

Federal election 2016: Shock poll result for Kelly O'Dwyer. Is Higgins the 'Indi of 2016'?

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Assistant Treasurer Kelly O'Dwyer is under siege from Greens candidate Jason Ball in the once-safe Liberal seat of Higgins, with the latest poll revealing her primary vote has collapsed to just 44.1 per cent.

As a direct result of the positive poll, the Greens will transfer volunteers and resources from other Melbourne seats in order to target Higgins.

One senior Victorian Liberal told Fairfax Media there were real fears Higgins could be "the Indi of 2016", a reference to Sophie Mirabella's shock loss of the safe Liberal seat of Indi to independent Cathy McGowan at the 2013 federal election.

Greens candidate Jason Ball is second in Higgins, with 24.1 per cent of the primary vote, while ALP candidate Carl Katter lags a distant third with 18.5 per cent. If the polling - commissioned by the Greens - proves accurate, such a result would take Higgins to an unlikely preference count for the first time since it was created in 1949.

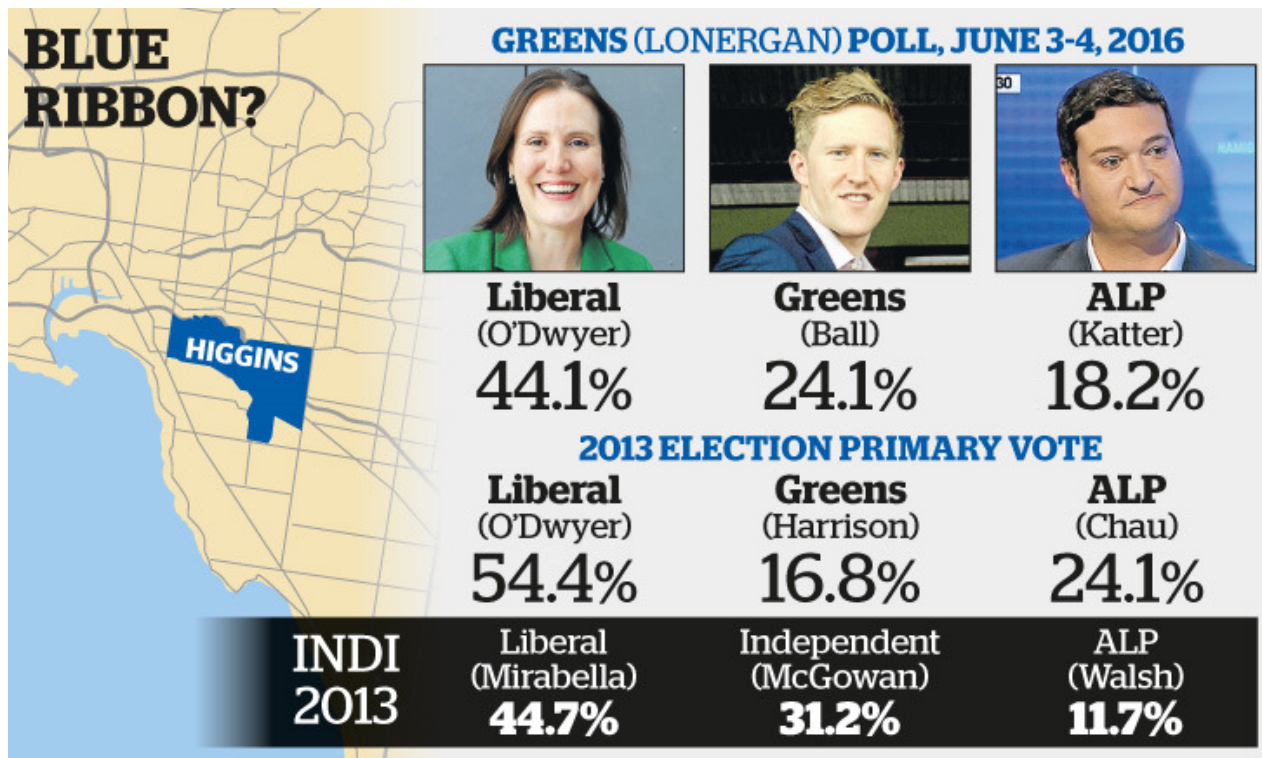
"The Greens will be putting extra resources into the Higgins campaign," said Larissa Brown, state director of the Victorian Greens. "We will increase our door-knocking and phone calls to voters, and the increased likelihood of winning has attracted volunteers from outside the seat."

Mr Ball needs a swing of 9.9 per cent to win the seat and preferences to flow the Greens' way. The ALP, along with a number of independent candidates, have already pledged their preferences to the Greens.

According to the poll, Ms O'Dwyer has a lower primary vote count (44.1 per cent) than the 44.7 per cent Ms Mirabella recorded in Indi in 2013. The Liberals ended up losing Indi by just 439 votes after preferences, with a swing against them of 10.2 per cent.

The Lonergan Research poll of more than 1100 registered voters in the seat of Higgins was conducted on June 3-4. On a two-party preferred basis, it still shows the Liberal Party leading the Greens 53-47. "We have turned a safe Liberal seat into a marginal seat," Mr Ball said.

The poll was conducted three weeks after Ms O'Dwyer made national headlines with her gaffe about a "\$6000 toaster" while appearing on the ABC's *Q&A* program.



Since then, the union movement has launched a campaign to undermine Ms O'Dwyer over planned changes to superannuation rules. Thousands of voters in Higgins have received a pre-recorded "robocall" message to their private telephone numbers. "Your local member, Kelly O'Dwyer, is Assistant Treasurer and minister responsible for superannuation," it states. "So this election you have a unique opportunity to send a message to the government that these changes, which will directly impact you, are just not on. On July 2nd, I urge you to put the Liberals last. After all, that's where they are putting you."

A senior Liberal told Fairfax Media they believed the party's superannuation policies were proving unpopular with traditional Liberal voters. "Kelly is the architect of those changes, so she would be feeling the backlash," Fairfax Media was told. "I still don't believe we will lose [the seat], but the fear is Higgins could be the Indi of 2016."

Election 2016

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Our election pendulum looks at how seats would fall according to a uniform swing, with seats adjusted for electoral redistributions.

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Like Ms McGowan in Indi, Mr Ball is relying on a strong grassroots campaign. Greens volunteers have spent nights queueing up for nightclubs along Chapel Street in the lead-up to the campaign, to ensure young voters were registered.

"This shows that our grassroots campaign has had a real impact in turning the seat of Higgins from blue to green," Mr Ball said. "Our team has hundreds of volunteers who have knocked almost 9000 doors in an electorate that's never had a politician take the time to listen to the issues that matter to them."

Mr Ball also noted that Malcolm Turnbull campaigned in Higgins last week. "You don't see the Prime Minister parachuted into 'safe' seats during elections unless they're under threat," Mr Ball said. "The Liberals know we're in with a real chance and they're running scared."

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