

3. The Leadership Contest: An end to the 'messiah complex'?

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Prime Minister Kevin Rudd had only just fired the starting gun on the 2013 election campaign, but commentators were already in no doubt about the nature of the campaign that would unfold during the ensuing five weeks: 'This federal election will be the most presidential in style, communications and frenzy in our history' (Dusevic 2013). In Australia we have grown accustomed over recent decades to media representations of each national election as a new high water mark in 'presidential' campaigning. The 2013 campaign was certainly no exception; the term 'presidential' was a ubiquitous reference point for journalists, especially in their descriptions of the Labor Party's pitch for re-election (see the controversy between Kefford and Dowding in the *Australian Journal of Political Science* 2013).

Given the tumultuous backstory to the election this was hardly surprising. While the roles of the executed and the executioner had been reversed in a reprisal of the dynamics of the 2010 federal poll, the 2013 election was announced within a handful of weeks of a party room coup to depose another Labor prime minister. On this occasion, caucus had voted to overthrow Julia Gillard and reinstate Kevin Rudd after a lengthy campaign of internal destabilisation by the Rudd-aligned forces (see Walsh 2013) against Gillard and escalating panic at published and internal opinion polling suggesting that the ALP faced electoral annihilation if it persisted with her leadership. If Gillard's (2013) subsequent assessment of the rationale for her removal glossed over her missteps in office, she nonetheless was correct in her assertion that the party room had capitulated to Rudd's apparent popularity: 'it was not done because caucus now believed Kevin Rudd had the greater talent for governing ... It was done—indeed expressly done—on the basis that Labor might do better at the election'. That his colleagues had thrice previously rejected him in favour of Gillard (counting the 'no-show challenge' of March 2013) underscored that the fundamental calculation for resurrecting Rudd as leader was that his personal appeal could retrieve Labor's dire electoral circumstances. The expectations of what improvement he might deliver ranged from the optimistic (that the ALP might now have a shot at winning the election with Rudd) to the modest (that the losses would be minimised or, to employ another phrase that became ubiquitous during the campaign, that he would 'save the furniture'). Whatever the scale of expectation, the positioning of Rudd

as the government's saviour provided the narrative frame for the leadership contest in the 2013 election and, as we will see, also influenced the conduct of the campaign.

Rudd's highly personalised campaign

At least initially the 'saviour narrative' and reality appeared to coalesce. Rudd's reclaiming of the prime ministership catalysed a dramatic shift in the published opinion polls. By mid-July, only a fortnight after the change in Labor leadership, Newspoll recorded a nine per cent surge in the ALP's primary vote, which translated into the government level-pegging with the Coalition in two-party-preferred terms (Shanahan 2013a). Rudd had opened up a 22-point lead over Tony Abbott as preferred prime minister, contrasting with the 45 to 33 per cent lead Abbott enjoyed over Gillard in the final Newspoll before her fall. The perception that Rudd's renaissance had been a so-called 'game-changer' was reinforced by reports that the ALP was recalibrating its resource allocation, with the focus shifting from 'sandbagging' vulnerable seats to targeting 'winnable' seats, particularly in the Prime Minister's home state of Queensland. Columnists interpreted the turnaround as evidence of the ascendancy of a personality-driven, leader-centred politics:

Am I the only person to be amazed by the way—if the polls are to be believed—the swapping of a leader has transformed the Labor government's electoral prospects from dead in the water to level-pegging? Is that all it takes? Can the mere replacement of an unpopular woman with a popular man make a world of difference? ... It's possible Rudd's improvement in the polls won't last but, regardless, we're witnessing a fascinating case study in the power of personality and perception versus reality ... Talk about the triumph of presidential politics (Gittins 2013).

Rudd's predominance (and the distancing from his predecessor) was reinforced in July as the Prime Minister acted decisively and rapidly to cauterise lingering political and policy problems that had plagued Gillard's incumbency. He dealt with the 'boat people' via the PNG 'solution' and 'killed off' the carbon tax by advancing the date for a transition to an emissions trading scheme. That the Labor Party had 'surrendered itself to Kevin Rudd' (Kelly 2013a) was perhaps most emphatically illustrated by caucus endorsing his audacious scheme for reform to the party rules governing the election of leaders that promised to stem the chronic instabilities of recent years but also afforded him 'untouchable power if he wins the election' (Kelly 2013a). As Rudd commanded the political landscape with his rush of announcements and with the polls swinging towards the government, some commentary suggested the Coalition had been caught

flat-footed by the leadership change and renewed questions were asked about the electability of the relatively unpopular Abbott (Kenny 2013a; Tingle 2013). However, later accounts would suggest that Liberal Party strategists had not only factored in Rudd's return, but had also calculated that the frenetic activity of the Prime Minister would pique pre-existing doubts about his leadership style dating back to his first period as Prime Minister: 'the more Rudd ran around fixing and announcing and creating mob scenes, the more he fitted into a "chaos" story' (Williams 2013).

Following on from the Labor caucus's capitulation to Rudd and his dominant performance throughout July, by the time the campaign proper got under way on 5 August it had become axiomatic in media analysis that the government's fortunes were tied to a 'presidential' campaign. For example, one of the doyens of political commentary, columnist Paul Kelly (2013b), marked the announcement of the election by writing:

Rudd's core calculation is highly personalised. Rudd believes he can best Abbott. Convinced the more the public sees Rudd–Abbott debate the more it will move to Labor, Rudd wants a presidential campaign.

What took longer to emerge was that not only would the ALP's campaign be individual-dominated in its public presentation, but also in the direction of its strategy and conduct. The relatively late leadership change had dislocated the ALP organisation's election planning. Only weeks before Gillard's downfall, Labor's party headquarters in Melbourne had staged a full campaign dress rehearsal complete with 150 staff. In another telling indicator of how personal leadership allegiance had come to trump party loyalty during the Rudd–Gillard civil war, however, some two-thirds of those staff departed when Gillard was deposed (Kenny 2013b). In addition to requiring a replenishment of personnel, Rudd's resurrection changed the whole tenor of the ALP's campaign. Plans for an electorate-based emphasis and a championing of the reform achievements of the (Gillard) Labor government were now to be overshadowed by a focus on Rudd (see Norrington 2013). In his post-election address to the National Press Club, the ALP's National Secretary and director of the 2013 campaign, George Wright, explained:

It had to emphasise Kevin Rudd and his strengths and work the party's strategy into making the most of these, not the other way around. To do anything else would have been implausible. For the party to install a new leader in such drawn-out and dramatic circumstances—well, our leader was always going to be in the spotlight (G Wright 2013).

What was more, Labor headquarters accepted that 'Prime Minister Kevin Rudd had earned the right—you could say he had accepted a duty—to campaign on his strategy' (G Wright 2013).

Consistent with his leadership history, the Prime Minister had no compunction in exercising that 'right'. Along with his chief lieutenant, Bruce Hawker, the consultant who had helped Rudd's toppling of Gillard, the Prime Minister appropriated tasks that normally would have been the preserve of Labor's campaign headquarters: altering travel schedules, handpicking candidates (such as the former Queensland ALP premier Peter Beattie), recasting strategies and messages, 'freewheeling' on policy and rewriting advertisements (Bramston 2013; Snow 2013; Williams 2013). According to one account, 'Rudd's own hand remained firmly on the tiller at all times, micro-managing both the smallest and biggest issues, conveying little trust outside his own inner sanctum' (Williams 2013). A senior Labor figure later complained: 'Look if Rudd knew how to fly the campaign plane and Hawker knew how to navigate, they would have thrown out the pilot, and the two of them would have flown the plane themselves' (Bramston 2013).

The Rudd campaign rapidly began to crumble under the weight of expectations and succumb to internal contradictions. Even before the writs were issued, opinion polls indicated that the initial surge of support triggered by his return to office was ebbing away. There were reports too about concerns within Labor circles that the Prime Minister had erred tactically by delaying the calling of the election and that his frantic round of activity during July had depleted his resources (Shanahan 2013b; 2013c). Worse was to come, as Rudd's reputation as a formidable campaigner, based on his 2007 election triumph, unravelled during August. He performed scratchily in the first leaders' debate. Hawker (2013) later revealed that during preparation for the event Rudd was distracted by his embroilment in candidate pre-selection issues. His announcement of a series of grandiose but apparently unplanned and unrelated ideas (a differential tax rate for the Northern Territory; moving the navy base on Garden Island in Sydney to Brisbane; a high-speed rail network down the east coast of Australia) were criticised as policy 'thought bubbles' and seemed redolent of the chaos and incoherence of his mode of governance. By the second week of the campaign, reports surfaced of a breakdown in communications between the Prime Minister's travelling party and Labor's headquarters with 'insiders' quoted as being concerned by 'snap decisions being taken by a small team of [Rudd's] confidantes (sic)' (Massola and Heath 2013).

Yet another problematic aspect of Rudd's highly personalised campaign performance was his default to meet-and-greet occasions where he was typically mobbed by members of the public (often panting youngsters) whose intent seemed to have less to do with politics than a desire to be photographed with a

‘famous’ person. These repetitive appearances militated against prime ministerial gravitas; it was as if Rudd in his keenness to exploit his supposed popularity had lost perspective on the line between celebrity and national leadership. Gillard (2013) pointedly warned her party subsequently against seduction by ‘the fripperies of selfies and content-less social media’. In a related if novel twist, Rudd’s media vanity fuelled a small cottage industry of speculative pseudo-psychoanalysis of the Prime Minister. The most extreme (Albrechtsen 2013) suggested he had the traits of a ‘psychopath’. It also later emerged that the Liberal Party had solicited a report from a ‘friendly psychiatrist’ who diagnosed from afar that the Labor leader was ‘suffering a personality disorder known as “grandiose narcissism”’ and ‘proposed tactics to leverage Rudd’s personality’ (Williams 2013).

By the second half of the campaign the Prime Minister’s self-belief must have been under siege as Labor’s support sank in the polls and his own popularity rating descended to record lows. Expressing the revised consensus of media commentators, *The Age’s* Michael Gordon (2013) attributed the collapse in the government’s position to ‘the folly of Labor’s initial campaign strategy of focusing entirely on the Rudd persona ... almost independent of the Labor Party’. In the final fortnight of the campaign there seemed to be tacit admission of this miscalculation as the ALP campaign was reorientated towards a concentration on the themes of job protection and the risks of spending cuts under a Coalition government. A week out from polling day Rudd delivered perhaps his most disciplined performance of the campaign at Labor’s official launch, the shift in emphasis from personal to party highlighted by the Prime Minister identifying his cause with a catalogue of totemic Labor reforms: the aged pension;¹ the Snowy Mountains hydro electrical scheme; Medicare; national superannuation; and DisabilityCare. The verdict from the pundits, however, was that the change had come too late (Kelly 2013c).

Abbott’s disciplined campaign as leader

How did Tony Abbott’s campaign compare? In the wake of Rudd’s return to the prime ministership and the initial bounce in the opinions polls for the government, the media stylised the election as a contest between a celebrity PM and an unpopular but ruthlessly effective opposition leader. As one headline proclaimed, ‘It’s the pop star v the pragmatist’ (Dusevic 2013). Based on data from the Australian Election Study (AES) surveys, at the 2010 election Abbott had been the least popular opposition leader since Andrew Peacock

¹ A common Labor misappropriation: the aged pension was legislated for by Alfred Deakin’s second Liberal-Protectionist ministry in June 1908.

two decades earlier (McAllister 2011: 249). Despite the Coalition establishing a clear and consistent advantage over the Gillard government in the opinion polls thereafter, Abbott's poor personal ratings remained a talking point and there was sporadic speculation that his leadership might become vulnerable in the event of the ALP reinstating Rudd. When that change materialised in June 2013, it was not long before some commentators suggested that the Liberal Party ought to dispense with Abbott and replace him with the more electorally appealing shadow communications spokesperson and former leader, Malcolm Turnbull (Short 2013).

Consistent with this framing, when the election was called it was widely noted that Abbott's opening statement was much less leader-centric than that of his rival: 'Abbott knows he is unpopular with most voters, so, unlike Rudd, he emphasises his "team", which he referred to six times, and the Coalition, which rated another half-dozen mentions' (Hartcher 2013a). While Abbott's references to 'the team' persisted over the following month and his colleagues such as Julie Bishop and Joe Hockey (though not Nationals leader, Warren Truss) featured more prominently than their Labor counterparts, the Coalition's was nevertheless a leader-oriented campaign. Abbott's media coverage, announcements and staged appearances dominated. In striking contrast with the erratic performance of the Prime Minister, however, Abbott stayed resolutely on message and resisted Rudd's efforts to force the campaign onto the ground he preferred. ALP National Secretary George Wright (2013) would later concede that the Coalition's was a 'brilliantly disciplined' campaign. Whereas Rudd's extemporising on the ground created confusion in Labor's organisation, Abbott marched closely in step with a well-oiled and highly experienced Liberal Party campaign team headquartered in Melbourne (Baker 2013).

Arguably, Abbott's relentless harping on key issues—boat arrivals, the carbon tax and alleged economic mismanagement—had been road-tested in 2010 and had already dictated the terms of debate before the campaign even started. Abbott and his Coalition colleagues simply refused to shift ground when challenged on subsidiary issues such as climate change, the National Broadband Network (NBN), education or health. Abbott's was a simple message largely devoid of policy detail (and evasive about costings), but it was coherent and consistent. With the one exception of the expensive paid parental leave (PPL) scheme, which provoked internal division and some negative reaction, there was no policy drift. With his events scripted meticulously and choreographed by the Liberals' campaign operatives, nor were there any substantial gaffes by Abbott. He did come under fire for what appeared to be thoughtlessly sexist remarks, yet these seemed less the result of bungling than designed to provoke predictable reactions from the 'politically correct' who could then be made to appear ridiculous. Perhaps Abbott's most premeditated 'off-the-cuff' line of the

campaign was delivered during the second leaders' debate when he interrupted a prolix Rudd by interjecting 'Does this guy ever shut up?' While Labor seized on the 'outburst' as a lapse of control by Abbott, the likelihood is that it had been calculated to exploit preconceptions that the Prime Minister was 'all talk and no action' (Packham and Walker 2013).

In addition, there was always the gift of Labor's record of internal disunity on which Abbott could capitalise. It was said that the Coalition campaign had prepared advertisements drawing on the rich body of analyses of Rudd's character failings from his own Labor colleagues, but opted instead to allow Rudd free rein to demonstrate just these traits in the campaign. Whether true or not, Abbott needed only occasionally to refer to Labor's successive depositions of leaders or to repeat his line, 'Do you want another three years like the last six?', to call the whole sorry saga to mind. At the Liberal Party's official launch, according to Paul Kelly (2013d), Abbott 'turned Labor's campaign themes against itself' by demanding 'If the people who've worked with Mr Rudd didn't trust him, why should you?'

As the Coalition's victory became seemingly inevitable (and in the immediate aftermath of that success) there was a rush of commentary about Abbott—some revisionist, some point-scoring—about how he had been underestimated, about how he had exploded the myth of his 'unelectability' and about how he had metamorphosed from the one-time impulsive and accident-prone 'Mad Monk' into a disciplined, even restrained, performer. To get to The Lodge, he had achieved a character transition on the scale of Bob Hawke's renunciation of booze and womanising (e.g. Kelly 2013d; Shanahan 2013d; Taylor 2013). Perhaps the most remarkable and ironic aspect of that 'transformation' given the terms on which the campaign had mostly been fought is that by its end stages the opinion polls were showing that not only had he overtaken Rudd in the preferred prime minister rating, but he was the least unpopular of two unpopular leaders.

The one-time 'ugly duckling' did indeed triumph on election day. The respective performances of both leaders when the results were clear recapitulated the atmosphere of the campaign. Rudd spoke at unseemly length, with surreal invocations of Labor tradition and his 'great party' belying the leader-centric nature of his campaigning (and the larger history of his prime ministerships), in an atmosphere verging on hysteria—almost as if, given the adulation of supporters, it had been a kind of victory ('Jeez, I thought we lost,' he remarked in response to a wild bout of cheering). It seemed a denial of reality. Still the pugilist, Abbott rejoiced in announcing that the Labor primary vote had plumbed its lowest level in a hundred years and declared that 'grown-up government' was back and that 'Australia was open for business' (Maley 2013; T Wright 2013).

The significance of the 2013 leadership contest

How might one rate 'success' in this leadership contest? In the obvious sense, given the Coalition electoral victory, Abbott 'won'—indeed, it is likely that the result was largely determined before the campaign proper began. Abbott had laid that groundwork by being one of the most effective opposition leaders of the post-war period. That he had succeeded principally through aggression and an enthusiastic resort to incivility, rather than through ideological and policy creativity, arguably disqualifies him from the ranks of the great opposition leaders who crafted a message that mobilised a constituency (like Menzies) or developed a compelling program of reform (like Whitlam). Ultimately, Labor's self-immolation ensured that Abbott was not called to account for the threadbare nature of his vision or the relative paucity of his policy portfolio. At the same time, it was widely accepted that Abbott's unremitting 'attack dog' style had been a major impediment to the electorate warming to him. The public remained cool about him right up to the election even though, as we have seen, he had eclipsed Rudd in the popularity stakes by the campaign's closing stages. A leading pollster noted he was the first federal Opposition Leader in four decades to win office with a net negative approval rating (Hartcher 2013b). Abbott's persistent unpopularity was corroborated by comparing the data on leadership ratings from the 2013 AES (Bean *et al.* 2014) with its predecessors dating back to 1987 (McAllister 2011: 246–50). They indicate that, while marginally more popular than he had been at the 2010 election, Abbott had maintained the dubious mantle as the second worst rated opposition leader over the past quarter of a century behind Peacock in 1990. Moreover, while only three opposition leaders had won office during that period—Howard in 1996, Rudd in 2007 and Abbott in 2013—Abbott was easily the least popular to achieve that feat.

As for Rudd, there was at least some consolation in that the defeat was not as crushing as had been predicted by the final polls. Inevitably, debate ensued about whether his reinstalment had been justified after all. Though inevitably speculative, George Wright (2013) told the National Press Club that the leadership change had averted 'potential losses' of the order of another 25 seats. In that sense, the 'saviour narrative' was not completely extinguished. Yet it had been reduced to a pale version of what it had been in the heady first weeks following Rudd's revival, and there was a predictable riposte from his detractors that Labor's predicament under Gillard would never have become so acute without his relentless campaign of internal subversion. Moreover, at a larger level, there was also a different conclusion to be drawn: that the campaign, and indeed the entire story of the ALP's chequered incumbency since 2007, had exposed the dangers of excessive leader orientation.

The ‘personalisation’ and ‘mediatisation’ of politics

The 2013 campaign was a striking manifestation of two closely related trends: firstly, of parties interpreting their link with the people as largely dependent on ‘the leader’; and secondly, of what is often summarised as ‘mediatised’ politics (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Helms 2012; Boumens *et al.* 2013). It was not only the contingency of Rudd’s last-minute regaining of the prime ministership that sealed the ‘presidential’ character of the campaign. Over recent decades, party practices evolved as economic development eroded their characteristic class and status concerns and the party attachments these had once fostered. As Campus (2010: 224) has argued:

Voters lost the reference points with which they used to orient themselves ... At that point, party and coalition leaders appeared as an anchor, a shortcut to making voting decisions without being obliged to fully understand ... the transformation of the party system.

The leader would set the agenda in responding to citizens’ issue concerns. The media also ‘played an essential role in the transition from a model of political communication based on parties to one based on leaders’ (Campus 2010: 224). There was increasing evidence of a personalisation of politics (Dalton *et al.* 2000), which comprised a convenient marriage with mediatisation—that is, stories about personalities being more integral to the commercial media culture than analysis of policy. Communications professionals capitalising on the media, especially television, would assist the leader in building ‘a virtual personal relationship with the citizenry’ (Campus 2010: 227). The outcome, however, was that ‘political logic’ (the communication of policy objectives) would succumb to ‘media logic’ (the imperatives of the story) and so ‘mediatisation’ is ‘the colonisation of politics by the mass media culture’ (Campus 2010: 228).

Labor’s civil war of 2010–13, depending substantially on Rudd’s command of ‘media logic’ and then feeding into the 2013 election campaign, is essential to the 2013 narrative. Rudd, in the 2007 election campaign, proved a master of mediatised politics. That victory, built on the back of his longer-term resort to ‘mediated visibility’ as a television regular, was a striking instance of the increasing personalisation of politics that Dalton and colleagues (2000) have described. *Kevin07* was not only predominantly about Rudd, demonstrating conclusively that he could command public attention, but also revealed his capacities to build a ‘virtual relationship’ with the voters and to ‘personify’ the Labor brand. Its perplexing culmination was his persisting ability to win positive regard at large, from people who had never met him, while provoking the antipathy of many of those who worked closely with him.

But 'media logic' would be cruel to his government. Rudd's consuming obsession with the media cycle and concern about the way decisions would impact on popularity led to difficult decisions being squibbed. The hard work of turning promising ideas into good policy and planning their implementation was secondary. Government administration was chaotic but he would not relinquish control. Looking outwards rather than towards his colleagues, he failed to see when the tide was turning against him. Julia Gillard, seeing a 'government that had lost its way', rode a party room insurgency to replace him. Yet the leadership repertoire demanded by mediatised politics was something that she could never master. Gillard in turn failed not so much in administration and policy achievement, but in achieving a personal tie with the voters and as communicator-in-chief. Rudd worked relentlessly to destabilise Gillard, yet despite this remained successful in courting the media (with his story of a leader wronged) and in rebuilding his popularity. To that extent, his command of media logic was compelling. And so, as outlined earlier, he was returned to power to rescue the party.

The expectation was that, whatever his shortcomings in government, Rudd would again prove a formidable campaigner. The danger, always, is that such a focus on the leader deflects attention from other players, ensuring that every glitch, every misstep, is sheeted home to the leader alone. There were, as we have seen, plenty of glitches and missteps in his campaign. Furthermore, as the Liberal Party had anticipated, the longer Rudd reoccupied the limelight the more the electorate was reminded of the fragilities of his governing persona and the gloss of popularity rapidly wore off. In order to successfully be seen as the embodiment of the party, leaders have to appear 'authentic', they have to publicly 'demonstrate and persuade citizens that they really are true to themselves and act accordingly, and that their convictions and beliefs are actually reflected in the [party's] policies' (Helms 2012: 658). Was it realistic to expect that Rudd could satisfy this criterion in 2013? Given the denunciation that had been heaped upon him in the successive confrontations with Gillard, only a disciplined, unified and temperate campaign could recapture the 'authenticity' (true to himself and with convictions reflecting those of his party) needed to prevail. Instead, as observed earlier, he was erratic rather than consistent, generating splits between his inner circle and Labor's campaign HQ, issuing 'thought bubbles' that disrupted considered policy, and confusing celebrity (as he was mobbed on the 'meet-and-greet' trail) with authority at the expense of gravitas. He and his team may have tried to build the 'story' of the 'Rudd rebellion' against the perverse politics of the previous six years (see Hawker 2013), but in responding to the imperatives of this specious narrative they revealed the costs of sacrificing political logic. The boom and bust pattern of voter estimates of Rudd suggested by AES data (Bean *et al.* 2014; McAllister 2011: 249)—between 2007 and 2013 he went from the most popular leader in

the quarter of a century of AES surveys to being the lowest rated prime minister at an election—gives dramatic expression to the inherent vulnerability of the personalising leader.

Abbott's story presents in many ways as a sharp contrast. Though the Liberal Party's rapid leadership transitions in opposition during 2007–09 (Brendan Nelson to Turnbull to Abbott) suggest a search for a 'leader solution', the resort to what many wrote off as the 'unelectable' Abbott appeared to defy 'media logic'. What is more, Abbott proceeded not to court popularity but instead to practise a form of intransigent opposition such as we have rarely seen. He held on to the leadership despite nagging doubts that his unpopularity was a millstone around his party's electoral aspirations.

Nevertheless, the Coalition's 2013 campaign was as heavily leader-focused as Labor's, and in that sense catered to the implicit proposition that it matters more which person gets into power than which party (see Boumans *et al.* 2013: 203). It featured contrived events calculated to emphasise Abbott's centrality and authority, albeit with a greater appearance of synchronisation between his beliefs and convictions and those of his party than Rudd was able to manage. Abbott also followed a staple of the mediatised mode—private lives as a resource to be exploited in constructing political identity (Campus 2010: 223)—with carefully staged revelations of his domestic life, especially his relationships with his wife and daughters, designed to humanise the 'hard' image his aggressive opposition stance had encouraged. While stressing his team, the extent to which the story was Abbott himself ensured they were rarely noticed, risking (like Rudd) the danger that failure would be seen as his alone. The professionalism of the Liberal campaign and his apparent willingness to be closely managed averted this risk, but does it remain a live possibility for Abbott now that he is in government?

It is the Labor debacle, however, that in the final analysis provides the most compelling leadership story of the 2013 election. In particular, Rudd's rollercoaster trajectory illuminates graphically the principal problem with the personalisation integral to mediatised politics: it is inherently more volatile than were the patterns of the past. Party affiliation, once closely tied to social identity, used to be relatively stable. Now that identity effects have diminished and the leader's personality figures alongside the party in determining allegiance, it should be recognised that fidelity to personality oscillates more rapidly and with greater amplitude when a leader's all too human failings become apparent (Blondel and Thiebault 2009: 58). Backlash against the leader is an ever present danger. Labor's failure to appreciate this, and its inability to contain and control its leaders' idiosyncrasies except through dramatic and catastrophic depositions, provides a cautionary tale about the reliance on 'leader effects' and the danger of capitulating to media logic. As the ALP went about finding a successor to Rudd

following its election loss, Bill Shorten, the successful candidate, suggested that his party had heeded that lesson: 'If I am elected leader,' he vowed, 'you will hear less about I and more about we. The era of the messiah is over' (*The Australian* 2013). Time will tell if that is true.

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