



Saying You Have A Plan Isn't Enough To Win An Election

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It is not enough to say you have a plan for a strong new economy. You actually have to have one. And it has to be simple enough to sell to the average voter.

That means cutting taxes, not increasing them; cutting government spending, not increasing it.

This is the clear message voters have sent to the Coalition following the weekend's shock result for the incumbent government.

At this stage, it looks as though the Coalition has lost at least 12 seats, with others still too close to call with pre-poll and postal votes yet to be counted. The Coalition may still hold government in its own right, but with potentially 76 seats out of 150 it is looking like Malcolm Turnbull will remain prime minister by only the slimmest of margins.

So what went so wrong for the Coalition during this election campaign? There is no doubt the mantra of "jobs and growth" was the key Coalition message of the 2016 federal election



campaign. It's telling that if you ask people what the Labor party's key message was it does not always elicit a clear response.

The Coalition's success in hammering home a message was a strength of its campaign. But this clarity of messaging disguised an economic policy that was too complex to explain – even in a marathon eight week election campaign.

Simplicity is one of the most underrated aspects of good policy. When it comes to communication, it's widely accepted simple is best.

Concise messages are more easily digested. This is the reason why we hear three word slogans from politicians over and over. But too often in politics simplicity is quarantined in the area of communications. Too many policy wonks fall into the trap of believing that complexity is a marker of intelligence. The more nuances you can build into a policy the more sophisticated you'll seem.

It's a trap that Turnbull and the Coalition were unable to avoid in this campaign. Matching an easily understood policy platform to the elegant simplicity of the jobs and growth tagline should have come as second nature to Liberal politicians. The values of the party so clearly align with policies that lead to higher growth and more jobs.

Problems arise for the Liberal Party when it strays from the principles on which the party was founded by Robert Menzies in 1944. State and federal Liberal governments tend to fall when they forget they are a party based on individualism and entrepreneurialism. This loss was the key factor behind the Victorian Coalition government's loss at the 2014 state election.

In the case of the Coalition government, the economic reform agenda was confused and complicated. Every policy put forward by the Coalition should be directed at cutting government spending, cutting taxes, and growing the economy. It is not enough just to pay lip service to economic rationalisation.

Having the right ideas is worthless if you are unable to express those ideas in the form of policy.

The Coalition talks about cutting spending. But it took countless new spending measures to this election.

The Coalition hopes to increase government spending over the next four years by \$57.6 billion. Of course, the Labor Party is far worse (it made more than \$16 billion of new spending commitments during the course of this campaign alone) but the Labor Party doesn't pretend to care about debt or deficits – they are the traditional party of higher spending.

And that is precisely the point. If you tell voters you are going to cut spending, cut taxes and grow the economy then you better have a policy platform that does those things. Failing to do that might make you look like a tax and spend government. And if that's the choice presented to voters don't be surprised when they opt for the experts.



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