

# Australian Labor government opening the door for right-wing Coalition victory

Mike Head

16 September 2024

Media poll predictions and local council election outcomes over the weekend point to the increasing likelihood that the Albanese Labor government's pro-war and anti-working-class program could pave the way for a right-wing Liberal-National Coalition regime.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese must call a federal election by May. But the results show that Labor's support is continuing to implode, above all because of the worsening cost-of-living crisis for working-class households, compounded by Labor's ongoing backing of the US-armed Israeli genocide in Gaza and its escalating commitment to US militarism, particularly the war plans against China.

Neither Labor nor the Coalition is now expected to be able to form a majority government. Instead, they would depend on the support of the Greens and/or various "crossbench" politicians. Regardless of the election outcome, an historic crisis of capitalist rule is developing amid intensifying social discontent and political disaffection.

A Coalition government led by Peter Dutton, a widely reviled key minister in the last Coalition governments of 2013 to 2022, would ramp up the program of war, genocide and austerity, and intensify the mounting efforts of the Albanese government to silence and demonise the opposition to it.

Labor barely scraped into office at the last federal election in May 2022 with a near-record low primary vote of 32.5 percent, only because of the even-greater collapse in votes for the Coalition. That outcome reflected the already widespread hostility in the working class to the record of Labor and its trade union bureaucrat partners in suppressing workers' struggles against declining conditions, especially since the union-backed Hawke and Keating Labor governments of 1983 to 1996.

The latest *Australian Financial Review* (AFR)/Freshwater Strategy poll, published on Monday, indicated that Labor's vote fell 2 points to 30 percent during the previous month, while the Coalition's rose a point to 42 percent. The Greens, the third party of the political establishment, who are anxiously seeking to prop up a minority Labor government

after the election, rose 1 point to 13 percent.

The poll said the Coalition was leading Labor by 52 percent to 48 per cent on a "two-party-preferred basis" after the notional distribution of first voting preferences from other groups. If those results were replicated uniformly at the election, the Coalition would obtain 75 seats in the House of Representatives, which is one short of a majority, while Labor could be reduced from 78 seats to as few as 65.

Such swings are never uniform across the country. According to Freshwater Strategy director Michael Turner, the Coalition would more likely "be closer to the 70-seat mark."

"We are well and truly into an uncertain zone, with who is able to form government a matter of speculation right now," Turner told the AFR. "If an election were held today, no one can be confident that Labor will have the numbers to form a minority, let alone a majority government."

Albanese's net approval rating also sank to minus 15, way down from plus 40 during Labor's first months in office, and well below Dutton on minus 4.

There are other indicators that Labor's pro-war and pro-business record is opening the door for a vicious Coalition government. In Queensland, where the state Labor government faces an election on October 26, Labor's poll support has plunged to 23 percent. That follows Labor's landslide defeat in the August 24 election in the Northern Territory.

The latest AFR poll suggests that, even without Labor's vote falling further, the Coalition could form a government by negotiating supply and confidence deals with a handful of right-wing crossbenchers.

Alternatively, Labor could stitch up a similar deal with the Greens and some "teal" independents. Either way, however, the result could hinge on just one seat. This would be an extremely precarious regime facing intensive unrest.

Much like in the US and Europe, where war-mongering and anti-worker policies of Democrats and Social Democrats have fueled discontent later exploited by figures like Trump and Le Pen, the Australian Labor government's rightward

shift is creating the conditions for the Coalition and forces even further to its right to tap into similar frustrations.

When the AFR poll respondents were asked to select three top issues of concern from a list of 16, cost of living remained well at the top with 74 percent, followed by housing and accommodation on 42 percent.

That is because Labor's 2022 election slogan of "a better future" has proven to be a total fraud. Since then, household disposable incomes, adjusted for inflation, have dropped by 8 percent. Working-class households have suffered the greatest financial stress, due to soaring prices for essentials, rents and house mortgage repayments.

Such polls bury the issues of the Gaza genocide, the massive military spending on AUKUS and other war preparations, and the transformation of Australia into a platform for a potential nuclear war against China.

Local council elections in the state of New South Wales (NSW) last Saturday, however, provided a glimpse of the hostility in working-class areas to Labor's political, diplomatic and military support, along with the Biden-Harris administration and every other imperialist government, for the Israeli onslaught on the people of Gaza.

Labor suffered significant negative swings in Sydney southwestern and western suburbs with substantial proportions of Middle Eastern and Muslim voters. An unnamed "senior Labor campaigner" told the *Sydney Morning Herald*: "It is pretty clear that we took a hit on Gaza, but there would be other factors like cost of living. On the booths, there was an anti-Albo [Albanese] sentiment."

This alone could threaten Labor in a number of seats, including Watson, held by Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke, and Blaxland, held by Education Minister Jason Clare. But that will not change Labor's course, which includes denying visas to most refugees trying to flee Gaza.

In fact, in response to its unravelling, the Albanese government, like its international counterparts, is moving sharply further to the right, deepening strategic ties with the US, and increasingly joining hands with the Coalition to rush through parliament a barrage of reactionary laws to meet all the major demands of the corporate elite.

In the past week, this has included aged care "reforms" that would force more than half of retirees, including age pensioners, to pay thousands of dollars more each year, and measures to politically censor social media outlets and block teenagers from accessing them altogether.

That was on top of attacking building workers' wages, conditions and basic democratic rights by imposing government control over the CFMEU, the main construction trade union, then inflicting deep cuts on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), and slashing the number of international students and immigrants—seeking to

scapegoat them for the housing and social crisis.

Labor began to decline sharply in the polls last November, following its support for the previous month's launching of the Israeli mass killings and the overwhelming defeat of the October 14 constitutional referendum to establish an indigenous Voice assembly at the heart of the political establishment.

Albanese had hoped to use the Voice to put a progressive sheen on Labor's program of war and austerity, while integrating an elite pro-capitalist indigenous layer into this agenda. In working-class areas, however, few people believed this would improve the conditions of ordinary indigenous people, amid a barbaric slaughter of Palestinians and deteriorating living and social conditions for all working people.

Political opposition is intensifying among workers and youth to Labor's militarist and corporate agenda. That can be seen in ongoing anti-genocide demonstrations, rallies by construction workers and last week's one-day NSW nurses' strike against the state Labor government over pay and conditions.

None of this will alter Labor's trajectory, however, nor that of the Coalition and the ruling class as a whole. The greatest danger is the promotion of illusions that Labor is a "lesser evil" or that mass pressure can shift its course. That is playing into the hands of the Coalition and other right-wing elements by trying to corral workers and youth back into the arms of the increasingly discredited Labor and union servants of the capitalist class.

To halt the drive to war and the accompanying attack on social and democratic rights, the brewing anger in the working class must be pointed in a clear socialist direction, seeking to overturn the corporate profit system itself.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**