Electoral Stasis

Electoral stasis occurs when an electorate can not realistically change its political composition regardless of the swing occurring in a general election.

In a Hare Clark proportional representation ballot, electoral stasis is the equivalent of a safe seat.

The following table demonstrates the swing required for a party holding 55% of the two party preferred vote in a multi member electorate, to either win or lose another seat.

Electorate	Holds	Swing to win	Swing to lose
2 Members	1	11.66%	21.67%
3 Members	2	20.00%	5.00%
5 Members	3	11.67%	5.00%
7 Members	4	7.25%	5.00%
8 Members	4	0.56%	10.56%
9 Members	5	5.00%	5.00%
10 Members	6	8.64%	0.46%
11 Members	6	3.33%	5.00%
12 Members	7	6.54%	1.16%
13 Members	7	2.14%	5.00%
14 Members	8	5.00%	1.67%
15 Members	8	1.25%	5.00%

Party strategists using these figures would quickly determine whether to give an electorate any priority in campaign time or money.

As the number of members to be elected increases, the likelihood that an electorate can be ignored decreases.

Two Member Electorates

The Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory are each represented in the Australian Senate by two Senators elected by proportional representation. The Proportional Representation Society of Australia (PRSA) recommends that their two House of Representative Members should be elected in the same manner. A quota for election is 33.34%.

Since 1975 at every Territorial Senate election, in both jurisdictions, the result has been one Labor senator and one Coalition senator returned.

A couple of attempts have been made to break this duopoly. At the first election in 1975, John Gorton, a former Prime Minister, ran as an Independent but only received 11.0% of the vote. He was comprehensively beaten by both he Liberal (45%) and Labor Party (35%) candidates.

At the 2007 Federal election the Greens thought they had a chance. However both the Labor and Liberal candidates received a quota in their own right and the count was completed on first preferences. The Greens at 21.47% were well short of a quota.

The following tables give the results of the election using House of Representatives figures and not Senate figures. In a ballot where the Government is at stake, voters are less likely to vote tactically.

Australian Capital Territory

Party	Vote	%	Quota
ALP	114244	51.1	1.53
Liberal	74295	33.2	0.99
Greens	29424	13.2	0.39
Democrats	2509	1.1	0.03
Socialist Alliance	539	0.2	0.01
CEC	1295	0.6	0.02
Taranto (Fraser)	1275	0.6	0.02

Quota 33.34%

The result is a clear win for Labor but the Liberals are still elected to the second seat, probably from the Labor Party's surplus. Labor is more likely to win two seats than the Greens are to win one. The author considers this electorate to be in electoral stasis.

Northern Territory

Party	Vote	%	Quota
ALP	46794	47.6	1.43
Country Liberal	40298	41.0	1.23
Greens	7903	8.0	0.24
LDP	358	0.4	0.01
CEC	245	0.2	0.01
Wright (Lingiari)	864	0.9	0.03
Ryan (Lingiari)	1206	1.2	0.04
Foley (Solomon)	545	0.6	0.02

Quota 33.34%

The result is, and always will be, Labor 1; Country Liberal 1

This electorate is in electoral stasis.

Three, Five, Seven and Nine Member Electorates

Electoral stasis can also occur in three, five, seven and even nine member electorates. The more members elected, however, the less likely it is to occur.

The following examples are of electorates that are in electoral stasis and can, under normal circumstances, be ignored by the parties. These examples drawn from the 2007 Federal election are of groupings of electorates recommended by the PRSA in their own proportional representation analyses of election results, but any grouping of three to seven electorates would provide similar examples.

Example 1.

The three member South Australian electorate of Barker, Kingston and Mayo gives the following result:

Party	Vote	%	Quota
ALP	98644	35.9	1.43
Liberal	126183	45.9	1.84
Nationals	9695	3.5	0.14
Greens	19777	7.2	0.29
Family First	14202	5.2	0.21
Democrats	4212	1.5	0.06
LDP	273	0.1	0.00
Conservatives for Climate	1165	0.4	0.02
Becker (Kingston)	505	0.2	0.01
Kusznir (Kingston)	380	0.1	0.01

Quota 25.00%

Clearly Labor's vote will not drop below 25% nor will it reach 50%. The result is and always will be ALP 1; Liberal 2

This electorate is in electoral stasis.

Example 2.

The five member NSW country electorate of Farrer, Calare, Riverina, Hume and Parkes gives the following result:

Party	Vote	%	Quota
ALP	125779	30.0	1.80
Liberal	91138	21.7	1.30
National	131294	31.3	1.88
Greens	19560	4.7	0.28
Family First	4615	1.1	0.07
CEC	2990	0.7	0.04
Conservatives for Climate	1088	0.3	0.02
CDP (Fred Nile)	2010	0.5	0.03
One Nation	1837	0.4	0.03
Climate Change Coalition	939	0.2	0.01
Priestley (Calare)	19035	4.5	0.27
Horan (Parkes)	17098	4.1	0.24
Haigh (Parkes)	2153	0.5	0.03

Quota 16.67%

The result would be ALP 2; National 2; Liberal 1

The high Independent vote (probably former Andren voters) and the Greens' vote will flow to Labor guaranteeing it two seats. Labor will never increase its vote to 50%, even after preferences, to enable it to win three seats.

This electorate is in electoral stasis.

Example 3.

The five member Queensland country electorate ofMaranoa, Flynn, Hinkler, Wide Bay and Groom gives the following result:

Party	Vote	%	Quota
ALP	148199	36.6	2.19
Liberal	55730	13.7	0.82
Nationals	150571	37.1	2.23
Greens	18249	4.5	0.27
Family First	14023	3.5	0.21
CEC	263	0.1	0.00
Democrats	3498	0.9	0.05
LDP	196	0.0	0.00
One Nation	3770	0.9	0.06
Costello (Flynn)	761	0.2	0.01
Scott (Flynn)	807	0.2	0.01
Wells (Hinkler)	1887	0.5	0.03
Molloy (Wide Bay)	5576	1.4	0.08
Volker (Groom)	616	0.2	0.01
Berry (Groom)	715	0.2	0.01
Jeanneret (Groom)	497	0.1	0.01

Quota 16.67%

Result ALP 2; National 2; Liberal 1.

Labor, because of the large Green vote, will never drop below two quotas and will never reach three quotas.

This electorate is in electoral stasis.

Example 4

The five member Western Australian country electorate of Kalgoorlie, O'Connor, Forrest, Pearce, and Canning gives the following result:

Party	Vote	%	Quota
ALP	126887	31.9	1.91
Liberal	191882	48.2	2.89
Greens	30056	7.6	0.45
Family First	5312	1.3	0.08
Nationals	13459	3.4	0.20
LDP	176	0.0	0.00
One Nation WA	5856	1.5	0.09
CDP	8950	2.2	0.13
CEC	1167	0.3	0.02
Socialist Alliance	316	0.1	0.00
Brunning (Forrest)	9924	2.5	0.15
Walton (O'Connor)	1128	0.3	0.02
Giudice (O'Connor)	986	0.2	0.01
Crowe (O'Connor)	237	0.1	0.00
Branwhite (Pearce)	1533	0.4	0.02

Quota 16.67%

Result ALP 2; Liberal 3

Labor, with Greens support, will always win two seats. Liberals, with National support, will always win three seats.

This electorate is in electoral stasis.

Example 5.

The <u>seven member</u> South East Queensland electorate of Ryan, Morton, Bonner, Griffith, Brisbane, Petrie and Lilley gives the following result:

Party	Vote	%	Quota
ALP	273029	47.0	3.76
Liberal	240963	41.4	3.32
Greens	43497	7.5	0.60
Family First	8574	1.5	0.12
CEC	227	0.0	0.00
Democrats	6973	1.2	0.10
Socialist Alliance	859	0.1	0.01
LDP	1503	0.3	0.02
Fishing	1010	0.2	0.01
CDP (Fred Nile)	430	0.1	0.01
Worringham (Ryan)	1328	0.2	0.02
Lamb (Moreton)	679	0.1	0.01
Howard (Griffith)	2264	0.4	0.03

Quota 12.50%

Result ALP 4; Liberal 3

The Liberal Party with 3.32 quotas is unlikely to drop below two quotas or reach four quotas.

This electorate is in electoral stasis.

Example 6.

The <u>seven member</u> Victorian electorate of Gippsland, Indi, McMillan, Flinders, Casey, La Trobe, and McEwen gives the following result:

Party	Vote	%	Quota
ALP	223449	36.8	2.94
Liberal	260347	42.9	3.43
National	42632	7.0	0.56
Greens	45695	7.5	0.60
Family First	19714	3.2	0.26
CEC	942	0.2	0.01
Democrats	6968	1.1	0.09
D.L.P.	775	0.1	0.01
LDP	1025	0.2	0.01
What Women Want	1825	0.3	0.02
CDP (Fred Nile)	533	0.1	0.01
Buckley (Gippsland)	2787	0.5	0.04
Trueman (McEwen)	849	0.1	0.01

Quota 12.50%

Result ALP 3; Liberal 4

Labor, with Greens support, will always win three seats. Liberals, with National support, will always win four seats.

This electorate is in electoral stasis.

Example 7.

The <u>nine member</u> Southern Sydney electorate of Sydney, Grayndler, Wentworth, Kingsford Smith, Barton, Watson, Banks, Blaxland and Lowe gives the following result:

Party	Vote	%	Quota
ALP	383012	52.0	5.20
Liberal	238083	32.3	3.23
Greens	82204	11.2	1.12
Family First	3449	0.5	0.05
CEC	1692	0.2	0.02
Democrats	3003	0.4	0.04
LDP	621	0.1	0.01
CDP (Fred Nile)	14592	2.0	0.20
Socialist Equality Party	1425	0.2	0.02
Socialist Alliance	1915	0.3	0.03
One Nation	1202	0.2	0.02
Climate Change Coalition	1156	0.2	0.02
Poulsen (Watson)	424	0.1	0.01
Ecuyer (Wentworth)	774	0.1	0.01
Sheil (Wentworth)	265	0.0	0.00
Stavrinos (Blaxland)	1535	0.2	0.02
Ward (Sydney)	979	0.1	0.01

Quota 10.00%

Result ALP 5; Liberal 3; Greens 1

Each party wins their quota entitlement.

This electorate is in electoral stasis.

<u>Half Electoral Stasis</u>

The <u>five member</u> Northern NSW electorate of New England, Richmond, Page, Cowper and Lyne gives the following result:

Party	Vote	%	Quota
ALP	137337	33.0	1.98
National	167560	40.3	2.42
Windsor (New England)	52734	12.7	0.76
Greens	36998	8.9	0.53
CEC	728	0.2	0.01
Democrats	1860	0.4	0.03
CDP (Fred Nile)	6576	1.6	0.09
LDP	2273	0.5	0.03
One Nation	1071	0.3	0.02
Family First	1543	0.4	0.02
Behn (Page)	1525	0.4	0.02
Kane (Page)	877	0.2	0.01
Wright (Lyne)	979	0.2	0.01
Scott-Irving (Lyne)	330	0.1	0.00
Harrison (Lyne)	3326	0.8	0.05
Riach (Lyne)	238	0.1	0.00

Quota 16.67%

Labor has no interest in campaigning heavily in this electorate as it can not improve on its two seats. The only interest is whether the Independent Tony Windsor holds his seat or the Nationals win three seats.

The Labor Party would consider this seat to be in electoral stasis. The National Party campaign would concentrate on potential Independent voters and not on Labor voters.

Note: The Robson rotation gives some interesting complications in this electorate. These will be examined in a future article.

Conclusion

On this count at least nine different electorates, in the PRSA model, electing 45 members are in electoral stasis. Party strategists do not need to consider these forty five seats when formulating their plans. These electorates account for 30% of the Australian population and include most of regional Australia, making capital city voters the focus of the election campaign for Labor, Liberal and the Greens.

As a comparison, after the 2007 Federal election the Australian Electoral Commission considered 52 seats (34.6%) to be safe for the party holding them.

Whilst the results of a Hare Clark election conducted with electorates ranging in size from two to nine members would ensure that the major parties would be accurately represented in the Parliament (although the Greens would be under-represented), it would fail to ensure that all voters were equally involved in the outcome of the election. Parties would still be able to target specific electorates and regions and the advantage of living in a marginal electorate would remain.

One of the objectives of a proportional representation system is to avoid safe seats and maximise the chance that a voter who changes his or her vote can influence the outcome of the election. Electorates in electoral stasis undermine this objective. Furthermore, to ensure that their "favourite son(s)" did not lose, the major parties would either only run the number expected to win or make the ticket up with an obviously unsuitable candidate.

The smaller the number to be elected from an electorate, the more likely that the electorate will be in electoral stasis.

To avoid electorates being in electoral stasis, electorates need to be as large as practicable. Each electorate should include capital city and country voters to avoid country areas being ignored.

In the Lesslie model (www.lesslie.com.au), no electorate is in electoral stasis.

Stephen Lesslie
29 April 2008