeking the establishment of a Constitutional Convention that will consider various matters, including citizen initiated referenda, removal of Ministers from the Legislative Council, removal of most committees from the House of Assembly, reduction of the size of Parliament, removal of parties from the upper house, and establishing a different mode of selection for the position of Governor.<sup>6</sup>

Lewis believes independents are best placed to achieve parliamentary reform—a theme of the conference of independents from the different parliaments, held in August 2001.

### Final uncertainty

The Liberal Party refused to accept the Lewis decision without a fight. Premier Kerin remained in office, and the Labor-Lewis alliance was tested on the floor of the House. On 5 March, a parliamentary vote of no confidence in the Kerin

Government (23-22) resulted in Mike Rann becoming Labor's 12th South Australian Premier. Peter Lewis was elected Speaker.

In the Hammond electorate, opponents of Lewis worked to gain public support to force a Court of Disputed Returns challenge to Lewis' victory. The grounds were that he had spoken during the campaign of not supporting Labor if he later held the balance of power. This move was supported by the Liberal Party. Such an appeal would have to be lodged within 40 days of the declaration of the polls (5 April) but had not occurred by the time of writing this paper.<sup>7</sup>

**Scott Bennett  
Politics and Public  
Administration Group  
Information and Research  
Services**

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**South Australian election 2002  
First preferences (%) and seats—House of Assembly**

	ALP	LIB	AD	NP	Other
<b>Seats won 1997</b>	21	23	-	1	2
<b>Votes won 2002</b>	36.3 (+1.1)	40.0(-0.4)	7.5(-8.9)	1.5(-0.2)	14.7(+8.5)
<b>Seats won 2002</b>	23	20	-	1	3

Source: SA Electoral Office

## Endnotes

1. 'Argument for the defence', *Advertiser*, 20 October 2001.
2. K. Tilbrook, 'Poll shows Libs lead race', *Advertiser*, 12 January 2002.
3. G. Kelton, 'Work until you drop, Howard tells the faithful', *Advertiser*, 28 January 2002.
4. G. Kelton, 'Nothing new in second hand election', *Advertiser*, 22 January 2002.
5. 'Labor deserves opportunity to govern', editorial, *Advertiser*, 8 February 2002.
6. *Peter Lewis', Compact for Good Government*, 2002.
7. For further discussion, see 'The South Australian election and its aftermath', *DPL Audio Brief*, vol. 1, March 2002.