

Election 2016: Half of the government's 20 most vulnerable seats are in NSW

SMH May 8, 2016

James Robertson

Reporter



Election 2016: where it will be won and lost

Labor needs to win four key clusters of marginal seats around Australia - this is where the election will be decided.

- Election 2016: comprehensive news and analysis

The oldest truism of national politics that federal elections are won and lost in NSW has as much weight as ever this year.

If Coalition loses 13 seats, it will lose its governing majority. Labor needs 19 to claim its own. Of the government's most vulnerable 20 seats, on margins of less than 4 per cent, more than half are in NSW.

The Liberals, under no delusions about a likely swing against the party, are identifying how many "in-play" seats can be realistically defended and will set about nailing down everything in sight.

"We're worrying about everything," one member of the Liberal campaign said, summing up an essentially defensive strategy.

Across that map of potential losses there is perhaps only one silver lining for the Liberals. It trails one of the party's few clouds from September 2013.



*Yvonne Keane... the Greenway candidate, a rare hope for the Liberals.
Photo: Isabella Lettini*

Pre-selected against the wishes of party leaders, one disastrous interview made Jaymes Diaz a running joke and cost the party a 2 per cent swing against the party in the north-west Sydney seat of Greenway.

This time the Liberals are taking no chances.

The party has used its "special powers" to shut down a local ballot and install a hand-picked candidate: Yvonne Keane, who cancelled a previous run after it became clear the Diazes had the race sewn up

Cr Keane is a charismatic deputy Mayor of Hills Shire Council and has an unusually diverse resume for a modern politician. She is a charity director and former TV presenter, cosmetics entrepreneur and potentially the first incoming parliamentarian to have columnist, *New Idea* as a past bullet-point on her resume (she wrote on home renovations).

She has the backing of the party's centre-right faction but is viewed across the party as its great hope to unseat popular Labor MP Michelle Rowland.

Elsewhere in Sydney Labor has hopes of picking off the marginal south-western Sydney seat of Lindsay, a new generation bell-wether that has fallen to the party of government for three decades and, if things break their way, Banks.

Almost nothing will stop it claiming the southern Sydney seat of Barton, high-profile NSW politician Linda Burney may challenge sitting MP Nick Varvaris, if he is able to reach a much-delayed decision about whether to stand again.

But Labor believes this election, even more than is usual, will be one fought on Sydney's extremities and beyond.

The key to the party's strategy, one campaigner says, is a disconnect in voters' perceptions of yet-to-be-elected Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.



Cr Keane campaigning at Kings Langley on Saturday. Photo: Fiona Morris

"There's a much a stronger reaction to him outside of Sydney," said one Labor source. "The farther you go from Sydney's CBD he becomes a very different political proposition."

An ALP policy to end future negative gearing also plays much better with voters outside cities, a source said.

Atop Labor's list of potential gains are seats encompassing Camden and south-western Sydney (Macarthur); the Blue Mountains and Hawkesbury (Macquarie); the south-coast (Eden Monaro); the central coast (Dobell and, less likely, Robertson), the Hunter (Paterson) and the NSW north coast (Page), where the National party has been dumped in droves at local elections, mostly over mining.

A Liberal source acknowledges Paterson and Macarthur are keeping senior members of the party awake at night. (The sitting MP in the latter, Russell Matheson, was forced to abandon a plan to move electorates after a redistribution shredded his margin by eight points).

But he said marginal-seat polling showed the party was faring better than suggested by national opinion polls, putting paid to Labor's anti-Turnbull strategy.

"He might be dropping us from [a] 24 to 22 [point lead] in some regional seats, but not where it matters," the source said. "And don't forget [the PM's] popularity ratings may not be universal, but for Bill Shorten they are a disaster everywhere."

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/federal-election-2016/election-2016-half-of-the-governments-20-most-vulnerable-seats-are-in-nsw-20160506-goo1i9>