



Queensland election 2009

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Executive summary

- The 2009 Queensland state election, held six months early on Saturday 21 March 2009, was announced on YouTube by Labor Premier Anna Bligh.
- In order to defeat the 11 year old Government, the newly merged Liberal National Party (LNP) led by Lawrence Springborg, required a substantial swing of 8.3 per cent to gain an additional 20 seats.
- This was the first election in Australia since the onset of the global economic downturn. Jobs and management of the economy were dominant themes in the election campaign. New electoral boundaries and three tropical cyclones also framed the context for the election.
- Under the banner of ‘Keep Queensland strong’, Labor primarily campaigned on creating 100 000 new jobs, maintaining its record spending on infrastructure and developing a football stadium on the Gold Coast.
- The LNP campaigned on ‘Change for a better Queensland’ and proposed to apply a three per cent funding cut to public sector spending, maintain two children’s hospitals in Brisbane, and implement a \$726.9 million infrastructure investment program.
- Pre-election polling indicated a tight finish with the LNP ahead 51–49 on a two-party preferred basis. However, despite a 4.7 per cent (first preference) swing against Labor, the Government was returned with 51 of the 89 seats. Bligh became the first female to be elected Premier in Australia.
- While failing to win the election, the LNP substantially increased the parliamentary representation of the two parties from which it was formed, from 25 to 34 seats, in its first electoral test. The LNP now requires a more modest swing of 4.2 per cent to win government at the next election.
- The election result demonstrates that in the current economic climate, a government can still be re-elected despite running a budget deficit resulting from a large spending program.

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Introduction

On Sunday 22 February 2009, the Premier of Queensland, Anna Bligh, appeared in a three minute video on the self-broadcasting website, YouTube, announcing her intention to ask Governor Wensley to issue a writ for a state election to be held on Saturday 21 March 2009. In the video, the Premier cited the unprecedented impact of the global financial crisis on the Queensland economy and the ‘continued heightened election speculation threatening the stability that we so desperately need’.¹ The video set the tone of the Labor Government’s re-election campaign centring on economic management and the need for ‘experienced leadership in troubled times’.

In terms of experience, Bligh had served 13 years in parliament as the member for the safe Labor seat of South Brisbane. She spent ten years in Cabinet with responsibility for (at various times) families, youth, community care and disability services; education; infrastructure; finance; state development; trade and innovation; and treasury. Bligh also led the Government for 18 months as Premier. With an election due by December 2009, an early election proved too difficult to resist with the Government performing well in opinion polls and the prospect of a major economic downturn.² Bligh’s rival, Liberal National Party (LNP) leader Lawrence Springborg, was first elected in 1989 in the south-eastern rural seat of Carnarvon. He served as Minister for Natural Resources in 1998 in the Borbidge Government and was first elected National Party leader in 2003. Springborg holds the distinction of being the youngest MP and youngest minister to have served in the Queensland Parliament.

Background

The Queensland Labor Party has enjoyed eleven years in office since Peter Beattie was elected Premier in 1998.³ The 2001 election resulted in a heavy loss for the National and Liberal parties which have since improved their parliamentary representation in the subsequent two elections. This election was Springborg’s third as Leader of the Opposition. This was the first election to be contested by a united opposition in the form of the Liberal National Party (branded ‘LNP’) following the merger of the opposition parties less than a year ago.

The challenge to defeat the Government was great, although not unprecedented. The 2006 election consolidated Labor’s substantial hold on the Legislative Assembly with 59 of the 89 seats. The Nationals held 17, Liberals eight, One Nation held one seat and there were four

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1. A Bligh (Premier of Queensland), ‘A clear choice on 21 March’, YouTube website, viewed 24 April 2009, http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=woChI2ft92M&feature=channel_page
 2. Queensland is the only state with three year parliamentary terms.
 3. In September 2007 Beattie announced his retirement and endorsed Deputy Premier and Treasurer Bligh as his successor.

independents.⁴ To govern in its own right in 2009, the LNP required a uniform swing of 8.3 per cent to gain 22 seats. To deprive the government of its majority and potentially form a minority government, the LNP needed a swing of at least 7.6 per cent to gain 18 seats.⁵

The Queensland election was the fourth election in the states and territories since the federal election of the Rudd Labor Government in November 2007. Labor held government in all states and territories from 2002 to 2008. Like the Northern Territory and Western Australian elections, the Queensland election was called early. The Northern Territory Labor Government went to the polls in August 2008, suffered a swing of almost nine per cent, lost five seats to the Country Liberal Party opposition, but held on to government by one seat following a narrow victory in Fannie Bay. The September 2008 election in Western Australia resulted in a swing against the Labor Government of six per cent, costing it ten seats in the Legislative Assembly and enabling Liberal leader Colin Barnett to form a minority government.⁶ The October 2008 Australian Capital Territory election also resulted in a substantial swing (9.5 per cent) against the Labor Party, leaving the Government with seven of the 17 seats, the Liberals with six seats and the Greens with four seats. These three elections in three months signalled the willingness of the electorate to vote against state Labor governments despite the popularity of Labor at the federal level.

This election also presented the opportunity for Bligh to make history by becoming the first female party leader to be elected Premier in a state election. Previous female state premiers, the Premier of Victoria (1990–1992), Joan Kirner, and the Premier of Western Australia (1990–1993), Carmen Lawrence, came to power after their embattled leaders were forced to resign by their own parties but they were voted out of office in their bids for re-election. However, unlike Kirner and Lawrence, Bligh succeeded a popular Premier and enjoyed a smooth transition into leadership. Female leaders have had greater success in the territories. In 1989 Rosemary Follett (Labor) was elected Chief Minister in the first general election of the Australian Capital Territory and was defeated by Liberal leader Kate Carnell in 1995. In 2001, Clare Martin became Chief Minister after leading Labor to a historic win in the Northern Territory.

4. S Bennett and S Barber, *Queensland election 2006*, Research brief, no. 3, Parliamentary Library, Canberra, November 2007, 2006–07, viewed 25 May 2009, <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/rb/2006-07/07rb03.pdf> The Greens gained a seat in the Legislative Assembly following the defection of the Labor member for Indooroopilly in 2008.

5. Based on nominal seats held following the 2008 redistribution. A Green, 'Election summary: 2008 Queensland Election', ABC Elections website, viewed 24 April 2009, <http://www.abc.net.au/elections/qld/2009/guide/summary.htm>

6. The cliff-hanger election resulted in the first non-Labor state government in Australia since the 2002 defeat of the Kerin Liberal Government in South Australia.

Context

The health of the economy, an electoral redistribution, the LNP's first election bid, and a number of natural disasters framed the context of the election.

The economy

This was the first election following the economic downturn triggered by the global financial crisis and collapse in world trade. On 20 February 2009, just days prior to the announcement of the election, the Queensland Government's Economic and Fiscal Update revised its expected 2008–09 budget outcome from a \$56 million surplus (predicted in December 2008), to an operating deficit of \$1.6 billion. The expected deficit was \$2.4 billion short of the \$809 million surplus originally predicted in June 2008.⁷ Economic growth was expected to continue at a lower rate (revised down from three to 2.5 per cent), supported by the Government's \$17 billion infrastructure program, the largest capital works program in Australia.⁸ In response to the predicted deficit, credit rating agency Standard and Poor's downgraded Queensland's rating from 'AAA' to 'AA+', noting the state's rising financial liabilities and declining operating revenue.⁹ Further news on the shape of the Queensland, national and global economies continued to punctuate the campaign period at a number of points. For example:

- on 4 March 2009 national accounts figures showed Australia's economic growth (Gross Domestic Product) had contracted 0.5 per cent in the December quarter (negative growth in the next quarter would technically bring the economy into recession)¹⁰

7. Queensland Government, *State Budget 2008–09: economic and fiscal update*, Queensland Government, 20 February 2009, viewed 24 April 2009, <http://www.treasury.qld.gov.au/office/knowledge/docs/economic-and-fiscal-update/economic-and-fiscal-update-february-2009.pdf>

8. A Fraser (Queensland Treasurer), *Infrastructure program protects jobs, keeps economy growing*, media release, 20 February 2009, viewed 24 April 2009, <http://statements.cabinet.qld.gov.au/MMS/StatementDisplaySingle.aspx?id=62892>

9. Standard and Poor's, 'Ratings on state of Queensland lowered to 'AA+' with stable outlook on expectation of weaker budgetary performance', Standard and Poor's website, viewed 24 April 2009, <http://www2.standardandpoors.com/portal/site/sp/en/au/page.article/4,5,5,1,1204844412721.html>

10. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian National Accounts: National Income, Expenditure and Product*, 'December Quarter 2008', cat. no. 5206.0, ABS, Canberra, 2009, viewed 24 April 2009, [http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/3CAB83057858A886CA25756E001126FA/\\$File/52060_dec%202008.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/3CAB83057858A886CA25756E001126FA/$File/52060_dec%202008.pdf)

- on 10 March 2009 the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund described the global economic situation as ‘the great recession’ and ‘the worst performance in most of our lifetimes’¹¹ and
- on 12 March 2009 labour force data revealed that the national unemployment rate reached a four-year high of 5.2 per cent. While Queensland registered a growth in employment, its unemployment rate grew by 0.1 per cent to 4.5 per cent in the month of February due to a greater increase in the number of people looking for work.¹²

Electoral redistribution

Section 38 of the *Queensland Electoral Act 1992* provides for a redistribution of electoral districts after a third general election is held on the same boundaries. In August 2008 the Queensland Redistribution Commission finalised new electoral boundaries.¹³ The redistribution abolished eight existing seats and incorporated those areas with nearby or new seats. Eight new seats were created, three of which were new districts in the south-east recognising population growth in that part of the state. The redistribution abolished the electorates of Charters Towers, Cunningham, Darling Downs, Fitzroy, Kurwongbah, Mount Gravatt, Robina and Tablelands. The new electorates created were Buderim, Coomera, Condamine, Dalrymple, Mermaid Beach, Morayfield, Pine Rivers and Sunnybank.

Under the new boundaries, Labor notionally gained three seats (Clayfield, Burdekin and Mirani), the Liberals maintained eight, The Nationals lost two leaving the party with 15, which left One Nation notionally without a seat. The redistribution also increased the number of marginal seats held by the Labor party from 13 to 14.¹⁴ However, the swing required for the LNP to win government remained the same (8.3 per cent).¹⁵ The most crucial region for the LNP to win seats was in Brisbane where it held only two of the 39 seats. This effectively meant that the election would be won or lost in Brisbane.

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11. D Strauss-Kahn, ‘Changes: Successful Partnerships for Africa’s Growth Challenge’, International Monetary Fund, 10 March 2009, viewed 24 April 2009, <http://www.imf.org/external/np/speeches/2009/031009.htm>
 12. N Bitá, ‘Job cuts hit boom states the hardest’, *The Australian*, 13 March 2008, p. 5.
 13. Queensland Redistribution Commission, ‘Determination of Queensland Legislative Assembly Electoral Districts’, *Queensland Government gazette*, vol 348, no. 111, 20 August 2008.
 14. This includes three seats notionally held by the Labor Party. The number of marginal seats held by the LNP remained at nine following the redistribution. The marginal seats referred to are those held by a margin of six per cent or less. A Green, ‘2008 Queensland Redistribution Summary of Electoral Boundaries’, viewed 24 April 2009, <http://abc.net.au/elections/qld/2009/guide/redistribution.htm>
 15. A Green, ‘2008 Queensland Redistribution Summary of Electoral Boundaries’.

The merger of the Liberal and National parties

After many years of discussion and debate, the conservative parties of Queensland resolved to merge in July 2008 to form the Liberal National Party or LNP, officially succeeding the Liberal Party of Australia (Queensland Division) and the National Party of Australia - Queensland. In terms of its formal structure, the new party is the Queensland division of the Liberal Party of Australia and is affiliated with the The Nationals.¹⁶ Sitting members of the new party elected former National member Lawrence Springborg as leader and former Liberal Mark McArdle, the Member for Caloundra, as deputy leader.

The merger effectively put an end to contests between Liberal and National Party candidates in individual seats which undermined their campaigns against Labor. Under Queensland's optional preferential voting system, the conservative parties had little to gain from preference deals between them. Merging the parties would therefore reduce Labor's electoral advantage. Whereas previously the Liberals focused on metropolitan issues and The Nationals focused on the bush, a major part of the challenge for the LNP was to market the new brand, fuse its divergent political dispositions and appeal to a diverse range of voters across the whole state. This election was widely considered to be the test of the merger in Queensland and the outcome would feed into deliberations about the potential for similar mergers interstate and nationally.

Natural disasters

From January 2009 tropical cyclones Charlotte and Ellie ravaged north and north western Queensland causing substantial flooding in large parts of the state. More than half the state was affected by the floods, with over 3000 homes damaged by 12.5 metres of water in the northern town of Ingham alone. In the week before the election was called, Emergency Services Minister Neil Roberts estimated the cost of the flood damage at over \$210 million.¹⁷

Tropical cyclone Hamish reached the mid-North coast during the campaign resulting in harsh winds but little damage to mainland Queensland. However, the cyclone caused the ship, Pacific Adventurer, to lose 31 containers of ammonium nitrate overboard and spill over 200 tonnes of crude oil leaving a trail of thick black sludge 20 kilometres along the northern and eastern sides of Moreton Island, north of Brisbane. Bligh was criticised for the Government's initial underestimation of the size of the problem (blaming the operators of the ship), its delay

16. Federal parliamentarians from Queensland have continued their affiliation with their respective parties. Liberal National Party, *Constitution*, LNP, viewed 24 April 2009, <http://www.lnp.org.au/images/stories/PDFs/LNPConstitution080808.pdf>

17. P Berry, 'Qld flood damage bill to exceed \$210m', *Sydney morning herald*, 16 February 2009.

in responding and its methods for addressing the issue.¹⁸ Springborg called the Government's response to the disaster a 'debacle of extraordinary magnitude'.¹⁹

The campaigns

The major parties

The Labor Party campaign centred on the need for leadership and experience in the face of the global financial crisis. Its campaign slogans included 'Keep Queensland strong' and 'Jobs not job cuts' (in reference to an LNP proposal to reduce the size of the public sector). Key promises announced by Labor during the campaign included:

- creating 100 000 new jobs in Queensland over the next three years by maintaining infrastructure investment, generating 20 000 jobs from new green industries (such as liquid natural gas), providing \$57 million for 3000 jobs in the 'Green army' for unemployed people, and providing 150 000 new training places²⁰
- contributing \$60 million to the redevelopment of Carrara stadium on the Gold Coast, (improving the stadium was a requirement for the establishment of a Gold Coast team in the Australian Football League by 2011),²¹ and
- providing upgrades to emergency departments across a number of hospitals through a \$250 million health package (\$242 million of which being funded by the Commonwealth) and building a children's hospital at the Mater Hospital in South Brisbane (transferring specialist paediatric services from the Royal Children's Hospital).²²

The LNP campaigned on the general theme of 'Change for a better Queensland' and attacked the Government's record on economic management. The LNP highlighted that Labor had amassed a \$74 billion debt after 11 years of a booming economy. Campaign advertising suggested that a number of projects had been mismanaged by the Government including the

18. 'Slick muddies waters in poll lead-up', *Weekend Australian*, 14 March 2009, p. 1.

19. L Springborg, 'Full audio of Qld election debate', ABC News website, viewed 24 April 2009, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/audio/2009/03/13/2515723.htm>

20. Queensland Labor, *100 000 jobs to keep Queensland strong*, Queensland Labor Party policy document, Election 2009, viewed 24 April 2009, http://www.qld.alp.org.au/01_cms/details.asp?ID=501

21. Queensland Labor, *Jobs, tourism win from Bligh Government commitment to AFL stadium*, Queensland Labor Party policy document, Election 2009, viewed 24 April 2009, http://www.qld.alp.org.au/01_cms/details.asp?ID=491

22. Queensland Labor, *Bligh pledge on children's health upgrades*, Queensland Labor Party policy document, Election 2009, viewed 24 April 2009, http://www.qld.alp.org.au/01_cms/details.asp?ID=489; P Lion, 'Rudd cash helps Bligh', *Courier-mail*, 9 March 2009, p. 8.

desalination plant (\$350 million over budget), the Northern Pipeline (\$400 million over budget), and the airport link (\$200 million over budget). 'Getting the economy right', it was argued, would enable improvements in health and education. Major LNP election promises included:

- applying a three per cent 'efficiency dividend' or funding cut to the public sector to produce a \$1 billion saving. This would be achieved by cutting general waste and inefficiency in government, cutting 12 000 jobs each year over three years by natural attrition and by reducing expenditure on political advertising, consultancies and administration (as opposed to front line service delivery staff)²³
- upgrading Brisbane's two children's hospitals in a public-private partnership worth \$1.7 billion, including an increase of 100 beds to the Royal Children's Hospital and 150 beds for the Mater Children's Hospital,²⁴ and
- implementing a \$726.9 million infrastructure investment program (discussed further below).²⁵

Labor commissioned academic Professor John Wanna of the Australian National University to analyse the LNP proposal to cut public spending. Wanna concluded that, for 'a service delivery state with substantial population growth pressures, it defies credibility to claim that \$1 billion can be extracted from the across-the-board expenses of government without affecting services at the front line'.²⁶ The proposal further enabled Bligh to focus her message on economic stability. Queenslanders, she argued, 'now have a very stark choice — a choice between my government offering jobs, job creation, job protection and a building

23. L Springborg (Leader of the Opposition), *LNP to protect jobs, repay debt and cut waste*, LNP policy document, Election 2009, 3 March 2009, viewed 24 April 2009, <http://www.lnp.org.au/lnp-media-releases/lnp-state-media-releases/lnp-to-protect-jobs-repay-debt-and-cut-waste.html>

24. LNP, *\$1.7 billion partnership to grow children's health services in Brisbane—north and south*, LNP policy document, Election 2009, 24 February 2009, viewed 24 April 2009, <http://www.lnp.org.au/lnp-media-releases/lnp-state-media-releases/17-billion-partnership-to-grow-childrens-health-services-in-brisbane-north-and-south.html>

25. LNP, *LNP announces \$726.9 million 'Rebuild Queensland' package*, LNP policy document, Election 2009, 15 March 2009, viewed 24 April 2009, <http://www.lnp.org.au/lnp-media-releases/lnp-state-media-releases/lnp-announces-7269-million-rebuild-queensland-package.html>

26. J Wanna, 'Briefing note regarding the claim by Mr Springborg to cut \$1 billion p.a. from Queensland Government expenses over the next three years', Australian National University and Griffith University, 2009, Queensland Labor Party website, viewed 24 April 2009, http://qld.alp.org.au/_dbase_upl/Report%20from%20Prof%20John%20Wanna.pdf, p. 6.

program, and Mr Springborg, who is offering to take \$1 billion out of the budget every single year'.²⁷

Springborg argued that lower public spending would free up the private sector, the main driver of the economy. Indeed, the Commonwealth had demonstrated that such cuts were both possible and necessary — if the Commonwealth can impose a 3.25 per cent efficiency dividend and save \$4 billion over five years, he argued, so can Queensland. Citing the federal Finance Minister's recent address to the National Press Club, Springborg stated 'we can carry waste and inefficiency in government in the good times if we choose to, we simply can't afford it when times are tough'.²⁸

Negative advertising by Labor included using footage of Springborg downplaying the impact of the international financial crisis and stating his intention to 'front-end' jobs and 'make positions 'de-necessary'. The advertisement asked how Springborg could be taken seriously as a leader if he could not recognise the gravity of the economic situation.²⁹ Labor also attacked the LNP deputy leader using interview footage of a person who had lost money in a mortgage scheme managed by McArdle suggesting that her life was ruined by his 'unscrupulous activities'.³⁰ The LNP strongly attacked Labor's priorities with its proposal to redevelop Carrara Stadium while rationalising children's health services. One advertisement posed the question, 'would you rather your sick child go to a hospital or to a game of football?' with accompanying footage of a young sick girl holding a teddy bear.³¹ The LNP tactic of attacking Labor's stadium proposal prompted accusations that it was using the Gold Coast as a 'political crowbar' for its campaign in Brisbane.³²

At the leaders' debate held on 13 March 2009, Bligh framed the election as a broader contest over the role of government in the economy in tough times. In her view, the challenge for government was to manage the 'economic storm' of the global economic downturn or what she described as the 'largest challenge since the great depression'. This would be managed through creating jobs and maintaining infrastructure expenditure. Mr Springborg focused on

27. M Ludlow, 'Heat is on the sunshine state', *Australian financial review*, 7 March 2009, p. 6.

28. L Springborg, 'Full audio of Qld election debate'; L Tanner (Minister for Finance and Deregulation), Address to the National Press Club of Australia followed by question and answer session', 11 March 2009, viewed 24 April 2009, http://www.financeminister.gov.au/speeches/2009/sp_20090311.html

29. Queensland Labor, 'Lawrence Springborg on the global financial crisis', YouTube website, viewed 24 April 2009, <http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=HDDMP93vOkM&feature=related>

30. Queensland Labor, "'Well my life's ruined," Joyce tells Mark McArdle and Lawrence Springborg', YouTube website, viewed 23 March 2009, <http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=l6GB5rDwXqE>

31. LNP, 'Build another stadium', viewed 24 April 2009, YouTube website, <http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=prO3vIxmgo0>

32. Editorial, *Gold coast bulletin*, 20 March 2009, p. 27.

the Government's underperformance in health, financial management (particularly record government debt and spending), and the need to provide better regional services, support small business and improve education standards.³³

The major parties officially launched their campaigns the day after the debate, one week before the poll. As part of his launch, Springborg announced a \$726.9 million infrastructure investment program called 'Rebuilding Queensland', to be funded by scrapping the Traveston Crossing Dam project and reducing government waste, and promised to create 10 000 jobs. The program included \$260 million for a Gold Coast rapid transit project, \$100 million for the Townsville and Nambour hospitals and \$80 million for a range of smaller local government projects.³⁴ The LNP's infrastructure scheme provided a counter-argument to Labor's claim that the LNP would increase unemployment. Bligh reinforced her main campaign messages including stimulus measures for certain sectors, employing more teachers, establishing 240 more kindergartens, employing 600 new police officers over three years, over 3500 more health workers over three years and a subsidy scheme for the installation of solar hot water systems.³⁵

Without a sense of renewal in government, the advantage of incumbency can diminish somewhat after a government has been re-elected a number of times. Labor showed some vulnerability to the 11 year old 'tired and stale' government argument. Following reports of slow progress by Queensland Health in fixing accommodation for nurses in the Torres Strait, Bligh refused to guarantee that Stephen Robertson would continue in his position as Health Minister. Bligh then stated that she would select her best team to fill Cabinet positions. Her deputy, Paul Lucas and Treasurer, Andrew Fraser, were the only ministers guaranteed their positions in the new government.³⁶

Campaign funding came under the microscope when it was alleged that mining billionaire Clive Palmer made substantial contributions to the LNP's \$7 million advertising budget.³⁷ It later emerged that while Palmer did provide \$280 000 to the LNP, the Labor Party also benefited from a \$230 000 donation from the Australian Workers Union.³⁸

33. L Springborg, 'Full audio of Qld election debate'.

34. LNP, 'LNP announces \$726.9 million "Rebuild Queensland" package', LNP policy document, Election 2009, 15 March 2009. viewed 24 April 2009, <http://www.lnp.org.au/lnp-media-releases/lnp-state-media-releases/lnp-announces-7269-million-rebuild-queensland-package.html>

35. M McKenna, 'Bligh pledges 100 000 new pay slips', *The Australian*, 16 March 2009, p. 5.

36. N Bitu, 'Cabinet on notice as bungling angers Bligh', *The Australian*, 13 March 2009, p. 6.

37. G Roberts, 'Billionaire stokes LNP's \$7m spend', *The Australian*, 18 March 2008, p. 6.

38. S Wardill, 'Union wrote late cheque to Labor', *Courier-mail*, 30 March 2009, p. 2.

Electronic campaigning

Bligh's decision to open the election via YouTube signalled the growing importance of 'new media', such as user-generated content and social networking websites, to campaign strategy. Websites such as Facebook, Twitter and Myspace were used extensively during the campaign. Indeed, during the period of speculation prior to the announcement of the election, supporters of the major parties set up Facebook groups such as 'Anna Bligh is a moron' and 'Lawrence Springborg the people of Queensland hate you'.³⁹ Three days before election day Springborg had accumulated 1146 Facebook friends compared with Bligh's 886. However, Bligh had a much larger following on Twitter and posted 184 'tweets' or short messages to her subscribers during the campaign compared with Springborg's 44 tweets.⁴⁰

Bligh's tweets more often focused on particular places and candidates whereas Springborg tended to post more state level comments suggesting that the tweets were more of an afterthought rather than an integral part of campaign strategy. Examples of the tweets sent during the campaign include:

- Bligh 7:07PM 19 March, 'Met up with member for Broadwater Peta-Kaye Croft, toured Runaway Bay Shopping Centre - she's so hardworking'
- Bligh 3:37 PM 17 March, 'Visited the new Houghton Hwy Bridge construction site - huge project, setting a cracking pace - a big congestion buster'
- Springborg 2:50PM 19 March, 'Just finished an interview with Madonna King @612brisbane'
- Springborg 7:56PM 16 March, 'Labor's answer to literacy, health & everything: build another stadium - tell us your #qldelection crisis at <http://buildanotherstadium.com>'⁴¹

The electoral impact of tweeting and whether the technology was mainly used to disseminate party-controlled information or to genuinely engage with the electorate will no doubt be the subject of further analysis.

In sum, both of the major parties ran a presidential-style campaign focusing on the two leaders, their skills and experience. Labor warned of the importance of government intervention in the unstable economy while the LNP cited the risks of an incompetent

39. M Singer, 'The ugly face of modern politics', *Brisbane times*, 20 March 2009, viewed 24 April 2009, <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/articles/2009/02/20/1234633035283.html>

40. Twitter was not used during the 2007 federal campaign. For a detailed analysis of the use of new media during the 2007 federal election, see, Australian Centre for Public Communication, *E-Electioneering: The use of new media in the 2007 Australian Federal Election*, University of Technology Sydney in association with Media Monitors.

41. Posted on Twitter, viewed 24 April 2009, <http://www.twitter.com>

administration out of touch with Queenslanders. Some media observers considered the campaigns ‘uninspiring’, ‘mediocre’, ‘boring’ and ‘lacklustre’.⁴²

Minor parties and other candidates

The Greens contested every seat but defended only one, that of Indooroopilly, after Ronan Lee defected from Labor to the Greens in October 2008. A new party DS4SEQ (Daylight Saving for South East Queensland) emerged in late 2008 to contest the election with only one policy, ‘to have Daylight Saving Time introduced into the South East Queensland region under a dual time zone arrangement’.⁴³ DS4SEQ contested 32 seats while Family First contested 25.

The former One Nation federal Member for Ipswich (1996–98), Pauline Hanson, stood as an independent candidate in the safe National seat of Beaudesert, south-east of Ipswich. Hanson’s campaign attracted controversy when News Limited papers published photographs (taken in the 1970s) of a nude person reputed to be Hanson.⁴⁴ The former Australian rules footballer, Warwick Capper, also launched a campaign for Beaudesert, sponsored by a men’s magazine. However, Capper missed the deadline for registration and had to abandon his campaign.⁴⁵ The only sitting One Nation MP in the country, Rosa Lee Long, was standing for re-election in the new seat of Dalrymple, notionally held by a former Nationals member.

Five independents were also seeking re-election. Former Nationals MP for the abolished seat of Cunningham, Stuart Copeland, stood for the seat of Condamine, running against LNP sitting member Ray Hopper. Liz Cunningham first won the seat of Gladstone in 1995 and in 1996 enabled Borbidge to form a minority coalition government. Dolly Pratt first won the seat of Nanango as a One Nation candidate in 1998 and became an independent in 2001. Both Cunningham and Pratt were defending marginal seats. Chris Foley had held the seat of Maryborough since an April 2003 by-election, and the Member for Nicklin, Peter Wellington, who had played a critical role in supporting Beattie’s minority government in 1998 was also seeking re-election. Foley and Wellington held their seats with substantial margins. Documentary maker Dave Zwolenski, affiliated with the Special Broadcasting

42. M Bahnisch, Pineapple Party Time, ‘Anna Bligh’s ship of state in stormy waters’, posted 13 March 2009, Crikey Queensland election blog, viewed 24 April 2009, <http://blogs.crikey.com.au/electioncentral/2009/03/13/anna-blighs-ship-of-state-in-stormy-waters/>; M Ludlow, ‘Lacklustre launch leaves Labor limping’, *Australian financial review*, 16 March 2009; p. 7; P Williams, ‘Boring towards victory’, *Courier-mail*, 17 March 2009, p. 26; C Johnstone, ‘Leaders are fresh but their tactics are tired’, *Courier-mail*, 18 March 2009, p. 12.

43. DS4SEQ website, viewed 24 April 2009, <http://www.ds4seq.org.au/>

44. N Leys, ‘Hanson ex-lover's intimate betrayal’, *Sunday mail Brisbane*, 15 March 2009, p. 13.

45. D Barbeler, ‘Capper fails to register as candidate’, *smh.com.au*, 3 March 2009, viewed 24 April 2009, <http://news.smh.com.au/breaking-news-national/capper-fails-to-register-as-candidate-20090303-8n7k.html>

Service, ran as an independent in the safe Labor seat of Mt Coot-tha, held by Queensland Treasurer Andrew Fraser.⁴⁶

Pre-election polling

The Opposition had generally improved its standing in opinion polls since the formation of the LNP in July 2008. Prior to the merger, Newspoll recorded the coalition primary vote at 38 per cent compared with Labor at 43 per cent. By the time the election was called the LNP had narrowed the gap—42 per cent to 41 per cent in Labor's favour. Bligh's rating as preferred Premier dropped seven per cent from June 2008 to 53 per cent just days before the election. Springborg's rating increased nine per cent during that period to 33 per cent. Importantly, for the LNP, Newspoll recorded an increase in its primary vote in Brisbane from 32.7 per cent at the 2006 election to 40.1 per cent on 19 March 2009. The two-party preferred result had also tightened during the campaign with the LNP ahead with 51 per cent on 8 March and 50.1 per cent on 19 March.⁴⁷

Polls conducted by Galaxy also showed a decline in Labor's primary vote from 42 per cent after the election was called to 41 per cent and 40 per cent over the following two weeks of campaigning. Commentators speculated about the possibility of a hung parliament.⁴⁸ Labor's primary vote had dropped to 43 per cent in Brisbane alone compared with 53 per cent in 2006. The day before the election a further Galaxy poll indicated a two party preferred split of 51–49 per cent in favour of the LNP.⁴⁹ The LNP's lead of two per cent equated to a six per cent swing across the state potentially costing the government 16 seats, two seats short of depriving Labor of its majority. However, leaked internal Labor polling indicated that the result could be worse, showing swings of up to ten per cent in some key seats.⁵⁰ In response to what appeared to be the closest election in many years, Bligh personally campaigned in 30 electorates in the final three days.

The outcome

The Queensland Labor Government suffered a state-wide first preference swing of 4.7 per cent and returned 51 seats, six seats more than the target of 45 to hold government (see Table 1). For Labor, the result was a loss of eight seats compared with the 2006 election (or ten seats held notionally after the redistribution). The LNP fared well, but not as well as some of the commentators were predicting, registering a swing of 3.7 per cent and gaining nine

46. G Shearer, 'Just a Dave in the life', *Courier-mail*, 23 April 2009, p. 26.

47. Newspoll and *The Australian*, 'Queensland voting intention and leaders' ratings, voting commitment, party to win', Newspoll website, viewed 23 March 2009, http://www.newspoll.com.au/image_uploads/0325%20QLD%20Final%2023-03-09.pdf

48. For example, P Williams, 'State at electoral crossroads', *Courier-mail*, 10 March 2009, p. 26.

49. S Wardill, 'Voters dump Labor', *Courier-mail*, 20 March 2009, p. 1.

50. P Van Onselen, 'ALP polling tips LNP upset win', *The Australian*, 19 March 2009, p. 6.

seats from 2006. Four of the sitting independents were returned. Former Nationals MP, Stuart Copeland was defeated in the seat of Condamine by the sitting LNP member. The nine per cent difference between Labor and the Liberal and National Party first preference votes at the 2006 election narrowed dramatically to less than one per cent, while the other parties maintained a similar proportion of the total vote.

Table 1: Total formal first preference vote by party and seats won

Party	Votes	Per cent	First preference swing, per cent	Seats Won	Change from 2006
Australian Labor Party	1 002 415	42.2	-4.7	51(a)	-8
LNP	987 018	41.6	+3.7	34	+9
The Greens	198 475	8.4	+0.4	0	0(b)
DS4SEQ	22 170	0.9	+0.9	0	0
Family First Party	19 379	0.8	-1.1	0	0
One Nation	9038	0.4	-0.2	0	-1
Other Candidates	134 156	5.7	+1.0	4	0
Formal Votes	2 372 651	98.1			
Informal Votes	46 908	1.9			
Total Votes	2 419 559	90.9		89	
Total state enrolment	2 660 940				

(a) At the time of writing, the LNP was challenging Labor's victory in Chatsworth in the Court of Disputed Returns, following allegations of electoral fraud. M Oberhardt, 'Poll hangs on paperwork', *Courier-mail*, 20 May 2009, p. 13.

(b) The Greens gained the seat of Indooroopilly in October 2008 following Ronan Lee's defection from Labor. In the 2009 Queensland state election Lee contested the seat as a Greens candidate but lost to Scott Emerson of the LNP.

Source: Electoral Commission Queensland, '2009 State General Election - Election Summary', viewed 24 April 2009,

<http://virtuallyroom.ecq.qld.gov.au/elections/state/state2009/results/summary.html#13>

The LNP won the seat of Hervey Bay and a string of other seats in three main regions: Brisbane (Aspley, Clayfield, Indooroopilly and Cleveland); the Gold Coast corridor (Redlands, Coomera, Gaven and Mudgeeraba); and the central coast (Burdekin and Mirani). The previously safe Labor seats of Cook (far North), Everton (North Brisbane), Broadwater (Gold Coast) and Toowoomba North suffered heavy swings to the LNP and have now become quite marginal being held by three per cent or less. Only four seats registered small swings to Labor: Toowoomba South and Callide (retained by the LNP) and Whitsunday and Waterford (retained by Labor). In sum, the LNP failed to win the additional seats it needed in

Brisbane. Some commentators have put this down to Springborg's rural National Party background and lack of appeal to city-based youth.⁵¹

Labor won with a much reduced, yet comfortable majority. So did the polls suggesting a tight contest get it wrong or was there a very late swing back to Labor? Neither appears likely. Analysis of the two-party preferred and primary vote outcomes at a state level shows that, while the polls overestimated the conservative vote, the final result was nonetheless within the Galaxy and Newpoll margin of error of two to three per cent either way.⁵² The ABC's election analyst Antony Green considered the possibility that there had been a late swing and concluded that postal and pre-poll votes were not significantly different from election day votes, suggesting that a last minute shift in voter sentiment was unlikely.⁵³ A hung parliament was always unlikely, considering that a uniform two-party preferred outcome of 51 per cent in favour of the LNP (their best performance in the polls) would have still left them almost two per cent short of the swing required to deprive the Government of its majority.

The only Australian Greens sitting member, Ronan Lee, lost the seat of Indooroopilly finishing third with 25.9 per cent of the first preference vote. The Greens candidate in Mount Coot-tha (Western Brisbane), Larissa Waters, received 23.1 per cent of first preferences but lost to Treasurer Andrew Fraser (documentary maker Dave Zwolenski attracted 0.8 per cent of first preferences in this electorate). An LNP proposal to overturn the ban on uranium mining could have cost Green preferences, as with Labor's proposal for the Traveston dam. Pauline Hanson also failed in her political comeback in the seat of Beaudesert with only 21.3 per cent of the first preference vote. The last sitting One Nation MP in Australia, Rosa Lee Long, fell short in her bid for the new seat of Dalrymple with only 32 per cent of the first preference vote. This loss marked the end of the era of parliamentary representation for the One Nation Party, after its high point in 1998 winning 11 seats in Queensland and holding seats at various times in the upper houses of New South Wales and Western Australia as well as the federal House of Representatives and the Senate.

Bligh's victory as the first female to be elected Premier was a symbolic achievement for women in politics. The election further improved the representation of women in the Queensland Parliament with 32 of the 89 members being female including 25 of Labor's 51 MPs. Five LNP women candidates won seats, up from three. Queensland women have done particularly well in recent years. The election of Premier Bligh follows the appointment of Queensland's Quentin Bryce as the first female Governor-General and the appointment of Queensland's Justice Susan Kiefel to the High Court (the third woman appointed to that

51. For example, T Koch, 'Voters didn't believe union was a happy marriage', *The Australian*, 23 March 2009, p. 9.

52. Pineapple Party Time, 'Polls Right, Journos Wrong', Crikey Queensland election blog viewed 24 April 2009, <http://blogs.crikey.com.au/electioncentral/2009/03/23/polls-right-journos-wrong/>

53. A Green, 'Was there a late swing in Queensland?', ABC Elections website, viewed 24 April 2009, <http://blogs.abc.net.au/antonygreen/2009/03/was-a-late-swin.html>

bench). Springborg also contributed to the record books by joining H.V. Evatt and Arthur Calwell as the only Australian opposition leaders to have lost three elections.

Following the election, the Premier renewed her government by including eight new Ministers in her 'hand picked' Cabinet of 18. Many of the new Ministers are below the age of 40 bringing the average age of Cabinet members down from 51 to 45.⁵⁴ Women now make up one third of the Cabinet. The Ministry includes Paul Lucas as Deputy Premier and Minister for Health, Andrew Fraser as Treasurer and Minister for Employment and Economic Development, first term member Cameron Dick as Attorney-General, and 29 year old Kate Jones as Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability.⁵⁵ The LNP elected former Liberal, John-Paul Langbroek from Surfers Paradise as its new leader and Springborg as deputy. The revised opposition shadow Cabinet also includes former deputy Mark McArdle as spokesperson for health, former Liberal leader Bruce Flegg as spokesperson for education and Tim Nicholls as shadow Treasurer.⁵⁶

Implications for the federal sphere

The 2009 Queensland election was the first major test in Australia of the new political dynamics of the global financial crisis and the associated national economic downturn. Detailed analysis of the campaigns may inform any future consideration of calling an early federal election within the context of a gloomy national economic outlook. The result suggests that in tough economic times, an electorate is not necessarily opposed to re-electing a government that promises fiscal stimulus through spending despite ensuing budget deficits.

Had the LNP been successful in its first electoral test, the victory might have added weight to arguments about merging the Nationals and the Liberals in New South Wales and Victoria and even federally. However, given its electoral defeat in Queensland, some commentators have argued that the pressure to merge the conservative forces elsewhere has abated.⁵⁷ One commentator described the Queensland merger as a 'product of the state's unique political circumstances' unlikely to be repeated elsewhere.⁵⁸ Federal Nationals leader Warren Truss and deputy leader Barnaby Joyce have since spoken out against a federal merger.⁵⁹ Other

54. R Odgers and P Lion, 'Eight new faces in Cabinet clean-out', *Courier-mail*, 25 March 2009, p. 4.

55. Queensland Labor, *Anna Bligh's new ministerial team*, media release, viewed 24 April 2009, http://www.qld.alp.org.au/01_cms/details.asp?ID=535

56. Liberal National Party, *New LNP Shadow Ministry unveiled*, media release, viewed 24 April 2009, <http://www.lnp.org.au/recent-news/all-the-recent-news-of-lnp/new-lnp-shadow-ministry-unveiled.html>

57. For example, M Grattan, 'Relief for Labor and bad news for Turnbull', *The Age*, 23 March 2009, p. 2.

58. M Steketee, 'Barren marriage', *The Australian*, 23 March 2009, p. 12.

59. R Peake, 'Nats won't meld with Liberals, Joyce says', *Canberra times*, 24 March 2009, p. 5.

commentators have argued that the future of the merger in Queensland is uncertain or needs to be tested further.⁶⁰

A challenge for the new party highlighted in post election commentary is to address the perception that the LNP is dominated by former Nationals. Disaffected Liberals within the party have expressed concerns over its limited success in Brisbane. Former Queensland Liberal President Bob Carroll called the result the 'beginning of the end' of the party.⁶¹ However, it could be argued that while it may have won more seats with a Brisbane-based ex-Liberal leader, an LNP victory was always unlikely considering the scale of the swing required, the prevailing climate of economic gloom and the Premier's own popularity. At one level the LNP did succeed in bridging the gap with Labor by winning an additional nine seats, five of which were in greater Brisbane. The party now has a better chance of winning the next state election. A further issue for the next federal election is that opposition candidates from Queensland will be preselected by the LNP. If elected, they will then need to choose to sit with either the Liberal Party or National Party in the federal parliament.⁶² This lack of clarity could cause some confusion for voters.

Consistent with other state and territory elections in 2008, the outcome of the Queensland election followed the trend of anti-government and, hence, anti-Labor swings. However, in the context of the contracting economy, the result will boost the confidence of the Labor Premiers in South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria, all due for re-election in 2010. Queensland will continue to be an important battleground at the next federal election which is due to be held by April 2011 (but likely to be held in 2010). Of all states and territories, Queensland registered the largest swing towards Labor (7.5 per cent) with a two-party preferred vote of 50.4 per cent at the 2007 federal election. This translated into an additional nine seats for the ALP. If a swing against Labor of a similar magnitude that occurred in the Queensland election (4.7 per cent) were to take place on a two-party preferred basis at the next federal election, Labor could lose all of those nine seats.⁶³ Table 2 below highlights the Queensland state electorates that changed hands and relates them to their federal electorates.

60. G Milne, 'Doubts dog mongrel party's future role', *The Australian*, 23 March 2009, p. 10; M Farr, 'Odd political beast on endangered list', *Daily telegraph*, 23 March 2009, p. 18; J Warhurst, 'You can't ignore Queensland', *Canberra times*, 26 March 2009, p. 21.

61. G Roberts, 'Moderate libs push to break up LNP', *The Australian*, 23 March 2009, p. 9.

62. M Steketee, 'Federal split on flying LNP flag', *The Australian*, 24 March 2009, p. 6.

63. The current federal redistribution in Queensland may change these relationships.

Table 2: Changing Queensland state electorates in relation to federal electorates

Queensland electorate	Region	Old margin, per cent	2009 swing to LNP, per cent	2009 result	New margin, per cent	Relevant federal electorate and 2007 margin, per cent
Coomera	Gold Coast corridor	8.3	10.2	LNP gain	1.9	Part of Fadden, Liberal since 1984, 10.2 Part of Forde, Labor since 2007, 2.9
Indooroopilly	Brisbane	2.7	8.6	LNP gain	5.9	Part of Ryan, Liberal since 2001, 3.8 Part of Moreton, Labor since 2007, 4.8
Aspley	Brisbane	3.1	7.5	LNP gain	4.5	Part of Petrie, Labor since 2007, 2.0 Part of Lilley, Labor since 1998, 8.6
Redlands	South east Brisbane	6.8	6.8	LNP gain	0.1	Part of Bowman, Liberal since 2004, 0.04 Part of Rankin, Labor since 1984, 11.7
Mudgeeraba	Gold Coast	2.7	6.6	LNP gain	3.9	Part of Moncrieff, Liberal since 1984, 14.0 Part of McPherson, Liberal since 1972 (except for 1998), 8.8 Part of Forde, Labor since 2007, 2.9
Clayfield	Brisbane	0.2	6.1	LNP win	5.8	Lilley, Labor since 1998, 8.6
Burdekin	Central coast	0.9	4	LNP win	3.2	Part of Dawson, Labor since 2007, 3.2 Part of Herbert, Liberal since 1996, 0.2 Part of Capricornia, Labor since 1998, 12.7
Hervey Bay	North of Brisbane	2.1	3.9	LNP gain	6.5	Hinkler, Nationals since 1993, 1.7
Gaven	Gold Coast Hinterland	3.2	3.9	LNP gain	0.7	Part of Fadden, Liberal since 1984, 10.2 Part of Moncrieff, Liberal since 1984, 14.0
Mirani	Central coast	1.2	1.8	LNP win	0.6	Part of Capricornia, Labor since 1998, 12.7 Part of Dawson, Labor since 2007, 3.2 Part of Flynn, Labor since 2007, 0.2
Cleveland	East of Brisbane	1.3	1.5	LNP gain	0.3	Bowman, Liberal since 2004, 0.04

Source: Based on 2009 Queensland data from ABC Elections website, viewed 24 April 2009, <http://www.abc.net.au/elections/home/>; Electoral Commission Queensland, '2009 State General Election—Election Summary', viewed 24 April 2009, <http://virtuالتallyroom.ecq.qld.gov.au/elections/state/state2009/results/summary.html#13>; S Bennett and S Barber, *Commonwealth election 2007*, Research paper, no. 30, 2007–2008, Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 8 May 2008, viewed 24 April 2009, <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/rp/2007-08/08rp30.htm>. Only state electorates with one per cent or more overlap with federal electorates are noted in the relevant federal electorate column.

Conclusion

Queensland Premier Anna Bligh's decision to call an early election as the national and international economy headed into decline turned out to have been an astute move. Her announcement on YouTube seized the initiative and set the agenda on jobs, which became the main focus for the rest of the campaign. Federal issues did not play a major part in the election. The Government was never likely to increase its hold on the Legislative Assembly given that the election was called early, there was a more united opposition and that recent

state elections showed a strong trend against the incumbent Labor governments. However, the Government's 58 Assembly seats provided a substantial buffer against the inevitable swing.

While the LNP failed to win the election, it did make significant progress in reducing the Government's majority from 14 seats in 2006 to only six seats. Despite losing its fifth consecutive election, with the last three under the leadership of former Nationals leader Lawrence Springborg, the Opposition is now within reach of government. From taking only 15 of the 89 seats in 2001, Springborg's opposition won 20 in 2004, 25 in 2006 and 34 in 2009. Now only 11 seats from government, the LNP requires a more modest swing of 4.2 per cent to gain power or 3.2 per cent for the chance to form a minority government. The increase of LNP members in the Assembly will strengthen its effectiveness as an opposition force. The challenge for the LNP will be to continue to appeal to a broad constituency and build on the inroads it has made in Brisbane. The new Opposition Leader, John-Paul Langbroek, a former Liberal based on the Gold Coast may be better placed to do this.

Labor will have to work even harder next time with 22 of its seats on a margin of six per cent or less. Its massive electoral advantage gained in 2001 has all but dissipated in the closest election since it won office in 1998. Given the dominance of the economic downturn during the campaign, it is quite possible that voters would be more willing to give the other side an opportunity should economic conditions improve. At the time of the next state election Bligh will be approaching her 16th year in parliament and 13th year in Cabinet including over four years as Premier. With the weight of a 14 year old Government, holding a number of vulnerable seats, the next Queensland state election promises to be a much tighter contest.

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