



And they're off: Victoria's election campaign begins

By state political reporter Ryan Sheales

Updated Mon Nov 1, 2010 9:28am AEDT

In a quirk of Victoria's set-term electoral cycle, the race that stops a nation also starts the state election.

The Government will enter caretaker mode 5:00pm Tuesday afternoon just as Melbourne Cup revellers are trudging home to count their losses or hitting the town to celebrate their winnings.

The timing is a gift to headline writers and cliché peddlers.

Watch for talk of the state's political leaders "bolting out of the gates" in a "two horse race", those candidates with "outside chances" and the main parties being "neck and neck." (And this is all before we even hit the campaign "home straight.")



Victorian Premier John Brumby and Opposition Leader Ted Baillieu: off and running. (AAP/ABC)

Loathed to produce a form guide for the contest, here are a few elements to keep an eye on.

Polls and realpolitik

Politicians are rarely keen to publicly discuss private polling data (or at least, to be seen to do so).

Likewise when public polls are released, both the Premier, John Brumby, and the Coalition leader, Ted Baillieu, politely deflect questions on their content.

The most recent Newspoll, published in The Australian newspaper, has Labor trailing the Coalition on primary votes (35 per cent v 40 per cent, down from ALP 43 per cent in 2006), but holding an election-winning lead (52 per cent v 48 per cent) after preferences.

Neither leader was willing to muse about the meaning of the poll last week, but they didn't need to: their actions spoke volumes.

Both have been campaigning in Labor-held electorates over recent weeks, suggesting (and confirming) that this election will produce an anti-Labor swing.

The real questions are; how big will it be? And, how uniform across the state? Again, the leaders' movements are useful here.

As polling day approaches, watch for Mr Brumby campaigning in less marginal seats and Mr Baillieu focusing on more ambitious targets (which will be a sign of growing panic for Labor, and increasing confidence for the Coalition), or vice versa.

The Other Hangman

Much has been written about the possibility of the Greens winning up to four Lower House seats, and wielding power in a hung parliament.

But less has been said (in Melbourne, at least) about Gippsland East Independent MP Craig Ingram.

Mr Ingram was one of the three country independents who supported a Labor minority government after the cliffhanger of 1999.

The Coalition is keen to reclaim his traditionally conservative seat, running both Liberal and National candidates.

Mr Ingram has recently accused the Coalition of trying to "hijack" the region's powerful Mountain Cattlemen's Association, in a bid to undermine his traditional supporter base.

Labor stands little chance of winning the seat (it received just 11.7% of the primary vote in 2006), and is instead hoping for an Ingram victory.

The Government recently committed more than \$6 million to build a boat ramp at Bastion Point, despite the fact the project has yet to receive environmental approval.

Local observers view this as Labor helping shore up Mr Ingram's position as the local MP who can "get results."

An Ingram victory will frustrate the Coalition in their hunt for an outright majority, but won't directly help Labor's position.

Mr Ingram has already ruled out supporting a minority government (of any persuasion) that is also relying on support from the Greens.

Gippsland East will be a fierce contest, and Mr Ingram may yet find himself kingmaker in another hung parliament.

The Young Labor Guns

No matter the outcome, this election will mean big changes for Labor and put pressure on more junior ministers to perform.

If Labor loses, it will enter opposition and face the traditional exodus of senior MPs as the party seeks renewal.

But it's also possible Labor will win the election, despite four or more ministers losing their seats.

Richard Wynne, Bronwyn Pike, Maxine Morand and Tony Robinson are all in the firing line on margins less than 3.6 per cent, while Jacinta Allan (5.4 per cent) and Joe Helper (4.3 per cent) may also fall victim to an anti-Labor surge.

This is in addition to the loss of ministers Bob Cameron and Peter Batchelor, through retirement.

So even in victory, the next Labor Government would look very different from the current one.

Younger ministers (like James Merlino, recently promoted to the police portfolio) would need to step-up and fill the power vacuum.

How well these younger MPs perform in the campaign may determine not only their re-election, but also their fortunes over the whole next term.

It goes without saying that John Brumby and Ted Baillieu want to win.

For both, this is the second election they've faced as their party's leader, having been previously rejected by the voters.

History would suggest Mr Baillieu will defeat Mr Brumby.

After all, Victoria is traditionally conservative, Labor's already been in power an amazing 11 years and voters don't like so-called unelected premiers.

(The brief reigns of both Liberal Premier Lindsay Thompson and Labor Premier Joan Kirner stand testament to this).

Those tricky polls, however, point to a narrow Labor win, possibly with Green support.

The final result won't be known until November 27th and there's a lot of campaigning to be done between now and then.

The only certainty is that after months of preparation and anticipation, the race has finally begun.

Tags: [elections](#), [vic](#)

First posted Mon Nov 1, 2010 8:55am AEDT

[MORE stories from Victoria](#)



© 2010 ABC