

The Gillard Governments



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Preface

Julia Gillard assumed the prime ministership on 24 June 2010, when she was elected leader of the Australian Labor Party. As the twenty-seventh prime minister, and Australia's first female prime minister, Gillard's election was cause for celebration in many quarters. With a boost in the polls, she immediately sought a mandate for her government and called an election for 21 August 2010. It was at this stage, however, that the Labor government began the electoral slide that culminated in the loss of office in September 2013. During those three years, Australia narrowly endorsed a Gillard minority government that was held together with support from a number of independents and crossbench members of parliament. The Gillard government ended its term almost exactly three years after it was installed, when Kevin Rudd won back the leadership of the Labor Party and with it, his second prime ministership.

In the intervening years we saw a prime minister under attack as never before: a combination of a hostile media, a relentless Opposition, fragile coalitions with the cross-benches, white-anting from within the Labor Party and an unprecedented assault on the Prime Minister herself, in large part due to her gender. It was, therefore, remarkable that the minority government was able to oversee an impressive legislative program, including a number of policies that sought to address long-term policy issues.

This volume traces the two Gillard governments from 2010 to 2013, viewing the period through the lenses of a group of experts in their fields of study. The volume is the eleventh in a series that has chronicled the events of all federal governments since 1983, each produced through the University of Canberra and its predecessor Canberra College of Advanced Education.

The book is divided into four sections: the first section includes two chapters that provide an overview of the period and then trace the drama and tension involved as Australia waited for the independents to decide which of the two main parties would hold a minority government.

The second section deals with the institutions of government—parliament, the public sector and the public service—and assesses the extent to which these were influenced by the political turmoil that surrounded them. The section also includes a chapter on the independents

and the impact they had on those institutions and on major policies and legislation enacted by the two Gillard governments.

The third section deals with those policies that marked Julia Gillard's three years as prime minister. The selection of key policy areas that characterise any period of government is always a difficult task, given that their saliency typically waxes and wanes throughout the period. We narrowed the choices to those matters that were kept in the public eye throughout the period and generated the key debates: asylum seekers and border protection, education, the economy, regional policy, climate change and foreign policy. This section also includes a chapter that assesses overall policy success, asking the question, what were the policy and program successes of the Gillard government? While these policy issues were examined in the context of the big, national picture, we have also included a study of a single electorate (Eden-Monaro) during the lead up to the 2013 election. We were interested to see if national policies, or local issues, would dominate the campaign at electorate level, and act as a litmus test for the nation—in this case, they did!

The final section of the book focuses on Prime Minister Julia Gillard, her leadership and her often tenuous relationship with the media.

Since the book was initiated in the third year of the Gillard period, the contributing authors have had to make frequent adjustments to their contributions and to their line of argument to capture the turbulence of the period—two prime ministers ousted by a party vote, a minority government, a series of scandals and disasters and a relentless Opposition. I am, therefore, grateful for the authors' flexibility and resilience and also for their capacity to deliver a manuscript so soon after the election result. My sincere thanks go to them as well as to those who provided data to support their research, in particular to the two independent members of the parliament who twice made themselves available for interview, the four main candidates for Eden-Monaro and the voters in that seat who participated in a series of online discussions throughout the campaign. It has been a genuine pleasure for me to work with colleagues in producing this eleventh book in the 'Commonwealth Administration Series'.

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December 2013

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PART 1 Introduction

A Narrative, a Narrative, My Kingdom for a Narrative!

Chris Aulich

Modern Australian politics is unquestionably volatile. The period since Labor assumed government in December 2007 has, however, proved to be one of the most turbulent in modern times, perhaps surprisingly, as it was a period during which the Australian economy achieved growth and proved resilient in the face of the global financial crisis. This chapter identifies the key elements of Julia Gillard's prime ministership during her three years as prime minister and the two governments she led and provides a framework to, and introduction of, the chapters that follow in this book.

Julia Gillard was elected as party leader in June 2010, replacing Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, who had suffered a serious decline in the polls and about whom many of his closest cabinet colleagues had expressed serious concerns. Chaotic management, constantly changing priorities and accusations of having a 'tin ear' were just some of the criticisms made against Rudd to support the decision to elect Gillard as party leader and prime minister.

Any celebration of the appointment of Australia's 27th prime minister was, however, short lived. Seeking legitimacy for her government, Gillard called an election for August 2010, at which point Labor held a healthy margin in the polls. From that time onwards, however, her standing as prime minister began to fall and, despite the efforts of her and her party, continued on a downward curve through the ensuing three years. Many factors have been discussed as possible causes of her failure to gain traction with the electorate: some have criticised the media for embarking on a relentless campaign of denigration of Gillard and her government; others have argued that her appointment unleashed a basic misogyny among many Australians; some point to ineffective leadership and a failure to generate a vision sufficiently powerful to capture the population. It has also been argued that Tony Abbott performed extraordinarily well as Leader of the Opposition and kept Gillard on the defensive throughout the period. Finally, some point to the persistent undermining of her government from within, and note that this was a critical issue in Gillard failing to secure a majority government in the 2010 election after a series of leaks to the media that were aimed at damaging Gillard personally.

Significantly, the period also brought the ALP more generally into the spotlight for the wrong reasons. The selection of Peter Slipper as Speaker in the House of Representatives was initially applauded as a great tactic to protect the minority government, but the decision soon embarrassed Labor when Slipper was forced to stand down after allegations of sexual harassment were made against him by one of his staff. Similarly, Gillard was criticised for not taking action against Labor member Craig Thomson, though she had for some time reserved her judgement about Thomson's behaviour on the basis of 'innocent until proven guilty'. At the same time, several ministers in the former NSW Labor government had serious allegations made against them in the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption. It is likely that all these cases cast serious concerns about trust and ethics in relation to the Australian Labor Party.

Finally, some have argued that the minority government was itself a cause of the instability, especially as it followed such a long period of stable majority government, at least in the House of Representatives. Each of these factors deserves some consideration here, and each is elaborated both in this chapter and later in the book.

Duelling narratives

Broadly, the line of argument followed in this chapter is that the period was characterised by a contest between different, and ultimately unconvincing, narratives of change. Abbott's narrative focused on a return to an earlier period of stability that had occurred under Prime Minister Howard. Labor's narrative focused on a belief that Howard had neglected investment in infrastructure, so Labor's key policy thrusts were to make up this infrastructure deficit, as well as embarking on a period of reform in key social policy areas, such as health and education. Labor approached its task of reform by: introducing the National Broadband Network (NBN); enhancing funding for schools as one mechanism to stimulate Australia's labour markets, as well as inject greater equity into school funding; introducing the National Disability Insurance Scheme; instigating and assisting Australian industry to replace its reliance on a carbon-base with climate mitigation as a centrepiece. However, this series of programs and policies was rarely connected to form a coherent narrative or story to convince the electorate that Labor had what Gillard herself called: 'the power of purpose' (Gillard 2013). However, any purpose that had been created during her watch was further diluted during the lead up to the 2013 election, as Rudd rarely mentioned, let alone gave credit for, her achievements during the period under review. Unsurprisingly, Gillard commented after the 2013 election that Labor was returning: 'to opposition having sent the Australian community a very cynical and shallow message about its sense of purpose' (Gillard 2013).

Abbott has frequently been accused of negativity, though an alternative explanation is that this was a seminal part of his narrative to return Australia to some earlier golden period, perhaps not to the Menzies era that had so appealed to Abbott's predecessor, John Howard, but nevertheless to some stable, predictable and less complicated earlier period. To cement this narrative, he opposed most of the initiatives for change proposed by Labor and maintained a constant mantra that portrayed Labor as incompetent and unstable. His promise to return to this imagined 'golden era' was well captured by Pope in the cartoon that accompanies this chapter (see Figure 1.1).

Abbott's approach to much of the Labor reform agenda was to oppose it, as typically expected in his role as Opposition Leader. However, this proved to be such an addictive and successful strategy

for him and the Coalition parties that it probably limited the effectiveness of another key opposition task: to present a clear view of an alternative, credible government. Significantly, even while the polls leading up to Gillard's sacking indicated a likely Coalition victory, Abbott still struggled, according to those same polls, to gain traction as an alternative prime minister.

What was clear is that neither leader proved able to articulate her/his narrative convincingly, with Abbott labelled as 'relentlessly negative' and Gillard seen as 'incompetent, untrustworthy and dissembling', particularly in relation to her policy on the carbon tax, which she introduced in 2011 after declaring before the 2010 election that she would not do so.

Former prime minister Paul Keating attributed these failings to the absence of a coherent or compelling narrative by either leader. In an interview in 2011, he commented that:

It's a matter of knitting the story together. You know, seeing all of these things like carbon abatement, the mining tax not just shooting stars, but part of an engaging, overall, compelling story. But I think there is nothing—there is no substitute for a compelling story of the country, of its future (ABC 2011).

FIGURE 1.1



Source: *Sunday Canberra Times*, 8 September 2013.

At heart of the construction and marketing of a narrative is leadership. Mark Evans and Brendan McCaffrie discuss ideas of leadership more fully in Chapter 16 of this volume, taken from a statecraft perspective. They identify two Julias in leadership terms: 'Julia' the effective negotiator; and 'Ju-liar' with an inability to win the war of ideas in the public forums. This reinforces the notion of Gillard as a prime minister with the deft negotiation skills needed to keep a minority government alive, but one who lost the struggle to articulate government actions as success stories; in other words, a failure to establish a credible narrative.

It was likely that other dimensions of leadership, typically associated with notions of transformational leadership, proved to be Gillard's weakness. One of the strong criticisms levelled at the Rudd government was its failure to make political capital from its obvious successes (Aulich 2010); such a criticism was often also made about Gillard. Several commentators (cited in Ireland 2013) make the following points: 'we have a popular perception things are tough ... which is really puzzling' given the positioning of the economy in relation to comparable economies; 'the government is ticking a lot of the traditional boxes but is struggling to communicate its successes to the voters.'

These comments are echoed by many other commentators and reflect on two issues of Gillard's leadership. First, she was unable to market the successes and to develop them into a coherent narrative that was both understood and accepted by Australians—the 'vision' thing. Second, these comments may also reflect a weakness in understanding basic principles of change management, perhaps best exemplified by the failure of Gillard's media reform legislation (this is covered in some detail by Sally Young and Matthew Ricketson in Chapter 15). Despite the fact that the reforms were two years in the making, they were rushed through cabinet and presented to the public just one week before the vote in Parliament. At no stage did the government explain the justification for the reforms, or the need for such urgency. It was hardly surprising, then, that the media itself managed to orchestrate a successful campaign to easily head off the government's proposals.

The notion of a 'hung Parliament' has been demonised by many, including *The Australian* and Opposition Leader Abbott, the latter declaring that he would not accept any arrangements with others to form a government after the 2013 elections. However, it must be

remembered that minority governments are common at state level in Australia and typical of many Parliaments in 'minoritarian' democracies (see Lane 2004). In addition, apart from a few years under Howard, there have been few governments operating with majorities in both houses. It has been argued that minority government is more likely to be short-lived and ineffectual (Kalitowski 2008) but the Gillard government proved robust and, despite enormous pressure from the Opposition, sustained the relationships that ensured that the minority government ran its full term in office. Much of the success for this can be attributed to the transactional leadership skills of Julia Gillard.

Rob Oakeshott's comments about transactional leadership (on page 9) may offer some insights into how leadership *really* operates in Parliaments where there are no majority parties in the lower house and no party is able to secure a majority through both houses: the kind of leadership that values negotiation has been necessary for the successful implementation of government agendas, irrespective of the political party in power. It is testimony to Gillard's leadership in this negotiating environment that so much legislation was passed through both houses of Parliament, a view supported by a number of authors in this book.

However, it is the transformational or inspirational aspect of leadership that appears to best serve a leader with a more radical change agenda. In a sense, Australians have become used to this form of leadership as the public face of government, notwithstanding Oakeshott's comment about the reality of leadership in Parliament. In addition, it is more typical of the way that male leadership is perceived. As Piterman (2013) argues: 'it is hard to shift old-aged paradigms that align leadership with masculinity in the minds of both men and women'. Gillard represented a change from this traditional notion that leaders operate more in the stereotypical masculine role adopted by both Rudd and Abbott, and this contributed to the often-sexist responses to her prime ministership (see Chapter 15 for a detailed discussion of gender and the media during Gillard's term in office).

The question of competence must also be raised here. A number of critics have suggested that the period under review has been characterised by a series of poor judgements and weak policy development, the blame for which has to be accepted by Gillard. Of course the Opposition have underlined and exaggerated this point. In Parliament,

Abbott said of the Gillard government: 'I used to think it was the worst government since Whitlam, but that is very unfair to Gough Whitlam ... This has been a government that has been monumentally incompetent' (Abbott 2013). Former ally, independent Andrew Wilkie, commented that 'fairly regularly [the Prime Minister] makes a bad call' and cites, as his evidence, the mining tax which has earned little or no revenues, the appointment of Peter Slipper as Speaker of the House of Representatives and the failure to cut Craig Thomson loose until Labor had been seriously wounded (Ireland 2013).

The various shifts in asylum-seeker policy (outlined in Chapter 7) and lack of clear purpose in climate change policies (see Chapter 11) add to the questions of Gillard's leadership capacity. The promises that the economy would be in surplus damaged the credibility of the government and confirmed for many voters that Labor's economic management credentials were weak (see Chapter 9 for elaboration of economic management under Gillard and Chapters 14 and 16 for further discussion of Gillard's leadership in relation to the economy). It was, therefore, unsurprising that the management of the economy was a critical election issue during the 2013 campaign and, likely, a major factor in Labor's loss of government.

Forming a minority government

With no clear majority from the 2010 election, each of the two major parties courted the independents and the Greens seeking their support for a minority government. The drama involved in this 17-day courtship are well recounted as a personal journey by Robin Tennant-Wood in Chapter 2 of this volume. It was ultimately the issue of who would best lead a minority government that encouraged the independents to support the Gillard government. As independent Rob Oakeshott acknowledged, in an interview after the 43rd Parliament rose:

Compromise and negotiation in politics is a strength not a weakness. That was actually, in many ways, the judgement call on Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott in 2010. That moment in time needed transactional leadership and my judgement call was that she was a better transactional leader than he was (Oakeshott 2013a).

Oakeshott went on to say, however, that neither Abbott nor Gillard would accept the transactional leader label as it is typically seen by those in the 'bear-pit' of the Parliament as not sending a sufficient message of strength. At the same time, Julia Gillard had built a strong reputation as a great negotiator throughout her legal and political careers. These were skills which she clearly demonstrated during those 17 days and, subsequently, in both managing the survival of the minority government and negotiating a significant amount of legislation through a Parliament in which Labor did not enjoy a majority in either house.

The role played by the independents in Gillard's second government is outlined by Brenton Prosser and John Warhurst in Chapter 4 of this volume; based in part on direct interviews with two of the independents. They ask the question: did the independents having the balance of power in the House of Representatives actually make a difference? The authors note that: 'perceptions of the impact of the independents on the 43rd Parliament have suffered from being framed by the highest ... of their aspirations'. Judged against these lofty ideals, Prosser and Warhurst conclude that the 'experiment' largely failed and it is likely that the independents' legacy will be erased by future majority governments.

The institutions of government

In the second section of this book, we deal with matters relating to the institutions of government: Parliament; the public service; and the public sector. These chapters broadly demonstrate that, amidst the fears that a minority government would generate shambolic institutions of government, this was not borne out in reality. Rather, Gwynneth Singleton, Roger Wettenhall, Bill Burmester and John Halligan write of a period characterised by 'business as usual'; a period of both consolidation and incremental change in the institutions of government.

In Chapter 3, Singleton outlines the legislative program that was as successful as that undertaken by any government in recent times. With 561 bills receiving Royal Assent, including significant policy innovations such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and the Gonski school funding reforms, it represents an endorsement of Gillard's negotiating capacity with both the independents in the

House of Representatives, and the Greens in both Houses. In Marsh and Lewis' terms (outlined in Chapter 14), it represented a significant policy success, at least from a 'process' perspective.

In Chapter 5, Wettenhall maps changes to the public sector. Despite the effect of political turmoil in necessitating numerous reconfigurations of the departments and agencies of state, he finds that the period was one of incremental change and rebalancing, little different from previous periods. He argues that all polities need reasonably strong central government machinery and soon discover that they also need a fairly extensive apparatus of away-from-the-centre entities to make the working of the governance system reasonably smooth, efficient and consumer-friendly. Balancing the two needs in an appropriate way is one of the major machinery-of-government challenges.

Burmester and Halligan provide a similar message in Chapter 6. The authors discuss the 'pronounced and profound problems with leadership style, and ... the rancorous politics of the centre' and argue that the collateral damage for the public service and the conduct of the nation's business was a defining feature of the period. However, despite the relatively unsettled period, the authors point to a substantial and impressive list of new policies that were developed in the public service and released by government. They also note that the reforms to the public service itself, outlined through the Moran Report, continued despite a prime minister with less interest in public service reform, in comparison to some of her predecessors.

Major policies of the Gillard period

The third section in this volume focuses on the major policy initiatives generated by the Gillard government. In Chapter 14, David Marsh and Chris Lewis consider these initiatives and ask the question of whether or not they could be deemed 'successful'. Using a heuristic developed by Marsh and McConnell (2010), the authors examine the major policies through a lens designed to assess success in three dimensions: process (has the policy received the support necessary to successfully be introduced?); programmatic (did the policy meet its goals and objectives?); and political (does it assist the government's reputation and electoral prospects?). Through this approach, the authors conclude that the Gillard government was successful in negotiating

policy through the Parliament (process success), adding support to Singleton's contention (Chapter 3) that the Gillard government managed to implement an extensive legislative program. They, like Marsh and Lewis, question the programmatic success of the government in the economic field, and are equally sceptical about the successes of the carbon tax and the mining tax. However, the authors are cautious about assessing programmatic success overall, given that so many of the policies that were legislated require longer periods to effectively gauge success, for example the NDIS and the school funding reforms. Marsh and Lewis conclude their assessment of Gillard's policy program by arguing that political success evaded the government, especially in relation to the management of the economy, the carbon and mining taxes and several arenas of social policy. That Labor was unable to gain electoral traction on the policies that they implemented is a clear indicator of political failure.

The issue of economic management is elaborated by Anne Garnett and Phil Lewis in Chapter 9. Garnett and Lewis conclude that, rather than eliminating budget deficits as repeatedly promised, deficits continued and net debt more than doubled during the period, something only expected during a time of significant economic downturn or recession. The continued drain of stimulus programs from the Rudd government that were characterised by cost-blowouts with little return, put further strain on successive budgets.

As was also the case during the 2013 election campaign, the state of the economy under Gillard is contested here. Garnett and Lewis point to the issues of over-spending, debt increases and soft labour markets, as indicators of poor economic management by Labor. Others argue that the levels of debt and the deficit are, by international standards, comparatively low, despite the 'softer short-term outlook' (Carmignani 2013). While there has not been a 'budget emergency' as claimed by the Opposition, who produced a four-year budget only \$6 billion (0.4 per cent) different from Labor's (Gillard 2013), Garnett and Lewis raise some important issues about the mid- and long-term economic situation.

Considering the special arrangements made by the Gillard government to secure the support of several of the independents, it would not have been surprising if rural and regional policy had been elevated to a first order policy concern. However, Linda Botterill and

Geoff Cockfield argue (Chapter 10) that the responses of the Gillard governments to particular rural and regional policy issues between 2010 and 2013 are best understood as part of long-term changes in values and the relative influence of different policy communities. They conclude that the Gillard governments' policy approach to rural and regional issues continued the trajectory established by governments from both sides of politics over the previous four decades, essentially balancing three, largely incompatible, value sets in rural and regional policy. This is evident in issues as diverse as coal seam gas and minerals exploration in traditional agricultural landscapes, animal rights and regional economic development. Botterill and Cockfield note that, despite the busy legislative agenda of the second Gillard government, there was no bill, let alone an act, that was predominantly about regional development. In relation to policy impact, it is interesting to note that their argument supports the broad conclusions offered by Prosser and Warhurst (Chapter 4) that, on balance, the independents are unlikely to have made a sustainable contribution to the 43rd Parliament.

The much discussed and electorally significant policy issue of how best to deal with asylum seekers and manage Australia's borders is outlined fully by Mary Walsh in Chapter 7. Walsh denies claims that the inability of Labor to establish a workable policy on border control was a significant failing of the Gillard government alone. She blames the Opposition who refused to work with the government even when the policy settings, such as offshore processing, were only marginally different between the two major parties. Despite an agreement with the Malaysian government, the use of offshore detention facilities and the establishment of an independent inquiry, all consistent with Coalition policies, the Opposition saw the issue as one which could provide them with electoral leverage. Walsh argues that Opposition exploitation of this complex issue, especially through simple slogan-eering ('stop the boats'), undermined Labor's credibility and certainly contributed to the demise of Gillard and, in the 2013 election, Rudd.

In Chapter 8, Jenny Chesters focuses attention on the Gillard government's education policies and assesses the success of Julia Gillard's 'crusade' to improve education outcomes for Australians at school, VET and university levels. Gillard wanted education to be the defining issue of her government, but Chesters presents a very

mixed success story. She suggests that Gillard's crusade to 'improve our schools and our children's lives' appears to have faltered. She argues that the shift from the socio-economic indexed base of school funding to a needs-based funding mechanism will inevitably prove 'fairer' for more Australian children and that the new system of school management would enhance transparency, quality and national standards. However, the lack of a clear and consistent narrative capable of convincing the electorate of the benefits of reforming all three sectors of the education system allowed the Opposition, some state governments and the media to undermine the importance of the various reviews and reforms promoted. Again, we are reminded of Paul Keating's advice about narratives.

Keating's advice also underpinned Gillard's performance in relation to pricing carbon. In Chapter 11, Andrew Macintosh and Richard Denniss conclude that:

alarmingly, after six years in office, Labor failed to clearly articulate what the object of its climate policy was—did it want to reduce emissions at least cost, rapidly decarbonise the economy or use climate policy for old-fashion industry policy purposes?

In the end, questions about the long-term benefits and costs of the Clean Energy Future package are likely to be moot and, at the time of writing, the new Abbott government was already beginning to repeal the ETS and terminate most other major parts of the package. From being the great moral challenge of this generation (Rudd 2007), the failure to move climate change policy beyond 2007 represents a huge failure for both the Rudd and Gillard governments; it also contributed significantly to the premature removal of both prime ministers.

In Chapter 12, Andrew Carr assesses Australia's foreign policy under Gillard. He argues that the Gillard government achieved improved relationships with the US, China and India and won a seat on the United Nation's Security Council. Carr concludes that the Gillard government was less ambitious, more pragmatic and ultimately more successful than the Rudd government in terms of foreign policy. However, he argues, that Gillard did not engage a great deal in foreign

policy matters and has left behind little intellectual or policy record for future governments to develop.

The third section of the book includes a chapter focusing on the bellwether electorate of Eden-Monaro in Southern NSW. Data for the micro-level study was derived from interviews with candidates and from an online discussion group maintained throughout the election campaign. It seemed that Labor had a popular candidate and no great sense of local grievance among Eden-Monaro voters and, to some extent, the change to Rudd was working for it. Yet, the voters of Eden-Monaro continued to elect a representative from the government benches with a swing against the sitting Labor member broadly similar to that nationally. The result appears to have been driven primarily by national rather than local factors; in short, the national policy agendas also played out in this particular electorate. While rural and regional Eden-Monaro in no real sense represents a microcosm of urban-dwelling Australia, the policies that resonated nationally were just as influential locally.

Misogyny, sexism or political opportunism?

An open question: how much of the criticism of Gillard's leadership capacity and competence has been the cause of relentless attacks in some media and how much of the criticism reflects a latent misogyny in the Australian psyche? That the media, and especially the Murdoch press and the radio shock-jocks, have been complicit in a relentless attack on Gillard is beyond doubt. Muller makes the point that narrow-focus reporting heavily influenced perceptions of Gillard, which, in turn, was reflected in opinion polls that finally contributed to her replacement. While the radio talkback operators, such as Alan Jones, Ray Hadley and Chris Smith, were relentless in depicting Gillard in 'sexist, extremist and malicious ways' (Muller 2013) on a daily basis, the Murdoch press often replaced reporting with opinion. In fact, early in the period under review, *The Australian* made a pledge to act as an opposition with its aim to remove the minority government. Not only did the mainstream newspapers actively move towards ending the Gillard government, they settled for a passively neutral way of covering the grossly disrespectful public attacks on her (Muller 2013). In some cases, they even obscured some of the government's important legislative achievements

in this process. Muller labelled the regular diet of content calculated to turn voters against Prime Minister Gillard as 'ethical lapses' (Muller 2013). Muller is not alone in these criticisms, with a former editor of *The Sunday Age* concluding that, during this period, the press gallery was the worst in Australian political history (Alcorn 2013).

Further, the media attacks on Gillard were reflected in social media and, of course, through comments made by a number of members of the Coalition parties. Tim Dunlop's analysis of social media concludes that: 'too much of it has been disgraceful, a mixture of partisan hackery, shoddy research, scandal for scandal's sake, and, of course unreconstructed sexism' (Dunlop 2012). It was clear that Abbott gave licence to some of the worst comments, for example, by allowing himself to be photographed in front of placards offensive to Prime Minister Gillard and by a number of comments made in the Parliament about, for example, her recently deceased father. According to Goodall (2013): 'Abbott has had nothing to say against any of the more graphic forms of vilification aimed at Gillard. If he has standards of taste in these matters, we are yet to hear of them.' Despite his plea in 2010 for a new paradigm of parliamentary behaviour, as a 'kinder, gentler polity', his ruthless pursuit of Gillard was a far cry from that plea. Indeed, only a few weeks after Abbott had expressed the hope for this new paradigm, former Democrat Andrew Bartlett lamented that 'a kinder, gentler polity' had already been revealed to be a totally hollow prediction and was too quickly consigned to the dustbin (Bartlett 2010). Opposition Treasurer Hockey summed up his own views when he declared that Gillard: 'has never deserved respect and will never receive it' (Syvret 2013). This last comment was reported under the headline, 'It's Time to Stop the Vile Vitriol about Prime Minister Julia Gillard', indicating that the abuse directed towards the Prime Minister was a 'bridge too far', even for the Murdoch paper, *The Courier Mail*!

Young and Ricketson (Chapter 15) provide a detailed and nuanced discussion of media and gender during the period under review. They make a powerful and persuasive argument that what occurred in Australia cannot be separated from broader international trends. They comment that the gendered media treatment of Gillard was, unfortunately, entirely predictable when placed in the larger, international context of how female leaders are reported by media. They decry the media reaction to Julia Gillard as both shocking and predictable:

predictable, because such media reporting is internationally common, and shocking because it was frequently obscene and belittling, especially outside of mainstream media and online.

Independent Rob Oakeshott also expressed his concerns about some of the things that had been said to, and about, the Prime Minister. In his valedictory speech in the House, he commented that:

this Parliament needs to deal with it. I have been shocked, frankly, over the last three years to ... see the width and depth of ugly Australia ... I am proud of my country. I think we are a resilient, entrepreneurial, strong and exciting nation, but we have got to deal with ugly Australia—we have got to deal with it somehow (2013b).

So, how much of this incessant criticism of Julia Gillard has been as a result of her gender? She, herself, made the comment that the reaction to being the first female prime minister does not explain everything about her prime ministership, nor does it explain nothing: 'It explains some things and it is for the nation to think in a sophisticated way about those shades of grey' (AAP 2013). The loss of Gillard's prime ministership has been attributed by some to her failure to embrace the Australian public and by others to a national failure of political maturity and public intelligence, unable to cope with a female prime minister. It is clear that misogyny, at worst, or female stereotyping, at best, contributed significantly to Gillard's treatment and eventual demise. Perhaps the accepted views of what makes a leader need to be reassessed in the Australian context.

Gillard made the point in her final speech that she hoped that the pathway for the next female prime minister would be easier following her term in office; given the array of forces that lined up against her during her term, it may still not be easy and may require a much more nuanced approach to the task of leadership for the next female prime minister. Piterman echoes the views of many when she argued that: 'sexism and discrimination [in Australia] is overt and celebrated, but the legacy of the 1960s remains deeply embedded in the DNA of our organisations.' She concludes that corporate and government leaders have a responsibility to exercise their footprints by showing the way for a more mature, ethical and sustainable society, in which men and

women are equal partners (Piterman 2013). This responsibility was clearly not accepted by either the Opposition or much of the media during the term of Julia Gillard's prime ministership.

Conclusion

While there may be some questions about Gillard's leadership during the period under review, there would be few who did not admire her grace in defeat—both as prime minister and, subsequently, after Labor conceded defeat at the 2013 election. Rob Oakeshott summed up the feelings of the many who had defended both her integrity and the resilience which had enabled her to deliver what she had agreed, at least on those matters which sustained her minority government:

Through my eyes, she has upheld her part of the agreement. We shook hands at the start of this Parliament, we looked each other in the eye and we said: 'we want it to run full term; we want supply and confidence to be delivered; we want to get some things done for regional Australia; we want a reform agenda through the Parliament; and we want to lift parliamentary standards and committee work to improve.' We have done it. So for that, I dip my lid, and say, 'Well done, Prime Minister' ...

He continued:

About 10 minutes before [the] party room ballot last night ... I sent the then Prime Minister a text that said her father would be proud of her (2013b).

Gillard can boast of an impressive record of legislative success during her prime ministership, but, in Marsh and Lewis' terms, there were failures in relation to both the programmatic and the political dimensions of policy making. Certainly, the hostile media contributed to these failures, as did the inability of the governments to 'cut through' this hostility and counter the effectiveness of the Opposition's disciplined attacks. As Strangio (2013) comments, the reforms instituted by Gillard:

have the makings of a substantial legacy that has been eked in the unfamiliar and inhospitable conditions of minority

government. Posterity will better judge this reform program's significance and weigh it against her incapacity to parlay the measures into electoral favour.

This incapacity to find electoral traction underlined leadership weaknesses but also spotlighted the way in which the mainstream media managed the political debate during the period. There is much to be lamented about current political debate carried on through 'jibes and slogans' (*Let's move Australia forward, The real Julia, Stop the boats, End the waste* and so on), in which the major parties seldom bothered to explain a policy or answer important questions, without short-term political gain being uppermost in their minds (*The Economist* 2013). And, despite the hopes for a 'gentler kind of polity', the 43rd Parliament has been described as one of the most 'brutal' and 'toxic' in recent memory. Perhaps, if the parties had better articulated their narratives, and questions and issues were discussed in more thoughtful and respectful ways, the tensions which would have inevitably been elevated under any minority government may have played a part in raising the level of political discourse in this country.

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Seventeen Days

Robin Tennant-Wood

At 3.00pm on 7 September 2010, two independent members of the Australian Parliament took their places behind twin lecterns in the Great Hall of Parliament House, facing a packed press gallery, to deliver government to either Prime Minister Julia Gillard or Opposition Leader Tony Abbott. This was the culmination of 17 days of tense, often terse, negotiations between each of the two leaders and the one Greens and four independent members elected to the House of Representatives. It capped almost three weeks of media hype, hysteria, rumours, counter-rumours, speculation, counter-speculation, red herrings, green herrings and the odd shark sighting.

It had come to this: two respected and long-standing independent rural MPs and a room full of journalists and TV cameras. The leaders were reportedly not advised of the independents' decision prior to the press conference and watched the unfolding proceedings in their respective offices with their staff. Ms Gillard and Mr Abbott learned the final outcome of the 2010 federal election at the same time as the rest of Australia.

The years 2010 to 2013 saw a remarkable period in Australian political history: Julia Gillard became Australia's first female prime minister after she successfully staged a leadership challenge to Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. A few months later she led her party to the 2010 federal election, and subsequently steered through seventeen days of negotiation with three independent members to successfully form her second, but minority, government. Yet, three years and three days later, she was overthrown by the very man she had originally dethroned.

In this book, expert contributors consider the turbulence of that period and reflect on the Gillard governments' policy-setting, institutional and political legacies. In particular, they consider the issue of Gillard's leadership of a minority government and the arrangements needed to work with the Greens and independents to achieve Labor policies in the parliament. A recurring theme raised by many of the authors relates to the many distractions that prevented Gillard and Labor from gaining popular traction during the period. The book gives particular attention to Gillard as a female leader and the relentless campaign of denigration that pursued her, drawing conclusions about the fate of many women who assume positions of significant power in the Australian community.

The Gillard Governments has been produced by the ANZSOG Institute for Governance at the University of Canberra. It is the eleventh in a series of books on successive Commonwealth administrations. Each volume has provided a chronicle and commentary of major events, policies and issues that have dominated successive administrations since 1983.

Chris Aulich is a Professor of Public Administration at the ANZSOG Institute for Governance at the University of Canberra. He has published extensively in academic journals, professional magazines and books on issues relating to public administration. Chris has jointly edited three books in this series, which mapped the main developments in the Howard and Rudd administrations.

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