

QUOTA NOTES

Newsletter of the Proportional Representation Society of Australia

QN2012D

December 2012

www.prsa.org.au

Greens join ACT Government after October poll

In a result sharply different from the [polling figures](#) published by *The Canberra Times* in the final week of the campaign (it turned out that only [one-quarter of those contacted participated](#)), on 20 October 2012 the ACT Greens lost a sitting member in each electorate, two to Liberal candidates and one to Labor, as their support fell from 15.6% to 10.7%. For the first time since self-government, first preference votes overall for Labor (up 1.5%) and Liberal (up 7.3%) were on a par at 38.9%, and each party won 8 of the 17 seats, so Shane Rattenbury, the previous Assembly's Speaker, and re-elected Greens MLA for Molonglo, the seven-member electorate, determined who would govern.

In an agreement struck a week after the counting ended, Mr Rattenbury joined the Gallagher Ministry on the basis of a new [signed agreement](#) between Labor and the Greens setting out priorities for action (including additional efforts to obtain control over the future size of the Legislative Assembly), and protocols for consultation and public acknowledgement in general, and for conduct in the event of disagreements.

Recent [changes](#) in electoral legislation predominantly concerned campaign funding, with more stringent caps introduced on donations and expenditure.

Elections ACT developed a new electronic roll mark-off system, ballot paper reconciliation tool and vote count transmission facility. On this occasion, as electors received their ballot-papers, they were marked off the roll on palm devices sourced from Tasmania's Electoral Commission, and those encrypted particulars were updated within minutes over a secure wireless network to every device throughout the territory.

In the final week of June, there were three last-minute applications for registration of new political parties that would have access to labelled columns on ballot-papers. Bullet Train for Canberra and the Marion Lê Social Justice Party were each registered early in August, but the Pirate Party application was rejected, as insufficient signatures of ACT electors were presented, and there was no further time available in

which to rectify that deficiency. Its candidates were included among the ungrouped without any descriptor.

A total of [74 candidates](#) nominated, 50 men and 24 women, 28 in Ginninderra, 26 (down noticeably) in Molonglo, and 20 in Brindabella. There was a 90% turnout with 3.5% informal voting overall, but lowest in Molonglo at 2.9%. A single first preference is formal, even though the ballot-paper asks for at least as many preferences as there are vacancies. Quotas ranged from 10,600 in Brindabella to 11,400 in Molonglo. Six women were elected, four being incumbents. For the first time, an ACT electorate, Ginninderra, had a majority of women elected.

The Chief Minister gained over two quotas in her own right in Molonglo. The Opposition Leader, who had moved to Brindabella, started with nearly two quotas. No other candidate was elected on first preferences alone, but four came within three percentage points.

The effects of Robson Rotation were evident in both five-member electorates where Labor and the Liberals each achieved one majority of seats, starting respectively with 40% of first preferences in Ginninderra and 45% in Brindabella. The likelihood of Green incumbents not being returned after their columns started with 9.9% and 7.9% respectively became more apparent as the days passed (they have usually done a little better in electronic voting, whose results are available immediately counting starts). Support for two major party contenders in each case was fairly even. When the final exclusion was made, they were respectively around 800 and 1,100 votes behind. [Later articles](#) suggested that the Greens' campaign nearly ended in the week before polling day.

In addition, for several days there appeared to be rather close contests between members of the same parties, who could not all be successful in Molonglo and Brindabella. Just over 200 votes separated the last two Liberals in Molonglo, while the progress totals of the incumbent Greens there differed by 250 when one had to be excluded. Similarly, just over 200 votes separated the last two Liberals in Brindabella.

On 8 November the Chief Minister, Katy Gallagher, [released](#) a written [commitment](#) from the Prime Minister to bring in sought-after amending legislation to allow the Legislative Assembly to determine its size during the Territory's centenary year, and [told](#) of the early establishment of an expert reference group to recommend on its most appropriate size.

A [review](#) of the *Australian Capital Territory (Self-Government) Act 1988* had begun in the Assembly in December 2011 and the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure [released its report](#) in August 2012. PRSA's ACT Branch participated in a Twitter session in May believed to be among the first instituted in any parliament, emphasizing that seven-member electorates have been markedly better at reflecting the diversity of voters' views.

Besides seeking control over the Assembly's size, the Standing Committee recommended redistributions be mandatory after two terms, now eight rather than six years (ACT legislation already specifies that they be undertaken after every election), and for elector and voting qualifications to be determined locally by enactment rather than just following federal law.

After passage of the *Territories Self-Government Legislation Amendment (Disallowance and Amendment of Laws) Act 2011*, ACT and Northern Territory legislation can now only be disallowed by action of both the House of Representatives and the Senate rather than by just the Federal Executive, as has happened sometimes in the past.

Single-member distortions set Japan's course

The Japanese House of Representatives was dissolved early for elections on 16 December 2012 following passage of legislation to increase the consumption tax. Since 1996 ([see QN 1996D](#)), there have been 300 single-member electorates using first-past-the-post methods and a further 180 block proportional representation seats determined separately in 11 regions by the [d'Hondt highest average method](#).

In 2009, the Japan Democratic Party (DPJ) had swept to power winning nearly 75% of the single-member districts with 47% of the vote, as well as just under half the PR seats with 42% support.

After that, there were three Prime Ministers, outrage over the handling of the response to the tsunami and nuclear power station meltdown of 2011, and a bitter public split over taxation measures after which several groups formed new parties hoping to achieve ongoing prominence. These breakaways reduced DPJ party numbers from 308 at the election to [230 at the dissolution](#).

Some new regional parties were also formed, and then some merged with others of similar disposition as jockeying for a "third pole" position intensified. These developments tended to assist the ousted Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which won only 119 seats in 2009, and its New Komeito (Clean Government) ally.

[Voter turnout](#) declined from a hybrid-system record high of 69% in 2009 to a record low of 59% since World War II. Not standing against each other, LDP and its partner secured 82% of the single-member districts on just over 43% of the vote. On average, there were 2.5 candidates in rural districts, 3.4 in urban ones and 3.0 in mixed ones, leading to several dozen additional LDP seats because of the vote-splitting among its opponents.

LDP and its partner won 39% of the PR seats for their joint 44% national support. With just over two-thirds of the House of Representatives, they could override any obstacles in the [House of Councillors](#), half of whose members' terms end in 2013.

DPJ secured 57 seats, just 27 in single-member districts after getting around 23% support, and 30 PR seats on 16% support. A record high seven Cabinet ministers were defeated and the former Prime Minister immediately stepped down as party president.

The largely-new Japan Restoration Party emerged with 54 seats, including 40 in the PR blocks on 20% support, while the splinter Your Party (LDP offshoot that stood in 2009) and Tomorrow Party of Japan were left with 18 (up 10) and 9 seats (down 52) respectively. Their single-digit support levels continuing to fall, the once-prominent Japanese Communist Party and Social Democratic Party won just 8 and 2 seats respectively.

PR Prevails at Victoria's 2012 Municipal Elections

Victorian councillors' first-ever four-year terms expired in October 2012. General elections for the next four-year terms, as required by the *Local Government Act 1989*, were held on the [fourth Saturday in October](#).

Of Victoria's [79 municipalities](#), 48 (over 60%) consist entirely of one or more multi-councillor electoral districts, where all ballots are required to be counted by quota-preferential proportional representation.

Just over 21% of councils had one or more uncontested seats. The uncontested seats in those 17 councils were distributed as shown in the table below:

The 17 Councils with One or More Uncontested Seats	No. of Seats Per Ward			
	1	2	3	7
Wards Uncontested	22	4	2	1
Seats Uncontested	22	8	6	7
Extra candidates to ensure polls	22	4	2	1

The bottom row in the table shows a big disparity between ward categories in the overall minimum number of extra candidates needed to necessitate polls in those wards. Single-councillor wards needed a much larger number overall than multi-councillor wards, as a category. Only 4 of the 48 entirely-PR councils had any uncontested wards.