

RAC after the 2025 Election

The substantial, and unexpected win by Labor, in the May election presents a somewhat new situation for the refugee campaign.

Many of us had hoped for what was widely considered the most likely election result – a minority Labor government reliant on a significant Greens and TEAL independent group in the Lower House. Since both the Greens and most of the TEALs have much better policies towards refugees and people seeking asylum than Labor, the possibility of them using this position to push Labor in the right direction on these questions was a hopeful prospect. With Labor now easily able to govern in its own right, that has disappeared. Labor will still need Greens support in the Senate to pass legislation, but it always had to negotiate with Greens and independents there in any case.

The refugee issue in the election

Refugees hardly appeared in the election with a couple of exceptions, including Dutton's attempt to vilify refugees from Gaza. In the 2022 election, the issue ranked a long way down the list of those which determined people's vote (11th). When the data becomes available, it is likely to show that it will again be ranked similarly. The fact that it played so little role probably has three elements: the predominance of cost of living questions; the fact that Labor had tried to protect themselves from "weak on refugees" attacks by passing three outrageous bills in the last sitting day of parliament in 2024; and the likelihood that the Liberals have been finding less traction on the issue over time.

The Liberals and the culture wars

Following their victory in defeating the Voice referendum, it was widely expected – including by us - that the Liberals would pursue the culture wars as a key strategy. They began to do so on questions like standing in front of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags and criticising "woke" small "l" liberalism. They put an emphasis on law and order and cuts to immigration. Even nuclear power was a part of the culture wars – indicated in part by the huge gender gap (25%) in support for it. But these cultural questions did not seem to cut through with the electorate. Possibly one reason for that is that people noticed the resemblance to Trump's culture war and recoiled from it. Dutton backed away from promising changes to the school curriculum to remove what they considered "left-wing brainwashing", although Jacinta Nampijinpa Price continued

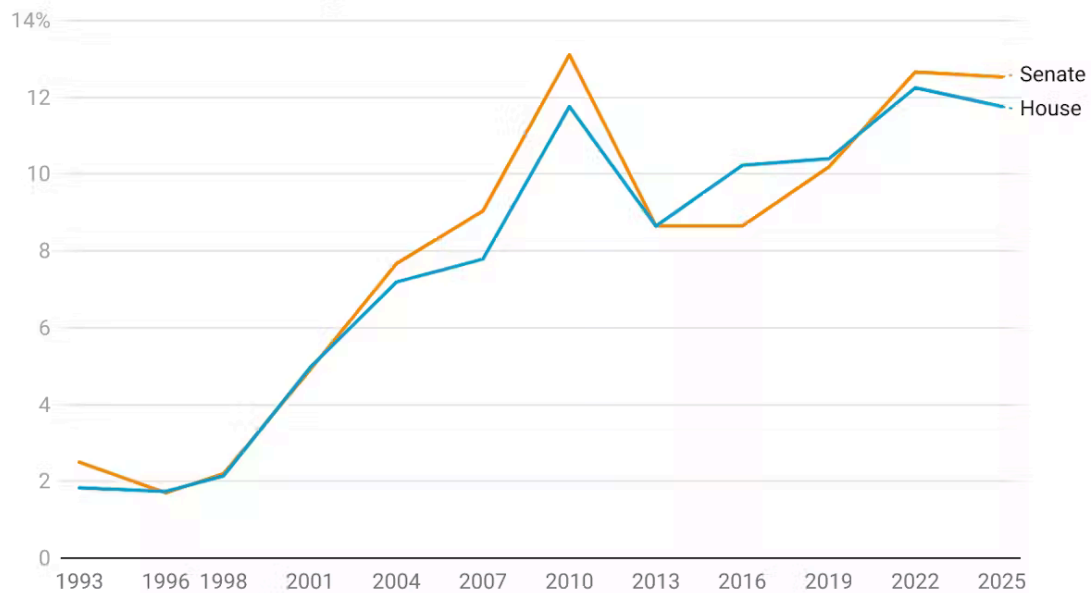
with it. The end result was that their campaign seemed inconsistent, improvised and removed from people's main concerns.

The Greens and Independents

A great deal of nonsense has been published in the mainstream, especially Murdoch, press about the losses suffered by the Greens. The narrative there has been that the Greens lost lower house seats – including that of Adam Bandt – because they steered too far to the left – not just on refugees but on housing, Gaza, the CFMEU etc.

The reality is the Greens got their equal second highest first preference vote in the House of Representatives (after 2022) and their third highest vote ever in the Senate (after 2010 and 2022). Although the swing against them was small, they lost three seats in the House of Representatives because a significant number of voters shifted their vote from Liberal to Labor and because Labor and the Liberals cross-preferenced each other in key seats to lock the Greens out.

Greens vote share, 1993 - 2025



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Locally – Pocock and Price

In Canberra, Senator David Pocock, who has been a firm supporter of our campaign, doubled his vote. Jessie Price cut Labor's huge majority in Bean to a wafer. Both the Pocock and Price campaigns had contingents in our Palm Sunday rally.

The international context

The refugee crisis continues to worsen as numerous governments have turned to harsher policies to repel and punish those seeking asylum – including attempting to emulate Australia's offshore detention on Nauru. We expect that two international questions will play a growing part in our campaign – Gaza and Trump.

The genocide taking place in Gaza is a much broader issue than that of refugee politics. The immediate question is that so many entirely innocent people are being slaughtered while most of the world – including the Australian government - stands by doing nothing. There has already been massive internal displacement of about two million people. It seems that Israel's plans are to make this permanent and even ethnically cleanse the whole of Gaza. We should be highlighting the situation in Gaza as an example of the on-going crisis of displacement and demanding that here and elsewhere, Australia should be doing much more – both to end the genocide and to accept as refugees those who are the victims of it.

Trump promises to deport more people than ever in history. Unlike the deportations under Obama and Biden (which were larger in scale than during Trump's first term in office), these will be heavily publicised. Trump even played a video of the deportees at his 100-day celebration. But there is already resistance to this and it is likely to grow. We should be making parallels between Trump's policies and Australia's and also between the resistance to them and our campaign.

Our messaging

Our messaging should be set against the enormous opportunity which Labor now has to make some important changes – including to refugee policy. The last two elections have seen big swings against the Liberals. But in 2022, much of the swing went to TEALS and the Greens. Labor got just a small majority of three seats. This year the swing was against the Liberals again but it went to Labor – giving it a huge majority. Labor's share of the two-party preferred vote is the largest since the landslide to the Coalition in 1975. In terms of the proportion of seats won in the House (about 63%), it is the biggest win for Labor since 1943.

No party in Australian history has ever come back from a loss such as that which the Liberals have just suffered and then won the following election. Unless they self-destruct with an internal upheaval, Labor is virtually assured of six more years in office. With the Liberals no threat to them, Labor has a clear opportunity to make changes to refugee policy – such as granting permanent residence at last to the thousands stuck on insecure bridging visas, expedite family reunion after 12 years and more cut off from family, process visa applications from the 14,000 people trapped in Indonesia as well as evacuating Nauru and those still stuck in PNG. Not to do so would not only be morally wrong, it would be an example of extreme political cowardice. This should be our message. The reality is that we will need to push Labor hard, and to continue to build pressure on them, to force them to act.