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## The South Australian election 2010

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## Introduction

On the eve of the official start of the 2010 South Australian (SA) election campaign (20 February–20 March), Labor Premier Mike Rann attempted to define the nature of electoral competition between the Labor Government and the Liberal opposition:

It comes down to leadership ... who is best equipped to keep our economy moving ahead, who is best ... equipped to secure projects, secure contracts for the future; who is best equipped to negotiate the best possible deal from Kevin Rudd in Canberra for South Australia.<sup>1</sup>

At first glance, Rann should have been almost certain of electoral victory at the polls on 20 March. The Australian Labor Party (ALP) Government had a comfortable majority in the Lower House. South Australia in early 2010 also enjoyed relatively low levels of unemployment. Further, the ALP could point to the success of high-profile and profitable industries such as mining, and an increasing official emphasis on infrastructure projects. South Australian self-confidence had been dented in the 1980s and 1990s by high unemployment, the decline of its historically prominent manufacturing industry, and the collapse of the SA State Bank—accompanied by the loss of taxpayers' money—through financial recklessness and mismanagement.<sup>2</sup> More recently, however, with national recognition for its arts festivals, wine industry and tourism, combined with a growing economy, modern South Australia presented a strong image of progress to its citizens.

Despite all these positive external factors, the Rann Government in early 2010 found itself to be increasingly unpopular with the electorate. This account of the 2010 election will show how the Liberal opposition, led by Isobel Redmond, made political capital out of voter disenchantment with unpopular Labor policies, as well as Rann's leadership style. The paper will also describe the election campaign and its aftermath. Further, it will demonstrate how strategic ALP campaigning in marginal seats and Liberal gaffes worked to ultimately secure Rann a third term in office. Finally, the role of the media and the possible federal impact of the South Australian 2010 election will be briefly explored. While the Upper House (the Legislative Council) is touched upon in this paper, its focus will be on elections for MPs in the Lower House (the House of Assembly), which secured Rann a third term as Premier.

## South Australian politics during the Rann era

Before entering parliament in 1986, Mike Rann was press secretary to three South Australian ALP premiers: Don Dunstan, Des Corcoran and John Bannon. Rann became opposition

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1. M Owen, 'I'll get you the best deals, Rann tells the voters', *Weekend Australian*, 20 February 2010, p. 10.
  2. G Young, 'It could be the end of media Mike's love affair with voters', *Weekend Australian*, 6 March 2010, p. 14; R Martin, *Responsible government in South Australia volume two: Playford to Rann 1957–2007*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, 2009, pp. 132–7, 171.

leader shortly after the 1993 state election, when the ALP Government was voted out of office in the wake of the collapse of the State Bank.<sup>3</sup> After the 2002 election, the ALP with 23 House of Assembly seats formed a minority government via the support of Independent MP Peter Lewis. Rann swiftly neutralised Lewis's capacity to 'make or break' the ALP Government by forging strategic relationships with other independents and minority MPs. Notably, Independent MP Rory McEwen was appointed to the Ministry in November 2002; The Nationals' Karlene Maywald in July 2004 also accepted a government portfolio.<sup>4</sup>

The first term of the Rann administration was marked by economic conservatism. This was partly a result of having to negotiate with independents and minor parties, including the Greens: Labor MP Kris Hanna defected to the Greens in 2003 and later became an independent.<sup>5</sup> Yet the new ALP Government quickly established a favourable profile within the electorate and the media. 'Good news stories' the Rann Government promoted included its capacity to prevent the Commonwealth from using South Australian land for nuclear waste storage, as well as its ability to attract federal defence manufacturing projects to the state.<sup>6</sup>

The Rann Government also benefited from a growing national boom in property and mining, which contributed substantially to government revenue streams. Association with popular causes and economic growth no doubt contributed to the Rann Government's convincing victory in the 2006 state election. In the House of Assembly, the ALP won 28 out of 47 seats, enough to govern in its own right.<sup>7</sup>

Rann's second-term agenda was typified by the Government's \$1.1 million investor awareness campaign (2008), with its confident slogan: 'Where would you invest—the last boom town or the next [Adelaide]?'<sup>8</sup> The Rann Government invested considerable energy in projecting an image of South Australian self-confidence to the electorate and the world at large. Setbacks such as the 2008 closure of Mitsubishi's Tonsley Park car manufacturing

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3. For Mike Rann's career, see H Manning, 'Mike Rann: a fortunate "king of spin"', in J Wanna and P Williams, eds, *Yes premier: Labor leadership in Australia's states and territories*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2005, pp. 197–223; Biographical entry for Mike Rann, in Z Singh, ed., *Who's who in Australia 2010*, Crown Content Pty Ltd, Melbourne, 2010, p. 1769.
  4. G Anderson and H Manning, 'The South Australian election of 18 March 2006', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 14, no. 4, 2006, pp. 631–2.
  5. C Macintyre, 'Politics in a time of change', in J Spoehr, ed., *State of South Australia: from crisis to prosperity?*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, 2009, p. 45.
  6. Anderson and Manning, 'The South Australian election of 18 March 2006', op. cit., p. 632; Manning, 'Mike Rann', op. cit., p. 213; Martin, *Responsible government*, op. cit., pp. 165–71.
  7. Martin, *Responsible government*, op. cit., p. 168; Macintyre, 'Politics in a time of change', op. cit., p. 47. Note: like most Australian states, general elections in SA are held every four years.
  8. M Phillips, 'Thanks a million Brumby, SA is ready to boom', *Australian Financial Review*, 20 February 2008, p. 15.

plant were downplayed in favour of positive economic news such as Commonwealth defence manufacturing contracts and the expansion of BHP-Billiton's Olympic Dam uranium mine. With unemployment falling, and Adelaide property prices rising, Rann in 2008 declared that 'The centre of gravity for Australia's economic future is now firmly based in states like Western Australia, Queensland and South Australia.'<sup>9</sup>

Despite the global economic downturn of 2008–09, the Rann Government continued to invest in infrastructure and make plans for new projects. It committed to a desalination plant for Adelaide (the quality and quantity of water supply being a perennial SA concern), and Rann played a high-profile role in arguing for national policy on Murray River water usage.<sup>10</sup> The Government also associated itself with popular SA-staged events such as the 'Tour Down Under' cycling competition, which has included appearances by celebrity cyclist Lance Armstrong.<sup>11</sup>

## Background: the lead-up to the 2010 South Australian election

Its efforts at celebrating South Australian self-confidence notwithstanding, the second-term Rann Government sometimes presented a very divisive image to the electorate. Government ministers made severe public criticisms about the liberal attitudes of some members of the South Australian judiciary, demonstrating a 'tough on crime' approach but offending parts of the law community. Civil libertarians were also upset by the Rann Government's alleged indifference towards prison overcrowding, exemplified by Treasurer Kevin Foley's 2008 throwaway line about prison accommodation: 'if we've got to rack'em, pack'em and stack'em we will.'<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the Rann Government calculated that any negative publicity garnered by such comments would be outweighed by the populist nature of much of its legal

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9. J Walker, 'The end of the line', *Australian*, 6 February 2008, p. 13.

10. H Manning, 'South Australia: January to June 2009', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 55, no. 4, 2009, pp. 619–23. South Australia has a very low average rainfall and only one major river system, the Murray, which also services large parts of Victoria and New South Wales. Drought as well as overuse of the River Murray in the Eastern states has negatively impacted upon the amount of water available to irrigators and others in South Australia. As Cathcart has pointed out about the Murray–Darling Basin, over several decades 'Wasteful irrigation had raised the ground water table, conveying ancient salts to the surface, poisoning productive country and leaching into the river.' M Cathcart, *The water dreamers: the remarkable history of our dry continent*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2009, p. 252. See also South Australian Labor, *Water and the River Murray: Policy 2010*, SA Labor, Adelaide, 2010, viewed 5 May 2010, <http://www.sa.alp.org.au/images/stories/Policies/waterpolicyweb.pdf>

11. N Abjorensen, 'Labor prepares for a bruising weekend at the state ballot box', *Canberra Times*, 19 March 2010, p. 21.

12. G Appleby and J Williams, 'Law and order', in J Spoehr, ed., *State of South Australia: from crisis to prosperity?*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, 2009, p. 328. The comment was reported in H Gout, *Independent Weekly*, 9 May 2008. See also Macintyre, 'Politics in a time of change', op. cit., p. 50.

reform program. This included legislation aimed at preventing ‘drink spiking ... indecent filming, selling drug paraphernalia’ and other social problems, as well as laws targeting the illegal activities of bikie gangs.<sup>13</sup>

While its pro-victim legal stance may have won it supporters within parts of the electorate, the Rann Government attracted sustained public criticism over a key health initiative. Announced in mid 2007 as part of the Budget, the decision to demolish the Royal Adelaide Hospital (RAH) and replace it with a \$1.7 billion new hospital on another site was greeted with dismay by many electors and hospital staff. After talkback radio highlighted public opposition to the Government’s preferred new hospital name (the *Marjorie Jackson-Nelson*, after the popular former SA Governor), the name of the proposed new building was changed back to the RAH.<sup>14</sup> A mixture of heritage concerns, sentimental attachment to the existing RAH and pragmatism inspired public opposition to the government proposal. As journalist Tory Shepherd argued,

What they [the Government] possibly failed to recognise was the deep attachment doctors and patients have to the existing site, the importance they place on co-location with other services and universities, and the resentment the changes to the state’s other hospitals would cause.<sup>15</sup>

Opponents of the new hospital believed that the present site was valuable because of the connections between the hospital and nearby educational institutions, such as the Medical School at Adelaide University. There were also fears that some suburban hospitals would have their services downgraded by the transfer of some of their activities to the new RAH. Some medical staff and citizens formed a ‘Save the RAH’ Party which was to field several candidates in the 2010 election. Significantly, the Liberal opposition established a major point of difference between itself and the ALP by insisting that the existing RAH should be redeveloped rather than rebuilt on another site.<sup>16</sup>

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13. Appleby and Williams, ‘Law and order’, op. cit., p. 321.

14. T Richardson, ‘A thorn by any other name’, *Independent Weekly*, 20 February 2009, p. 7. Jackson-Nelson won gold medals for running events at the Olympics and the Commonwealth Games in the 1950s. She was well known for her official roles supporting these events in later years, as well as her fund-raising for leukaemia research. She was South Australia Governor between 2001 and 2007. See Martin, *Responsible government*, op. cit., p. 159; Zingh, *Who’s who*, op. cit., p. 1119.

15. T Shepherd, ‘New bricks for old — how they scrub up’, *Advertiser*, 26 March 2009, p. 19.

16. For arguments for and against the new RAH, see T Shepherd, ‘Hospital brawl: the factions dig in’, *Advertiser*, 5 February 2009, pp. 1–2; ‘Redemption or relocation?’, *Independent Weekly*, 12 February 2010, 12 February 2010, p. 5; Shepherd, ‘New bricks for old’, op. cit, p. 19.

Polling by the Adelaide *Advertiser* suggested that while far from popular with the electorate, the new RAH proposal was not an election changing issue.<sup>17</sup> A state-wide opinion poll conducted by the *Advertiser* on 18 March 2009 indicated that the ALP was leading 56 per cent to 44 per cent on a two-party preferred basis.<sup>18</sup>

In the lead up to the 2010 election, however, the Rann administration suddenly appeared politically vulnerable. On 1 October 2009, a man called Rick Phillips ‘smacked Mr Rann in the face with rolled-up magazine’ at an ALP fund-raising dinner.<sup>19</sup> Phillips was married to but separated from Michelle Chantelois, who had previously worked at Parliament House in the hospitality area. In the course of her work, she had struck up a friendship with Rann. The subsequent assault of the Premier by Phillips resulted in mass media speculation about the nature of Rann’s friendship with Chantelois, assisted by her subsequent allegation that she had had an affair with the Premier. While Rann strenuously denied an alleged affair with Ms Chantelois, it was an issue which continued to distract the ALP Government from the ‘good news stories’ it wished to tell the electorate.

Public opinion polling company Newspoll conducted voter surveys in 2009 and early 2010 which give some quantitative substance to the general impression that the physical assault of the Premier and the subsequent fallout caused a downturn in voter confidence in the Rann administration. The July–August 2009 Newspoll survey of voting intentions showed the Rann Government riding high with 56 per cent of the two-party preferred vote. After the Phillips–Chantelois media story erupted, in Newspoll surveys the ALP share of the vote declined to 53 per cent (October–December 2009) and then to 50 per cent (January–March 2010). Rann’s satisfaction rating as Premier declined from 51 per cent (July–August 2009) to 45 per cent (January–March 2010), while the opposition leader’s approval rating climbed from 43 per cent to 58 per cent over the same period. If the Newspoll figures were accurate, the Liberal Party was now in with a chance of acquiring a large number of Lower House seats and possibly even the reins of government.<sup>20</sup>

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17. Kelton notes that 62 per cent wanted the RAH redeveloped on the existing site, citing figures from a state-wide poll conducted by the *Advertiser* on 18 March 2009 involving 522 participants. G Kelton, ‘Keep RAH where it is, voters say’, *Advertiser*, 23 March 2009, p. 1.
  18. These figures are from the same poll which gauged voter sentiment on the RAH proposals. G Kelton, ‘Liberals collapse: Labor leads in country seats’, *Advertiser*, 21 March 2009, pp. 1, 10.
  19. N Hunt, ‘Bloody campaign leaves Rann badly wounded’, *Sunday Mail* (Adelaide), 21 March 2010, p. 3.
  20. In response to the Newspoll question ‘Who do you think would make the better Premier?’, however, voters surveyed tended to prefer Rann over Redmond, although many voters were uncommitted on the issue. Between July–August 2009 and January–March 2010, Rann’s share of the ‘Better Premier’ poll declined slightly from 46 per cent to 44 per cent, while Redmond’s share rose from 27 per cent to 41 per cent. Figures taken from Newspoll website, viewed 30 April 2010, [www.newspoll.com.au](http://www.newspoll.com.au)

'Media Mike' Rann, as he was nicknamed by the press, had generally been highly skilled at handling the media. The Premier was often armed with calculated sound-bites, catchy statements and 'mini-narratives' that showcased how the ALP wished to present itself to the electorate. The assault of the Premier and the personal allegations were, however, stories that Rann and his senior party strategists could not control. Labor's subsequent attempts to manage the fallout over the Chantelois–Phillips incident only drew attention to its professionalised management of media messages, and how focused Rann was on media presentation. The Liberal Party therefore saw electoral capital in trying to convince the electorate that the ALP was more style than substance. As a consequence, the relatively new leader of the opposition, Isobel Redmond, sought to present herself as plain-talking and open in comparison with Rann.<sup>21</sup> Several commentators believed that with approval ratings for the Rann as a leader heading downwards, the Redmond opposition could potentially win the 2010 election.<sup>22</sup>

## The campaign

The official four week election campaign began on 20 February 2010, although both major parties had effectively begun their campaigns by the New Year. The ALP chose to focus its campaign on its record of economic management, contrasting it with the Redmond opposition's lack of experience in office. Rann suggested that the polls indicated that the ALP had not 'communicated [its] message well enough', and that message, albeit not spelt out in explicit terms, was that South Australia had prospered and grown confident under a Rann administration:<sup>23</sup>

We think we've got a pretty good story to tell. The latest jobs figures show that there's 111,300 more South Australians in work than there were the day we got elected. We've won more than \$44 billion worth of defence projects ... I think the most important thing that we've done in partnership with South Australians is get confidence back because confidence breeds growth, breeds jobs, breeds opportunities.<sup>24</sup>

The Government showcased its plans for infrastructure projects, such as its forthcoming upgrade of Adelaide's southern expressway, the new Royal Adelaide Hospital and an expansion of the Adelaide Convention Centre.<sup>25</sup> These 'good news stories' were counterbalanced by aggressive attacks on the Liberal opposition's capacity to effectively govern. For example, the ALP ran TV advertisements which suggested that the opposition

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21. L Novak, 'Redmond: I'll stand for plain talk', *Advertiser*, 16 January 2010, p. 22.

22. An early February poll by the *Advertiser* on who electors trust more scored Redmond (51 per cent) far higher than Rann (34 per cent). G Kelton, 'Election now all about trust', *Advertiser*, 13 February 2010, p. 36.

23. M McKenna and L Wilson, 'Saying sorry "a vote winner"', *Australian*, 2 March 2010, p. 4.

24. Rann, in J Spoehr, 'Election 2010: two visions', *Adelaide Review*, March 2010, p. 14.

25. P Akerman, 'Rann revives rust bucket past', *Australian*, 15 March 2010, p. 6.

leader was soft on crime and included footage of Redmond claiming she would be ‘extremely hesitant to move against a recommendation of the Parole Board’.<sup>26</sup>

Isobel Redmond, a former solicitor, had only been opposition leader since 8 July 2009. Her predecessor, Martin Hamilton-Smith, had been compelled to resign after he attacked the ALP Government with documents that turned out to be fake. According to commentator Peter Van Onselen, Redmond’s election to the leadership was aided by the desire of the Right faction of the Liberals ‘to keep well-known moderate Vickie Chapman out of the leadership’.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, the Liberals managed to keep a united front for most of the election campaign.

The Liberal campaign emphasised a number of alternative policies it would bring to government. Unlike Labor, it would support the refurbishment of the RAH on its existing site. Unlike Labor, it would support the establishment of an Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) as existed in various forms in other states: this fed into ongoing public speculation about the connections between major parties and big business. The *Advertiser*, for instance, had negatively reported on the expensive business-oriented functions (over \$1,000 a head) which both the Liberals and Labor had held to raise party funds, raising questions of how much influence wealthy donors may have on political decisions.<sup>28</sup>

Redmond also attempted to secure the support of regional electors, who often perceived that South Australian politicians—who mostly served inner and outer metropolitan electorates—had little understanding of their problems. Regional concerns included youth unemployment, a sense of remoteness from the capital, as well as the tendency of modern governments to close local facilities in favour of concentrating services in ‘regional hubs’.<sup>29</sup> Aside from making promises on local infrastructure projects, Redmond promoted herself as the leader most ‘in touch’ with the regions:

Redmond said recurring themes in the Mid North had focussed on health and the feeling by residents that the world did not exist beyond Gepps Cross [Adelaide suburb]. She said she understood the frustration faced by the community who were unable to have easy access to

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26. G Lower, ‘Rann lashes out on parole’, *Australian*, 11 March 2010, p. 6.
  27. P Van Onselen, ‘Rann a poll model for PM’, *Australian*, 23 February 2010, p. 11.
  28. Rann argued that pushing for a national ICAC was more appropriate than setting up a new state body. For ICAC discussions see H Gout, ‘Labor holds out against ICAC’, *Independent Weekly*, 5 February 2010, p. 1; ‘As they saw the week that was’, *Independent Weekly*, 5 March 2010, p. 7. For *Advertiser* coverage of fundraising dinners, see K Wheatley, ‘Want to dine out with a pollicie? It will cost you’, *Advertiser*, 12 February 2010, p. 16; Editorial, ‘Cosy functions need to be transparent’, *Advertiser*, 9 February 2010, p. 16.
  29. S Mennie, ‘Big country calls for bigger say’, *Sunday Mail*, 21 February 2010, p. 38; L Walsh, ‘Like the Murray, hopes are sinking’, *Sunday Mail*, 7 February 2010, p. 76.



government ministers and departments and said she was planning, if elected, to make her Government more accessible.<sup>30</sup>

Yet the Liberal campaign also subtly highlighted the fact that many of its priorities were similar to those of the ALP Government. Both parties planned to spend big on large-scale building projects for central Adelaide (including improved sports facilities); each party had detailed plans on how to obtain future water security for South Australia that included a desalination plant for Adelaide; both parties ruled out future privatisations of publicly owned assets.<sup>31</sup> Rann and Redmond each expressed yearnings for South Australia to return to the days when it was regarded historically as an innovative state, although such comments were not backed up by specific reforms.<sup>32</sup> In reality, both parties were offering a familiar mixture of pragmatic and populist approaches to public policy, albeit with different styles of leaders.

To secure government in their own right, the Liberals needed to win an extra 10 seats. This was no small task, and a couple of high profile gaffes in the last week of campaigning may have cost the Liberals some votes in marginal seats. First, Vickie Chapman failed to explicitly rule out a future challenge to Redmond's leadership during a policy launch; while she subsequently made it clear that she would not challenge the Liberal leader, her hesitation allowed media speculation on internal party tensions to grow.<sup>33</sup> Second, opposition treasury spokesman Stephen Griffiths created doubt over a future Liberal Government's capacity to manage the budget. For example, when asked by a reporter whether a number of statements regarding the Liberals' projected \$1 billion savings on their RAH scheme were 'spin', Griffiths said 'In essence, yes'. Redmond later explained that the savings would be made over the six year redevelopment of the hospital, but the damage was done. The ALP took full advantage of these political gaffes in its public statements and advertising during the last days of the campaign.<sup>34</sup>

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30. N Berrett, 'Heat on in Frome with 38 days until state election', *Northern Argus* (Clare, SA), 10 February 2010, p. 2. See also P Akerman, 'Redmond wants second debate, in the bush', *Australian*, 5 March 2010, p. 8.

31. M Dunckley, 'Rann says "sorry" for "friendship"', *Australian Financial Review*, 4 March 2010, p. 10; Editorial, 'Four weeks to sift through the party promises', *Advertiser*, 20 February 2010, p. 80; Akerman, 'Rann revives rust bucket past', op. cit.

32. See interviews with Rann and Redmond in Spoehr, 'Election 2010', op. cit., pp. 14–15. Among other early legislative reforms, South Australia was the first Australian colony to legislate in favour of female suffrage (1894). The second Premiership of Don Dunstan (1970–79) attracted national attention for its policy innovations in areas such as the arts and urban development. See C Macintyre, 'Politics', in J Spoehr, ed., *State of South Australia: Trends & Issues*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, 2005, pp. 117–32.

33. M Owen, 'Rift fears as scuffle mars Liberal leader's day', *Australian*, 16 March 2010, p. 7.

34. V Edwards and M Owen, 'Redmond plays straight bat after slip-up on spin', *Weekend Australian*, 20 March 2010, p. 7; M Dunckley, 'SA Libs admit hospital funds "spin"', *Australian Financial Review*, 19 March 2010, p. 4.

## The election outcome: House of Assembly

While it took several days to confirm the result, the Rann Government was returned to office with the overall loss of just two House of Assembly seats. Some Labor MPs, however, were very lucky to retain their seats: ‘Labor retained Bright by only 167 votes, Hartley by 894 votes, Newland by 900’.<sup>35</sup> Despite winning some 52 per cent of the overall two-party preferred votes, the number of Liberal MPs only rose from 15 to 18. This result must vex the Electoral Districts Boundaries Commission (EDBC), which after every state election redraws the boundaries in time for the next poll. The EDBC has the stated purpose of ensuring that the ‘party that obtains 50% or more of the overall vote at a general election is able to form a government’. In 2010 (following a 2007 redistribution of electoral districts) this certainly did not happen.<sup>36</sup> The 2010 poll might suggest that voter preferences are too unpredictable to be governed by geographical boundaries and mathematical formulas.<sup>37</sup> Whatever the reason, Labor was now in a position to look forward to four more years of governing in its own right (see table next page):

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35. D Jaensch, “‘Gaffes gifts’ take their toll at the poll’, *Advertiser*, 8 April 2010, p. 24.

36. State Electoral Office, *Electoral questions & answers*, no. 33, published ca. 2006, p. 11, viewed 27 April 2010, [http://www.ecsa.sa.gov.au/apps/uploadedFiles/news/276/SEO\\_QA06\\_13feb06.pdf](http://www.ecsa.sa.gov.au/apps/uploadedFiles/news/276/SEO_QA06_13feb06.pdf)

37. For details of the 2007 redistribution, see Electoral Districts Boundaries Commission, *2007 Report of the Electoral Districts Boundaries Commission*, South Australian Government, Adelaide, 2007, online publication available from the South Australian Electoral Commission website, viewed 4 May 2010, [www.ecsa.sa.gov.au](http://www.ecsa.sa.gov.au)

## South Australia, House of Assembly results, 2010 election

Party Name	First preference vote n	First preference vote share %	Change from previous election %	Seats won n	Uncontested seats held n	Seat share %
Liberal Party	408,482	41.65	+7.68	18	0	38.30
Australian Labor Party	367,480	37.47	-7.75	26	0	55.32
Australian Greens	79,535	8.11	+1.62	0		
Family First	52,769	5.38	-0.50	0		
Independents	46,108	4.70	+1.95	3	0	6.38
The Nationals	10,279	1.05	-1.04	0		
Save RAH [Royal Adelaide Hospital] Party	5,382	0.55	*	0		
Australian Democrats	3,682	0.38	-2.52	0		
Gamers 4 Croydon	1,962	0.20	*	0		
Fair Land Tax Party	1,819	0.19	*	0		
FREE Australia Party	1,497	0.15	*	0		
Dignity 4 Disability	1,348	0.14	*	0		
Votes for other than listed parties	326	0.03	-0.67			
Totals	980,669	100.00		47	0	100.00

Table sourced from the Australian Politics and Elections Database,<sup>38</sup> University of Western Australia, viewed 3 May 2010, [www.elections.uwa.edu.au](http://www.elections.uwa.edu.au)

## The election outcome: Legislative Council

The election results for the Legislative Council displayed the trend evident in the 2006 poll: a marked number of South Australians were voting for Upper House candidates outside the major parties. There are a total of 22 Members of the Legislative Council (MLCs), each serving eight-year terms: 11 of these MLCs face the voters at the same time as the House of Assembly elections. The 11 successful MLC candidates in 2010 included four Liberals, four ALP, one Greens, one Family First and one representative of the Dignity for Disability Party, Kelly Vincent. At 21, Vincent is the youngest member of an Upper House in Australian political history.<sup>39</sup> The final make-up of the 22-seat Legislative Council may suggest an electorate disaffected by major parties but not enough to challenge the *status quo* of adversarial politics in the Lower House.

38. At the time of writing (4 June 2010), the South Australian Electoral Commission had not yet published a definitive table.

39. L Novak, 'Cheers and tears as Kelly wins a seat in the House', *Advertiser*, 9 April 2010, p. 13. MLC seats facing election in 2010: ALP 4, Liberal 5, Family First 1, Independent 1. See ABC News, 2010 South Australian Election website, viewed 11 May 2010, <http://www.abc.net.au/elections/sa/2010/guide/lc.htm>

South Australia, Legislative Council seats (prior and post-2010 election)

Party name	Total seats prior to 2010 election	Total seats after 2010 election
ALP	8	8
Liberals	8	7
SA Greens	1	2
Family First	2	2
Independents	3	2
Dignity for Disability	0	1

Note: In 2009 the single Australian Democrats MLC, David Winderlich, resigned from the party and became an Independent MLC.<sup>40</sup>

## Assessing the outcome

### Labor: electoral success through marginal campaigning

According to many commentators, Labor slipped back into office by strategic campaigning in marginal Adelaide seats held by the ALP, especially Light, Newland, Hartley and Mawson.<sup>41</sup> Considerable efforts were made by ALP candidates in these marginal areas to fashion their campaigns to win over their electorates with a ‘personal touch’. For example, Leon Bignell, MHA for Mawson, hand-wrote around 2,000 letters to voters in his electorate; in Newland, the wife of the sitting candidate, Tom Kenyon, was pressed into service to write a letter to the electors praising Kenyon.<sup>42</sup> Last-minute ALP advertising negatively reflecting on the qualities of the Liberal Party were no doubt geared towards convincing marginal voters to choose Labor. Bignell in Mawson was especially energetic in highlighting Liberal gaffes through letterbox campaigns, doorknocking and placards.<sup>43</sup>

The ALP’s strategy for the marginal electorates included a highly contentious variation of the standard practice of party volunteers handing out ‘How-to-Vote’ cards outside polling booths on election day. ‘How-to-Vote’ cards generally display a party’s official position on how it would like voters to mark their first, second, third (etc.) preference on the ballot sheet. In the electorates of Morialta, Mawson, Hartley and Light, however, Labor supporters handed out

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40. Sources for the Legislative Council table include Anderson and Manning, ‘The South Australian election of 18 March 2006’, op. cit., p. 639; Novak, ‘Cheers and tears’, op. cit., p. 13.
  41. Jaensch, “‘Gaffe gifts’”, op. cit., p. 24; P Williams, ‘Southern discomfort’, *Courier-Mail*, 23 March 2010, p. 22; C Kenny, ‘Lessons for Labor in Rann reprieve’, *Australian*, 24 March 2010, p. 12.
  42. G Kelton, ‘It’s the little seats that counted’, *Advertiser*, 23 March 2010, p. 9; Kenny, ‘Lessons for Labor’, op. cit., p. 12.
  43. D Nason, ‘Rann grabbed victory from jaws of defeat in marginal campaigns’, *Weekend Australian*, 27 March 2010, p. 12; Kelton, ‘It’s the little seats that counted’, op. cit., p. 9; Jaensch, “‘Gaffes gifts’”, op. cit., p. 24.

How-to-Vote leaflets which requested Family First voters to give their second preference to Labor. While Family First's official How-to-Vote card gave the Liberals, *not* the ALP, their second preference, Labor was within its rights to offer Family First voters an alternative voting suggestion. What was controversial was the manner in which it was done. Labor volunteers—dressed in blue T-shirts bearing the slogan 'Put Your Family First'—handed out the leaflets, which made no explicit mention of the fact that they were generated by the ALP. Observant voters would have noticed that they were authorised by 'M Brown', although it was not stated that he was the South Australian secretary of the Labor Party.<sup>44</sup>

Several politicians and journalists condemned the allegedly deceptive decision to dress volunteers in Liberal-style blue rather than traditional Labor red, as well as the absence of strong Labor identification on the material. But the How-to-Vote incident did not appear to break any electoral laws; similar incidents by political parties have occurred in several previous Australian elections, but it has been difficult legally to prove the intent to deceive and whether that intent to deceive bore fruit.<sup>45</sup>

The Rann Government's attempts to justify their campaign committee's How-to-Vote tactics sent mixed messages to the South Australian electorate. On the one hand, the ALP stressed that what Labor had done was not illegal, that the Liberals had adopted similar tactics in previous years, and they also encouraged people to believe that it had 'zip [no] impact on the outcome of the election'.<sup>46</sup> On the other, Rann claimed he had no knowledge of the tactic until after the event, and would seek to introduce laws to prevent similar How-to-Vote incidents in the future. Some successful Labor candidates, like Chloe Fox (MHA Bright), revealed that they had declined to use the controversial How-to-Vote leaflets: 'I do not want to be involved in that kind of behaviour'. Tony Piccolo (MHA Light), on the other hand, reported that the 'campaign committee in the party head office suggested they [the How-to-Vote leaflets] would be a good idea and, given I had the most marginal seat, I accepted that advice.'<sup>47</sup>

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44. Note: Labor lost the seat of Morialta to the Liberal Party. For the How-to-Vote story, see A Fraser, "'Sneaky" Labor tactics', *Sunday Mail* (Adelaide), 21 March 2010, p. 21; H Gout, 'Election fraud', *Independent Weekly*, 26 March 2010, pp. 1, 3,5; D Jaensch, 'How-to-vote trick debases democracy', *Advertiser*, 25 March 2010, p. 22.

45. For other allegations of deceptive use of How-to-Vote cards, see for example Joint Committee on Electoral Matters, *Inquiry into the 2004 Federal Election and matters related thereto*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 10 August 2005, p. 117, 120; Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, *Inquiry into the 2001 Federal Election and matters related thereto*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 24 June 2003, p. 135.

46. Rann, in L Novak and G Kelton, 'Game of dirty tricks', *Advertiser*, 25 March 2010, p. 23. See also the comments on Michael Brown in the same article.

47. Comments by Fox and Piccolo in G Lower and M Owen, 'Family First slams Labor's dirty tricks', *Australian*, 22 March 2010, p. 7. Apart from the 'How-to-Vote' issue, the ALP came under attack by Kris Hanna, unsuccessful candidate for the seat of Mitchell, which he had held

## The backlash against Labor: why?

The controversy over the Family First-related How-to-Vote cards overshadowed the message of humility and willingness to listen which Labor hoped to convey in the wake of the hard-won election victory: ‘What we have seen is a natural correction plus a kick in the pants ... We have got a message from the public, in a number of seats we got a real hiding ... we have got to listen to that message from the public and learn from it, take our punishment.’<sup>48</sup> Rann signalled the start of an ALP attempt to reconnect with the public: ‘I want ministers and MPs out there doorknocking, doing street-corner meetings—not just in marginal seats but in safe seats.’<sup>49</sup>

The Premier’s comments reflected the electoral backlash against the Government. Aside from the tight marginal contests, many Labor MPs in safe seats were returned with a substantially reduced majority. One prominent ALP Minister, former Adelaide Lord Mayor Jane Lomax-Smith, lost the seat of Adelaide with a swing against her of 15 per cent. Lomax-Smith may have lost votes over the Royal Adelaide Hospital controversy. The *Independent Weekly* also suggested that the vote for Lomax-Smith may have been affected by concerns about the Government’s encouragement of major development projects at the expense of the perceived quality of life for local residents.<sup>50</sup>

Many commentators suggested that the Government’s decline in popularity in early 2010 was partially due to the sense that the Rann Government was excessively focused on tightly controlling the messages it conveyed to the public. Rann’s reliance on pithy, media-friendly statements and stage-managed political events was now being criticised as clinical and lacking in underlying sincerity.<sup>51</sup> Further, the Government’s public handling of controversial issues laid itself open to charges of hubris. When told of criticism regarding the RAH

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as an Independent at the time of the election. Hanna alleged that the ALP had used misleading information against him during the election campaign. Such information allegedly included pamphlets intimating that he was soft on crime. At the time of writing (4 June 2010), Hanna was pursuing the matter in the Court of Disputed Returns (South Australia) with a view to securing a fresh election for the seat of Mitchell. See K McGregor and D Wills, ‘Ousted MP begins court challenge to pamphlet’, *Advertiser*, 22 April 2010, p. 33.

48. S Larkin, ‘Reeling Rann now facing leadership brawl’, *Canberra Times*, 22 March 2010, p. 5.
49. P Akerman, “‘Humbled” premier orders his team back to the streets’, *Australian*, 25 March 2010, p. 6.
50. H Gout et al., ‘A handful of winners but hatful of losers’, *Independent Weekly*, 26 March 2010, p. 6; H Manning, ‘Whatever the result, let’s hope Labor listens’, *Sunday Mail*, 21 March 2010, p. 15.
51. H Manning, ‘Debates dying a slow death’, *Sunday Mail*, 7 March 2010, p. 25; Kenny, ‘Lessons for Labor’, op. cit., p. 12; Hunt, ‘Bloody campaign’, op. cit., p. 3. Letters to the editor of the *Advertiser* sometimes mirrored the views of commentators. See for example letters in *Advertiser*, 20 February 2010, p. 80.

proposal, for example, Infrastructure Minister Patrick Conlon said ‘Nonsense ... they love it. Name me a doctor anywhere who doesn’t want a brand new hospital.’<sup>52</sup>

Rightly or wrongly, there was also a tendency among media commentators to regard the publicity surrounding Rann’s alleged relationship with Ms Chantelois as the ‘circuit-breaker’ which caused considerable numbers of voters to rethink their support for the ALP Government. One respondent to a South Australian political article on the website New Matilda suggested that this media narrative:

overlooked the huge disenchantment with Rann and the Labor government long before the Chantelois revelations. The disregard for community opinion over land use issues, the transfer of public land to private for housing and retail development ... the introduction of grandiose new projects—a desalination plant and a new hospital—without public discussion or consultation, and attempted intrusion onto the Adelaide Parklands [i.e. through increased car parking facilities], all these alienated many longstanding Labor voters.<sup>53</sup>

Statistical support for this view of longer term disenchantment with the ALP Government is found in the fact that for the House of Assembly, more than twenty per cent of voters did not mark one of the major parties down as their first preference on the ballot paper.<sup>54</sup> Such figures also offer a challenge to any assumptions that swinging voters were simply ‘tired’ of a style of government and just wanted a change.

## The Liberals and The Nationals

The federal Liberal Party was undoubtedly disappointed in the election loss, as a Liberal South Australian Government might have created a stumbling block for the Rudd Labor agenda, which was reliant upon Federal–State co-operation for a raft of policy initiatives.<sup>55</sup> A few commentators blamed poor selection of Liberal candidates, with some candidates having been defeated in previous elections. South Australian Senator and powerbroker Nick Minchin suggested that ‘I think we preselected in some places a bit too early, when our prospects were not that great ... we may have had better candidates if we waited a bit longer.’<sup>56</sup> If what Minchin says is true, there may be a need for the Liberals to identify candidates with a hunger for representing their communities that does not diminish if they believe they will be on the

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52. ‘Redemption or relocation?’ *Independent Weekly*, 12 February 2010, p. 5.

53. ‘djhetzel’, comment dated 18 March 2010, in L Walladge, ‘Rann very close to the edge’, article posted 18 March 2010, New Matilda website, viewed 23 March 2010, <http://newmatilda.com/2010/03/18/rann-very-close-edge>

54. D Jaensch, “‘Gaffes gifts’”, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

55. G Kitney, ‘State elections may lift Abbot’, *Australian Financial Review*, 15 March 2010, p. 8.

56. Nason, ‘Rann grabbed victory from jaws of defeat’, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

opposition benches. With their people skills and high local profiles, experienced local government politicians may prove to be useful party recruits.<sup>57</sup>

The Nationals' Karlene Maywald lost the rural seat of Chaffey at the election; the former Rann Minister (and only Nationals MP) was replaced by Liberal Tim Whetstone. Liberal success in this seat was unlikely to be due to Redmond's campaign attempt to present her party as the one most in touch with the regions. Whetstone already had a high profile as a former SA Murray Irrigators chairman, and this probably helped him win the seat. Whetstone was especially keen to present himself as the right person to secure better deals for irrigators in the Chaffey electorate. A probable factor influencing the Chaffey election result was voter dismay over continued problems with South Australia's limited access to water in the River Murray through drought and excessive consumption by the interstate users of the river (NSW and Victoria).<sup>58</sup>

## Independents and minor parties

Being judged to be familiar with local issues obviously counted in regional elections. Certainly the high local government profiles of successful independent candidates Don Pegler (MHA Mount Gambier) and Geoff Brock (Frome)—both former Mayors—served to thwart the ambitions of the Liberals to gain a greater foothold in the regions. The third and final successful House of Assembly Independent, Bob Such (Fisher), could also count on local recognition, having represented his suburban–rural Adelaide electorate since 1989, initially as a Liberal and then, after 2000, as an Independent.

There are also two Independents in the Legislative Council, loosely aligned with former State MLC (and now Independent Senator) Nick Xenophon, whose most prominent policy is his opposition to poker machine gambling. Neither was facing re-election in 2010. Having resigned from the Australian Democrats in late 2009, the only Independent MLC to face the polls, David Winderlich, lost his seat in the election. He perhaps lacked sufficient time to establish his profile outside the confines of the Australian Democrats, which had been in electoral decline nationwide for several years.<sup>59</sup>

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57. Dr Haydon Manning has highlighted the recognition factor of local government service in accounting for the electoral wins of two former Lord Mayors: Labor's Tony Piccolo (MHA Light) and the Independent Geoff Brock (MHA Frome). Being a former Lord Mayor of Adelaide did not result in Jane Lomax-Smith (ALP) retaining the seat of Adelaide, but it may have assisted her initial election to parliament. See H Manning, in P Mares (transcript of interviews with Sue Neales and Haydon Manning), 'Hanging and clinging: two state elections', Inside Story (website), published 22 March 2010, viewed 25 March 2010, <http://inside.org.au/hanging-and-clinging-two-state-elections/>

58. L Novak, 'River MP raises volume', *Advertiser*, 23 March 2010, p. 11.

59. Xenophon was replaced as Independent MLC by Xenophon supporter John Darley in 2007. The other Xenophon-aligned MLC is Ann Bressington, who was Xenophon's running mate in the 2006 election. See N Henderson, 'Friendly fire', *Advertiser*, 22 November 2007, pp. 1,6.



While the media focus was on the major parties, there were several minor parties fielding candidates in the 2010 election.<sup>60</sup> As previously mentioned, the Dignity for Disability Party was successful in securing a seat in the Legislative Council. The Dignity for Disability Party policies generally concentrate on improving access for the disabled in various aspects of public and community life. The party was presumably successful because many people in the community are affected by disability (including parents and carers), whereas other single issue parties like the Shooters Party and Save the RAH have a more limited natural constituency.<sup>61</sup>

The Australian Greens and Family First gained the largest number of non-major party votes, but not enough to secure either party a seat in the House of Assembly. Both parties have a total of two seats each in the upper house after the election. The high national profile of the Greens may yet translate into greater bargaining power at the state level; it is more difficult to predict the long-term future of Family First, which is relatively new to the Australian political scene.

Some of the political parties appeared to be mainly using the election campaign to highlight their causes rather than to elect candidates. The most prominent of these parties was the Save the RAH Party, which gained lots of publicity but whose capacity to attract votes was probably lessened by the fact that the Liberals had adopted the 'Save the RAH' cause in their campaign. Another notable party with a narrow focus was Gamers 4 Croydon (G4C), which called for R18+ video games to be made available and voiced its opposition to mandatory internet filtering. G4C concentrated its campaign on the seat of Croydon, held by Attorney-General Michael Atkinson, who was opposed to introducing R18+ video games to South Australia.<sup>62</sup>

The minor parties trying their electoral luck were joined by a large number of independent candidates aligned to specific community concerns, such as Kirsten Alexander (MLC

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Information on Independent MPs can be found on the Parliament of South Australia website, viewed 11 May 2010, [www.parliament.sa.gov.au](http://www.parliament.sa.gov.au)

60. Details on 2010 electoral candidates and their parties can be found on the Electoral Commission SA website, viewed 4 May 2010, [www.ecsa.gov.au](http://www.ecsa.gov.au)
61. The Dignity for Disability Party's lead candidate, Paul Collier, passed away on 9 March 2010; his name still appeared on ballot papers but his votes flowed to his fellow candidate, Kelly Vincent. A sad irony is that Collier's tragic death boosted the profile of his party and thus may have increased the number of votes for the Dignity for Disability Party. See T Shepherd, 'Dignity in death', *Advertiser*, 11 March 2010, pp. 1, 4; M Reynolds, 'Enabling a fair go', *Sunday Tasmanian*, 14 March 2010, p. 53.
62. Gamers 4 Croydon had candidates in four House of Assembly seats and one in the Upper House. Communications between Gamers 4 Croydon supporters and the Attorney-General were at times emotionally charged and personalised on both sides. See Gamers 4 Croydon party website, viewed 3 May 2010, <http://www.gamers4croydon.org>; B Grouch, K Moo and C Pepper, 'Minor parties, big ambitions', *Sunday Mail*, 31 January 2010, p. 17.

candidate) and Mark Galanti (MHA candidate for Croydon), whose focus was on saving the St Clair Parklands in Woodville (Adelaide suburb) from high density development.<sup>63</sup> Without the financial and strategic resources available to Labor and the Liberals, the minor parties and single issue independents presumably adopted the philosophical approach to electoral defeat taken by unsuccessful Communist candidate in Lee, Bob Briton:

We raised the profile of the party ... and our policies were very well received. If nothing else, I think we managed to challenge the stereotypes about Communists and what we represent.<sup>64</sup>

## New media and the South Australian election

The so-called 'Old Media', such as newspapers, took a great deal of interest in the way in which the major parties used the 'New Media' around the time of the South Australian election. The ALP put together a 'Mike Rann—Election 2010' website which posted videos of Rann promoting Labor's government record even before the official campaign started. Although presumably designed to allow Rann to communicate directly with the voters without media interference, it also provided the 'Old Media' with easy access to potential news stories, albeit with a heavy government slant.<sup>65</sup>

The major parties attracted attention by using the relatively new electronic social networking medium 'Twitter' to make announcements before, during and after the election.<sup>66</sup> For example, Rann tweeted 'Great result in Bright' when the ALP's Chloe Fox won her seat.<sup>67</sup>

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63. Other Independent affiliations included 'SA Fishing & Lifestyle' and 'Climate Sceptics'. For background to the Save St Clair campaign, see L Novak, 'Park swap to go to appeal', *Advertiser*, 24 November 2009, p. 15; C Pepper, 'Oi, leave my mate Mick alone: retiree to minister's aid', *Sunday Mail*, 24 January 2010, p. 18. See also the City of Charles Sturt Ratepayers and Residents website, viewed 4 May 2010, [www.charlessturtratepayers.org](http://www.charlessturtratepayers.org)
  64. Briton, in Gout et al., 'A handful of winners but hatful of losers', op. cit., p. 17.
  65. See the *Advertiser's* use of Mike Rann website in K Kyriacou and G Kelton, 'Sorry Premier: Chantelois relationship did not affect job', *Advertiser*, 15 February 2010, p. 1.
  66. Twitter is an incorporated company: its 'product' is essentially an instant messaging service where individual messages posted on an internet-based twitter account have a limit of 140 characters, including line-spaces (the message is called a 'tweet'). Anyone can open a twitter account, and subject to some restrictions, fellow 'tweeters' may send tweets to another person's twitter account in response to a post, or send unsolicited tweets to another person's twitter account. In the case of politicians, the public are often alerted to the fact that their MP tweets via a link from the MP's website. Fellow tweeters can then 'follow' the MP on twitter. See D Oliveri, 'What is twitter and how does it work?', web article posted 3 January 2009 in Suite101.com website (online magazine based in Vancouver, Canada), viewed 29 April 2010, [http://onlinepublishing.suite101.com/article.cfm/what\\_is\\_twitter\\_and\\_how\\_does\\_it\\_work](http://onlinepublishing.suite101.com/article.cfm/what_is_twitter_and_how_does_it_work)
  67. G Lower, 'ALP takes two seats as poll ends', *Australian*, 29 March 2010, p. 2. For an example of Redmond's 'tweeting', see AAP, 'Grey water helps Adelaide to go green', *Canberra Times*, 12 January 2010, p. 6.

Probably because of the novelty of the medium, newspapers and traditional electronic media often reported the political use of Twitter in the South Australian contest, sometimes just as a matter-of-fact aside. Ironically, 'Old Media' reportage ensured a wider audience for political tweets than would have been possible otherwise.

Despite the eagerness with which several South Australian MPs used Twitter, both major parties combined in 2009 to pass a Bill which, if had been enforced, would have placed some restrictions on the public use of New Media for political comment during election time. On 6 January 2010 a number of amendments to South Australia's *Electoral Act 1985* became law. These amendments included the stipulation that during election periods, the name and address of a person making political comment in a journal published on the Internet must be supplied to the person/s responsible for the publication, and must be retained by the publisher for six months.<sup>68</sup>

Such rules have been in place for 'letters to the editor' in print newspapers for decades. However, traditional media organisations expressed outrage about the new amendments, as did many contributors to *Advertiser's* letters page. Many angry reader comments were also posted on the newspaper's *AdelaideNow* website. Concerns were raised about the censoring of Internet discussion, fear of reprisal if the name of a controversial 'blogger' might come to light, and the possibility of steep fines for not obeying the law. As a result of sustained negative coverage, by early February 2010 the Attorney-General Michael Atkinson backed down on the new amendments to the *Electoral Act 1985*:

From the feedback we've received through AdelaideNow, the blogging generation believes that the law supported by all MPs and all political parties is unduly restrictive. I have listened.<sup>69</sup>

Atkinson stated that the laws would not be enforced during the 2010 election, and would be repealed at some point after the poll. He had previously argued that the amendments were necessary to promote honesty in the campaign process: 'In blog sites, there is just no restraint. It is a jungle of criminal defamation (and) identity theft, a sewer of fraud'.<sup>70</sup>

Both the *Advertiser* and the *West Australian* carried strong editorials denouncing the amendments as counter to the best interests of free speech and democracy. The *West Australian* asserted that the laws show 'how MPs have failed to keep pace with new

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68. The specific amendments referred to are located in Section 44 of the *Electoral (Miscellaneous) Amendment Act 2009* (this Section amends parts of Section 116 of the *Electoral Act 1985*). The South Australian *Electoral Act 1985* can be found online at the South Australian Government website, viewed 5 May 2010, [www.sa.gov.au](http://www.sa.gov.au)

69. P Akerman, 'A-G backs down on political blogging', *Australian*, 3 February 2010, p. 7. See also letters to the editor, *Advertiser*, 3 February 2010, p. 20.

70. Akerman, 'A-G backs down', op. cit., p. 7.

technology and how it is used by the public to express opinions'.<sup>71</sup> Curiously, these newspapers did not start a campaign to remove the 'name and address' requirements for letters published in newspapers. It remains to be seen as to whether the high-volume online comments component of 'Old Media' will develop into a powerful tool for communication with politicians, or whether such pseudonym-oriented forums will predominantly exist as a means of individual self-expression with limited political impact beyond those with similar views.

## Federal implications

On the eve of the South Australian election, federal Liberal leader Tony Abbott was in a buoyant mood:

[C]limate change is real, it is caused by humans, it is happening, Isobel Redmond is leading it, it's starting in Adelaide and I believe it's going to spread right across Australia.<sup>72</sup>

If the Liberal Party under Redmond had achieved a victory on 20 March, it would have given the federal Liberals an immense boost in confidence. With Redmond joining Western Australian Premier David Barnett as the second state Liberal leader, Tony Abbott would have been able to present a case to the electorate that the Liberals were on the ascendant. If both the Tasmanian election (also held on 20 March) *and* the South Australian election had allowed the Liberals to form governments, the capacity of the federal Labor Government to pursue its centralist agenda on traditional state matters like health and education might have been reduced. With three Liberal and three Labor states negotiating with federal Labor, inevitable political tensions would have allowed the federal Liberals to draw attention to its policies and perhaps score some political advantage. As it happened, neither state Liberal Party was able to form a government, and the above scenarios remained hypothetical.<sup>73</sup>

Should the South Australian Liberals be able to maintain a stable leadership and translate this into increasing support in poll surveys, some of this confidence might be transferred to support for the Liberals on a national basis. Working against this positive scenario is the fact

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71. 'Free expression should be our concern', *West Australian*, 4 February 2010, p. 20; 'Censoring free speech in the secret state', *Advertiser*, 2 February 2010, p. 16.
  72. P Hudson, 'Voters give a clue to the state of play', *Herald Sun* (Melbourne), 19 March 2010, p. 41. As the media were well aware of Tony Abbott's climate change scepticism, the statement may also have been a subtle dig at the Rudd Government's environmental agenda.
  73. The Tasmanian election result was 10 Liberals, 10 Labor and 5 Greens. The Tasmanian Governor ultimately decided to commission a Labor government, believing it would be more stable than a Liberal administration under present circumstances. See P Caruana, 'Governor feared Tas govt would be unstable', *Canberra Times*, 10 April 2010, p. 9. Various scenarios regarding the national implications of several Liberal states facing a Federal ALP are discussed in G Kitney, 'State elections may lift Abbott', *Australian Financial Review*, 15 March 2010, p. 8.

that the SA Liberals have a long history of internal rivalries and animosities, some of which have their origins in the 1960s (when the party was known as the Liberal Country League). Whether these intra-party tensions can be resolved or forgotten remains unclear.<sup>74</sup>

While the 2010 South Australian election was fought on mainly local issues, there were some aspects of the campaign which attracted the attention of political parties at the federal level. The How-to-Vote card scandal, for example, gave an opportunity for the federal Liberals, the Australian Greens and Family First to express their disapproval of the practice and present their credentials as firm believers in fair and open democracy.<sup>75</sup> Greens Senator Bob Brown also condemned Labor's negative pre-election ads targeting the Liberals (SA) and the Greens (Tasmania):

This gutter stuff from Labor in both states requires decent leadership to intervene and call it what it is—unacceptable ... [Prime Minister] Rudd should tell his state counterparts to lift their game.<sup>76</sup>

Such interventions from federal parties were largely of symbolic value. The federal ALP was unlikely to condemn a state branch of its own party around election time. Undoubtedly, however, South Australia's election allowed an opportunity for parties to comment on important public issues while maintaining their national media profile. In sharp contrast to federal interest in the conduct of elections, other SA issues with a national flavour—like hospital care and the rating of video games—received limited Commonwealth comment.

## Conclusion

Taking advantage of the marked decline in Labor's popularity in the opinion polls, as well as public doubts about Rann's personal image, the Liberals ran an election campaign centred around Redmond's leadership style. The major parties offered voters alternative policies on a number of public issues, such as the fate of the RAH and the establishment (or otherwise) of an Independent Commission Against Corruption. Yet Labor managed to return to office at the election with the overall loss of just two seats. Intensive ALP commitment to defending marginal seats and continued doubts about the Liberals' readiness to rule are likely factors in accounting for Labor's victory at the polls.

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74. For a history of Liberal infighting, see B Crouch, 'It's the Rocky Horror Liberal show', *Sunday Mail*, 11 April 2010, p. 73.

75. Novak and Kelton, 'Game of dirty tricks', op. cit., p. 23; M Dunckley and M Skulley, 'Labor's preference for dirty tricks sparks campaign reform call', *Australian Financial Review*, 23 March 2010, p. 4.

76. Australian Greens, *Labor's tactic undermines decency in public life* — Brown, media release, 16 March 2010, viewed 8 April 2010, <http://bob-brown.greensmps.org.au/content/media-release/labors-tactic-undermines-decency-public-life-brown>

While the South Australian election was fought over local issues, many of the public issues raised during the election campaign are also part of the national conversation, such as water, the role of technology, the links between business and government, health care and natural/built heritage. As we head towards the 2010 federal election, it will be interesting to see whether the ‘big picture’ concerns of contemporary South Australian politics are a general reflection of the national mood.<sup>77</sup>

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