"On the Campaign Trail: The Electoral Effects of Leader Visits"

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Abstract

The campaign trail is an integral part of most elections. In an Australian federal election, it means the Prime Minister and the Opposition Leader engage in a strategic program of visits, both to 'our seats' (the one's we want to hold on to) and 'their seats' (the one's we want to take from the other party).

This article is the first to examine visits by multiple, competing political leaders in an election, in a Westminster system. Using a unique data set from the 2013 Australian federal election, there appears to be a non-random, strategic approach to the selection of seats visited by political leaders.

However, using a counterfactual analysis, leader visits do not appear to have a major impact in determining the broader outcome of the election, although the absence of leader visits could have changed the outcome in a number of ALP Government-held seats.

Introduction

The campaign trail is an integral part of most elections. Political leaders get 'out on the stump' to be seen to be a man/woman engaged with the ordinary voter. The images fill the evening news bulletins and even carry over to the newspapers (and increasingly other electronic platforms). In Westminster systems such as Australia it means the Prime Minister and the Opposition Leader engage in a strategic program of visits, both to 'our seats' (the one's we want to hold on to) and 'their seats' (the one's we want to take from the other party).

While there have a number of studies looking at the impact of Presidential visits on mid-term election campaigns in the United States polity, to the best of our knowledge this is the first to examine visits by multiple, competing political leaders (a Prime Minister and an Opposition Leader) in an election, in a Westminster system. Using a unique data set from the 2013 Australian federal election, there appears to be a non-random, strategic approach to the selection of seats visited by political leaders. However, using a counterfactual analysis, leader visits do not appear to have a major impact in determining the broader outcome of the election, although the absence of leader visits could have changed the outcome in a number of ALP Government-held seats. For the candidates-members in those seats, less would have been much better.

The Literature

The overwhelming body of scholarly literature on the impact of visits by political leaders come from studies of the American polity, most notably visits by sitting United States presidents during mid-term congressional elections. The underlying thinking is relatively simple: the aura or stature of the political leader's office or the popularity of the incumbent has spill-over effects on the vote support for the candidate(s) being visited. Looked at in another way, the local candidate rides on

the coat-tails' of the higher profile and/or more popular national leader (Cohen and Powell 2005).

In the much less studied Westminster system (and this article hopes to go some way to fill this gap), this means visits by the Prime Minister or the Leader of the Opposition (in systems where it is essentially a duality, such as Australia) 'add value' to the electoral prospects of the candidate/incumbent being visited. This value-adding happens either by helping an incumbent from 'our party' to hold on to their seat when they are otherwise vulnerable to being defeated, or a challenging-candidate from 'our party' to take a seat from an incumbent of 'the other party' when they may otherwise fall short of the votes required.

However, party leaders do not necessarily campaign for their co-partisans out of altruism alone. Rather, their time and effort, and pattern of visits, on the campaign trail can also be feedstock for their own Prime Ministerial ambitions, as he/she who 'gets the most seats, wins the election'. As such, the time and effort spent by political leaders on the campaign trail is essentially an investment in the self-interest of the (ambitious) political leader, and beyond just helping co-partisans (at least in sufficient number) to win seats in Parliament.

The largely American political literature has found, by and large, a visit by a political leader (generally the sitting United States President) during a mid-term congressional election does add-value to the electoral support of the candidate (whether incumbent or challenger) visited, and this is often sufficient to impact the outcome at electorate level in close contests (Cohen et al 1991; Holbrook 2002; Cohen and Powell 2005).

However, other scholars have questioned efforts to identify a discrete leader visit effect during designated election campaigns, pointing to what they see as 'the permanent campaign' – that is, political leaders' engaged in constant election campaigning across the electoral cycle, or who see candidate visits during individual

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campaigns within the context of their own electoral agenda (Sellers and Denton 2006; Doherty 2007; Eshbaugh-Soha and Nicholson-Crotty 2009; Mellen and Searles 2010). In this context, political leaders are campaigning more or less consistently across the electoral cycle, with visits to local candidates/ members, and schools and shopping centres et al, during the actual election campaign seemingly just an ordinary, unremarkable episode of the political process.

The strategic decision-rules for selecting which candidates to favour with a visit by the political leader are many and varied. They range across: whether the leader's visit will make a difference to the local candidate's prospects of election (Cohen et al 1991; Keele et al 2004; McClurg and Bryan 2009) and/or to the leader's own longer term political prospects (Cohen and Powell 2005; Sellers and Denton 2006); the popularity of the national leader (Hoddie and Routh 2004; Doherty 2007; Mellen and Searles 2010; Lang et al 2011); and, the amount of time the political leader has available, recognising the substantial logistical burden of travel (Cohen et al 1991; King and Morehouse 2004; Mellen and Searles 2010).

They also include: the competitiveness of the seat/State (the more vulnerable it is to being lost by incumbent/ gained by the challenger: Cohen et al 1991; Keele et al 2004; Sellers and Denton 2006; Doherty 2007; Herrnson and Morris 2007; Charnock et al 2009; Eshbaugh-Soha and Nicholson-Crotty 2009; Lang et al 2011; but, for an alternate view see McClurg and Bryan 2009); the need to visit an otherwise uninteresting seat just to neutralise the impact of a visit by the opposing political leader (Shaw 1999; Herr 2002; Cohen and Powell 2005; Hill et al 2010); and, whether the leader's appearance would have other dividends, such as motivating financial donors and/or grass-roots supporters (Cohen et al 1991; Herr 2002; Sellers and Denton 2006; Herrnson and Morris 2007).

Other considerations are seen to include: the potential for positive local media coverage (Herrnson and Morris 2007; Charnock et al 2009; in contrast to that often provided by the more cynical coverage from the national press corps: King and Morehouse 2004; Cohen and Powell 2005); and, the likelihood of the candidate visited being appreciative of the leader's efforts, such as supporting a president's policy agenda when elected to Congress (Cohen et al 1991; Hoddie and Routh 2004; Sellers and Denton 2006; Herrnson and Morris 2007; McClurg and Bryan 2009) or in the Westminster model, supporting the leader in important caucus ballots such as leadership challenges or major policy debates in the party room or in Cabinet.

However, the converse can also apply: a candidate may not want a visit from a politically unpopular leader, fearing association could be vote-subtracting, which can be particularly important in an otherwise marginal seat (one with a narrow margin to lose).   American studies (McClurg and Bryan 2009) have found visits by then US President George W Bush to Republican candidates in the 2002 and 2006 midterm Senate elections reduced the latter's vote support, while visits by US Vice President Dick Cheney (a Republican) during the 2000 Presidential election increased Democrat support by as much as 0.5 per centage points in some States (Hill et al 2010).

 At the same time, candidates or incumbents with a strong local following, whose grass-roots campaign is dominated by distinctly local issues may not want the political leader to visit if it means drawing attention to otherwise unpopular national issues and/or motivates a visit by the leader of the other political party which may not otherwise have occurred. A leader-visit can also have the counterproductive effect of mobilising supporters of the other party (Sellers and Denton 2006).

While electoral and political contexts, amongst other things, have varied across studies of political leader visits, modelling estimates suggest they can add anywhere between 1 and 2 per centage points to the vote outcome of the candidate visited (Cohen et al 1991), while probability models have found presidential visits to congressional candidates can lift the likelihood of the latter winning by more than 40 per cent in competitive elections (Herrnson and Morris 2007). Counter-factuals' indicate well-targeted strategic visits can make the difference between winning and losing (for example, Truman's defeat of Dewey in the 1948 US Presidential election: Holbrook 2002).

Making Choices

Political strategy and practical logistics (time and money) mean a political leader cannot expect to visit every seat even during an extended election campaign. The vast distances and the air-travel time involved in a country like Australia mean it is close to impossible for even the best organised political leader to visit all of their party candidates in every one of the 150 federal electorates around the nation.

(Two of Australia's federal electorates – Durack, in Western Australia, with an area of more than 1.59 million square kilometres; and, Lingiari, in the Northern Territory, at more than 1.35 million square kilometres – could together absorb France and Germany combined three times over, or the United Kingdom more than 12 times over, with room to spare.)

Political leaders, strategists and candidates have to make hard-nosed decisions about which seats to visit. Some seats may be listed for multiple visits, being regarded as either winnable or 'must wins' if the party is to win the election. Other seats may be disregarded entirely and get no visits at all, viewed as 'rock solid ours/ theirs', seats with margins to lose so sizeable they are highly unlikely to ever change hands. For example, the Liberal National Party (LNP) held seat of Mallee (with a margin to lose of more than 23 per cent) and the Australian Labor Party (ALP) seat of Batman

(nearly 25 per cent) would likely to be judged, at best, low priorities by political strategists.

Clearly, the choice of seats to visit, let alone the time spent in each seat, the number of repeat visits, the sequence of visits and the nature of the visit (especially where it is used as a platform for a major announcement) is far from a random event (Keele et al 2004; Sellers and Denton 2006; Herrnson and Morris 2007; McClurg and Bryan 2009). This study uses a rare data set for an election in a Westminster system to examine whether the incidence and pattern of political leader visits to individual electorates are random events, and whether such visits have any meaningful impact on election outcomes in those seats, with the results having important implications for how politicians and their strategists conduct election campaigns.

Not surprisingly, political leaders and their advisers-strategists select 'more winnable' seats to visit (to add lustre to the leader), and avoid 'unwinnable' or 'already lost' seats (to avoid embarrassment of being associated with a loss). Part of this judgement of the 'winnability' of any given seat may well reflect assessments by political leaders and their advisers that those seats have a higher incidence of undecided voters available to be won-over (Shaw 1999; Herr 2002) or contain voters who are more persuadable than those in safer seats (who may have more fixed views: Hill et al 2010).

The Data

The primary data used in this study were compiled manually by the author from media reports of the campaign trails of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (leader of the Australian Labor Party), and Opposition Leader Tony Abbott (leader of the Liberal National Party; the Coalition) during the 2013 Australian federal election. The data set was cross-checked against partial campaign trail lists which appeared from time to time in the print media. The spatio-temporal data set records the date and the name of the seat visited, but do not distinguish between the nature of the activities

undertaken during the visit – for example, whether it was just a simple walk through a shopping mall or a visit to a primary school, or an event where a major policy announcement was made.

Any visit to the seat was counted as a single visit, with the exceptions of those to Brisbane (which were coincidentally where both major parties held their official campaign launches, and one of the political leaders debates) and Sydney (which was more of a transport hub) where a leader presence will not be counted as a visit. The data series commence on Sunday 4 August 2013 (the day the election date was formally announced), and concludes on Saturday 7 September 2013 (election day: n = 35 days).

Table 1 reports the general patterns of leader visits to the 150 federal electorates during the 2013 campaign.

Table 1: Leader Visits During the 2013 Election Campaign.

Rudd		Abbott Visit				
Visit	0	1	2	3	4	Total
0	85	20	2	0	0	107
1	14	10	4	1	1	30
2	2	6	2	0	0	10
3	1	1	0	0	0	2
5	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	102	38	8	1	1	150

Looking first at Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's campaign trail, he made a total of 43 seat visits, with 30 seats receiving a single visit, 10 seats getting two visits, 2 seats getting three visits, and one seat getting five visits (being his own seat of Griffith, in Queensland). By comparison, Opposition Leader Tony Abbott made 48 seat visits, with 38 seats getting one visit, 8 seats getting two visits, 1 seat each getting either three or four visits (the must-win government-held seats of Lindsay and Reid in western Sydney).

Just over one-half of all seats (85 out of 150) did not receive any visits from either of the leaders, with 14 seats getting a single visit from Mr Rudd and no visit from Mr Abbott, and 20 getting a single visit from Mr Abbott and no visit from Mr Rudd. Ten seats got one visit, and two seats got two visits from both political leaders (in the latter case, Bass in Tasmania, and Petrie in Queensland, both then held by the ALP Government). Not surprisingly, the pattern of the seats visited was markedly (and statistically significantly) non-random (we can reject the null hypothesis that the pattern of leader visits was random: $\chi^2 = 3.34$; $p = 0.00$).

For example, had the pattern of leader visits in the 2013 election been random (that is, not pre-selected by campaign strategists based on their prospective safety/margin to lose), then leaders would have been expected to have visited 25 marginal seats rather than the 41 seats they actually did (with the difference being statistically significant: $\chi^2 = 10.0$), while they would have visited 28 safe seats compared to the 14 actually visited (with the difference again being statistically significant: $\chi^2 = 6.8$). Taken together, this suggests leaders, visited marginal seats at the expense of visits to safe seats, a politically rational decision.

Table 2 records the patterns of leader visits by party holding the seat, with the top panel reporting visits to Government (ALP) held seats, and the bottom panel visits to Opposition (LNP) held seats, allocated on the basis of the party winning the seats at the 2010 federal election. As such, the seats of Dobell and Fisher were allocated to the ALP and the LNP respectively, despite the sitting members who were originally elected for those parties subsequently becoming independents.

		ALP Held Seats					
Rudd		Abbott Visit					
Visit	0	1	2	3	4	Total	
0	35	11	0	0	0	46	
1	7	7	2	1	1	18	
2	1	3	2	0	0	6	
3	1	0	0	0	0	1	
5	0	1	0	0	0	1	
Total	44	22	4	1	1	72	
		LNP Held Seats					
Rudd		Abbott Visit					
Visit	0	1	2			Total	
0	47	9	2			58	
1	7	3	0			10	
2	1	3	0			4	
3	0	1	0			1	
Total	55	16	2			73	

As can be seen in Table 2, of the 72 seats held by the ALP, nearly two-thirds (n = 46) did not receive any visit from their own party leader (Kevin Rudd), with 18 seats getting one visit, 6 seats getting two visits, and one seat each getting three or five visits; a total of 26 visits to ALP held seats. LNP Leader Tony Abbott made 28 visits to ALP held seats. The pattern of visits was not dissimilar for the 73 seats held by the LNP, with the ALP leader making 17 visits and the LNP leader making 18 seat visits. Again, the pattern of seat visits appears to be strategic (that is, non-random): for the ALP seats, $\chi^2 = 27.64$, $p = 0.03$; and, for the LNP seats, $\chi^2 = 12.2$, $p = 0.06$).

Table 3 reports the patterns of swings, on average in two party preferred (TPP) percentage terms, against the ALP Government based on leader visits. The TPP measures the share of the vote obtained by each of the final two parties in each electorate after the distribution of preferences, usually being the ALP and the LNP

candidates. Electoral analysts also make calculations of TPP by, amongst other things, regions, States/Territories and combinations thereof (States by regions).

Table 3: Two Party Preferred Swings Against the ALP Government

Rudd		Abbott Visit			
Visit	0	1	2	3	4
0	3.4	4.1	2.5		
1	4.2	3.3	9.5	3.7	4.0
2	2.4	5.5	7.0		
3	1.7	4			
5	5.6				

The largest swings (averaging 9.5 per cent) appear to have occurred in those seats which Rudd visited once and Abbott visited twice (namely, Denison, Dobell, Hindmarsh and Melbourne), followed (averaging 7.0 per cent) for those seats which both leaders visited twice (Bass and Petrie), and then (averaging 5.5 per cent) those visited twice by Rudd and once by Abbott (Bennelong, Braddon, Corio, Gellibrand and Solomon). The seat which Rudd visited five times and Abbott visited once was Rudd's own electorate of Griffith, where the swing against the ALP was 5.6 per cent. By contrast, the seats which received no visits from either leader had an average swing against the ALP Government of 3.4 per cent. While it might be tempting, to suggest 'the swings were least where the politicians were least' (and the best strategy was 'stay away'), this outcome may again reflect strategic decisions – leaders' putting more effort into seats likely to deliver greater swings.

Modelling

Two important considerations for political leaders and strategists is 'which seats should we visit' (the 'determinants' model) and 'what will be the effects of such visits' (the 'effects model)?   The dependent variable for the 'determinants model' is a binary outcome (0 = not visited by either leader; 1 = visited by either leader), estimated and reported using logistic regression.   By comparison, the dependent variable for the 'effects model' will be the TPP swing, in percentage points, against the incumbent (ALP) government (that is, a continuous variable), estimated using ordinary least squares regression.

The independent variables for both models are: '*safe*', a categorical variable reflecting the 'margin to lose' of the seat (1 = 'marginal' = margin to lose <= 6 per cent TPP; 2 = fairly safe = margin to lose 6 <= 10 per cent TPP; 3 = safe = margin to lose >= 10 per cent or more) TPP; '*geo*', a categorical variable reflecting the geographic location of the seat (1 = inner metropolitan; 2 = outer metropolitan; 3 = provincial; 4 = rural); '*female*', a continuous variable reporting females as a percentage of the population in the seat; '*median age*' is a continuous variable reporting the median age, in years, of the population of the electorate; '*income*' is a continuous variable reporting the median weekly household income, in nominal dollar terms, for households in the electorate; and, '*owned*', a continuous variable reporting the percentage of households in the electorate who own outright their principal residence.

The '*safe*' and the '*geo*' variables were included to control for the electoral marginality and geography of the seats, the '*female*', '*median age*' and the '*income*' variables as indicators of the socio-economic characteristics of the electorates, and '*owned*' as a proxy for housing affordability which was expected to be an important issue during the election campaign.   The '*safe*' and the '*geo*' variables come from the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC 2011) and are for the 2010 federal election, with the other variables coming from the 2011 Australian Census (ABS 2013).

The results of the determinants modelling are reported in Table 4. The left hand panel report the results for 'All Seats', the centre panel for 'ALP (Government) Held Seats', and the right hand panel for 'LNP (Opposition) Held Seats'. The models were estimated in binary logistic form, with the results reported as odds ratios (OR). The dependent variable was binary (0 = seat not visited; 1 = seat was visited).

Table 4: Determinants of Leader Visit

		All Seats			ALP (Govt) Seats				LNP (Opp) Seats		
	OR	z	p		OR	z	P		OR	z	p
Safe	0.36	-4.66	**0.00**		0.31	-3.22	**0.00**		0.27	-2.75	**0.01**
Geo	0.77	-1.02	0.31		1.09	0.25	0.81		0.86	-0.30	0.76
Female	0.88	-0.49	0.62		0.57	-0.98	0.33		0.91	-0.24	0.81
Median Age	1.22	1.55	0.12		1.76	2.88	**0.00**		0.99	-0.04	0.97
Income	1.00	0.95	0.34		1.00	0.3	0.77		1.00	1.37	0.17
Owned	0.87	-2.35	**0.02**		0.82	-2.13	**0.03**		0.86	-1.16	0.24
Constant	142.87	0.40	0.69		4315522	0.56	0.58		5080	0.48	0.63
McFaddenR2		0.204				0.268				0.360	
McFadden Adj R2		0.135				0.125				0.213	
Log Lik.		-81.02				-36.04				-30.43	
AIC		176.03				86.08				74.86	
BIC		197.06				101.91				90.89	

The clear message from the modelling reported in Table 4 is the margin-to-lose of the seat is an important determinant of whether or not the seat is visited by a political leader. As the margin of electoral safety goes up – moves from marginal, to fairly safe, to safe - the likelihood of a visit by a political leader declines (all seats, $z = -4.66$, $p = 0.00$; ALP seats, $z = -3.22$, $p = 0.00$; and, LNP seats, $z = -2.75$, $p = 0.01$).   Looked at another way, the less safe (more marginal) the seat , the more likely it was to get a visit from a political leader.

Based on this modelling, there was a 79 per cent probability a marginal seat held by the ALP would get a leader visit, well ahead of the 56 per cent probability for a LNP marginal seat.   A fairly safe ALP seat had a 54 per cent, and a fairly safe LNP seat had a 25 per cent, probability of a leader visit, while the figures for safe seats were 26 per cent and 8 per cent respectively. However, the greater likelihood of a political leader visiting an ALP seat ahead of an LNP seat is not surprising given the ALP was in government and thus retaining its seats was fulcrum to the outcome of the election. However, the imbalance of visits is consistent with perceptions the ALP ran a seat-defensive campaign during the 2013 Australian federal election.

The results of the first-look of the 'effects modelling' are reported in Appendix 1. While the explanatory variables used in the 'determinants modelling' have been carried over into the 'effects modelling', three new variables have been added: '*polivisit*', a binary variable if the seat received a visit from either Mr Rudd or Mr Abbott; '*ruddvis*', a binary variable if the seat received a visit from Mr Rudd, but not from Mr Abbott; and '*abbottvis*', a binary variable if the seat received a visit from Mr Abbott but not from Mr Rudd. The dependent variable in all three models was '*swing*', that is the TPP swing, in percentage terms, against the ALP Government at the 2013 federal election.

Several key messages standout: in the 'Rudd and/or Abbott Visit' model, only the '*polvisit*' variable (whether either of the political leaders visited the electorate) showed any practical or statistical significance (b = 1.69; p = 0.01) or explanatory power (SSD = 41.0); in the 'Rudd Visit' model, the Rudd visit variable (*ruddvis*) was nowhere near statistical significance, with only the '*safe*', '*geo*' and '*female*' variables even close to conventional levels of statistical significance; with a broadly similar story in the 'Abbott Visit' model.   Interestingly, while both the 'Rudd Visit' and the 'Abbott Visit' models had respectable levels of goodness-of-fit (Adj R2 of 0.249 and 0.253 respectively), that for the Rudd and/or Abbott Visit model (Adj R2 = 0.047) was considerably lower, suggesting a neutralising effect of party leader visits upon each other.

Two messages standout from a review of the modelling reported in the panels in the Appendix – the importance of the variables reporting political visits and the safety (margin to lose) of the seats concerned.   This initial look can be taken further by a more intensive examination of the political visit and the safety variables in ALP-held seats (that is, the ones of greatest practical importance for the ALP to retain, and the Coalition to win, government).   The results of this modelling are reported in Table 5.

The top panel reports the effects of visits by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to co-partisan (ALP) seats, with the bottom panel the effects of visits by Opposition Leader Tony Abbott to contra-partisan (ALP) seats.   The baseline for the 'safe' variable is safe = 1 (that is, the seat had a margin to lose of up to 6 per cent TPP), while the baseline = 0 for '(name)vis' (the number of visits made by the respective political leader to an ALP seat)   The analysis only considers cases where political leaders visited a seats up to two times, given the very small number of times either leader visited a seat 3 or more times (see Table 1).   The dependent variable is the TPP swing against the ALP, in percentage point terms.

Table 5: Visits to ALP Seats

	b	t	p	Beta
	Rudd Visits to ALP Seats			
	b	**t**	**p**	**Beta**
Safe				
2	2.39	2.14	**0.04**	0.28
3	3.21	3.28	**0.00**	0.45
Ruddvis				
1	1.61	1.57	0.12	0.19
2	3.27	2.27	**0.03**	0.26
Constant	1.78	2.12	0.04	…
R Sq	0.193			
Adj R Sq	0.142			
Log Like	-181.31			
AIC	360.03			
SBC	371.13			
	Abbott Visit to ALP Seats			
	b	**t**	**p**	**Beta**
Safe				
2	2.17	1.93	**0.06**	0.25
3	3.17	3.25	**0.00**	0.45
abbottvis				
1	0.87	.94	0.35	0.11
2	3.94	2.18	**0.03**	0.26
Constant	2.00	2.33	0.02	…
R Sq	0.176			
Adj R Sq	0.123			
Log Like	-182.31			
AIC	361.51			
SBC	372.61			

Looking first at the top panel, which reports "Rudd Visits to ALP Seats", it is quite clear the ALP suffered much greater swings in its fairly safe (safe =2; b = 2.39) and safe (safe = 3; b = 3.21) seats than in its marginal seats (the baseline case), with both cases being statistically significant (p = 0.04 and 0.00 respectively).   More interesting, however, was the impact of the number of visits Mr Rudd made to ALP seats, with the swing being almost 3.3 per centage points greater in seats he visited twice than in seats he did not visit at all, with the difference being statistically significant (p = 0.03), which is probably not that surprising given his sizeable net disapproval rating (minus 17 per centage points) at the time.   The pattern of the effects of visits by Mr Abbott to ALP seats was fairly similar, with ALP seats he visited twice showing a swing almost 4 per centage points greater than those he did not visit at all (and, again, statistically significant: p = 0.03).   Interestingly, in both cases the swings against the ALP in ALP-held seats visited only once by either political leader where not statistically significantly different from those not visited.   For politicians and campaign strategists the message would seem to be clear: it may be more effective to visit to visit a smaller number of priority seats more often than a greater number of seats just once (or, possibly even just stay away altogether).

Counterfactuals

All of this leads to the inevitable 'so what' - did the leaders' visits make a difference to the outcome of any seat(s), and as such to the outcome of the election? Or, to put it another way, where leader visits just part and parcel of the theatre, or did they have a meaningful impact on the outcome, of the election campaign? Such matters are of more than passing interest for political leaders, their strategists and advisers, and indeed for the candidates/ members whose seat they visit.

While such counter-factual questions can never be answered with absolute certainty (although Holbrook 2002, attempts a similar exercise for the 1948 US Presidential election), an insight can be gained from comparing the actual swings with plausible scenarios of what the swing against the ALP might have been in the absence of any leader visit at all.   In short, what might have been the outcome had neither Mr Rudd or Mr Abbott visited any the 16 seats the ALP lost in the 2013 Australian federal election.

The results of these counterfactual estimates are reported in Table 6. The variables '*ruddvisn*' and '*abbottvisn*' are counts of the number of visits by each political leader to the seat; '*margin*' is the TPP margin for the ALP to lose for the seat, in percentage point terms; '*swing - actual*' is the actual swing in TPP terms against the ALP at the 2013 federal election in the seat; while '*swing – predicted*', is the swing which could have taken place under the counterfactual situation (neither leader visited the seat); while '*LCL*' and '*UCL*' report the lower and upper confidence limits for '*swing-predicted*', at 95 per cent confidence intervals. The final column, '*ALP retained*', assesses whether the ALP might have otherwise retained the seat under the counterfactual scenario, by comparing the UCL of the predicted swing against the margin to lose for the seat.   Where the UCL was less than the margin to lose, then the ALP may well have retained the seat had there been no leader visits; where the UCL was greater than the margin to lose, then the ALP may well have lost the seat anyway.

Table 6: Counterfactuals

Name	Ruddvis	Abbottvis	Margin	Swing (Actual)	Swing (Pred)	LCL	UCL	ALP Retained
Banks	0	0	1.5	3.4	…	…	…	…
Barton	0	0	6.9	7.3	…	…	…	…
Bass	2	2	6.7	10.9	4.1	2.7	5.6	Yes
Braddon	2	1	7.5	10.1	4.4	2.7	6.0	Yes
Capricornia	0	1	3.7	4.5	3.3	2.2	4.4	No
Corangamite	1	1	0.3	4.3	3.1	2.1	4.2	No
Deakin	0	1	0.6	4.0	2.9	1.8	3.9	No
Dobell	1	2	5.1	5.9	3.0	1.8	4.1	**Yes**
Eden-Mon.	1	0	4.2	4.9	3.2	1.9	4.5	No
Hindmarsh	1	2	6.1	8.1	3.4	2.1	4.7	**Yes**
La Trobe	1	1	1.7	5.7	2.9	1.8	3.9	No
Lindsay	1	4	1.1	4.0	2.7	1.6	3.8	No
Lyons	0	0	12.3	13.6	…	…	…	…
Petrie	2	2	2.5	3.2	3.1	2.0	4.2	No
Reid	1	3	2.7	3.7	2.4	1.1	3.8	No
Robertson	1	0	1	4.0	3.0	1.8	4.1	No

Three seats are excluded from the counter-factual, namely Banks, Barton and Lyons, each of which received zero visits from either political leader (that is, the counterfactual scenario). Of the remaining 13 seats, it is possible the ALP could have retained Bass (UCL = 5.6 per cent; margin = 6.7 per cent), and Braddon (UCL = 6 per cent; margin = 7.5 per cent), although other seemingly Tasmania-specific factors may still have caused them to be lost.   At the same time, it is possible the ALP could have held on to Dobell (UCL = 4.1 per cent; margin = 5.1 per cent) and Hindmarsh (UCL = 4.7 per cent; margin = 6.1 per cent), with Capricornia (UCL = 4.4 per cent; margin = 3.7 per cent) and Eden-Monaro (UCL = 4.5 per cent; margin = 4.2 per cent) being closer run outcomes. The other seven seats were more clear cut loses, where the 'no visit' counterfactual would not likely have altered the outcome.

Given the ALP entered the federal election with a deficit of one seat against the LNP (ALP = 72 seats; LNP = 73 seats), with two seats previously held by independents widely slated to (and actually did) return to the Coalition parties (Lyne and New England), the Coalition really only needed a net gain of just one seat to secure a majority (76 out of 150 seats) in the House of Representatives.   Under the best scenario for the ALP under the counterfactual, the ALP may have retained up to six seats they otherwise lost, but likely have lost at least seven seats anyway.   This would have given the ALP 61 seats to the Coalition's 84 seats (compared with the actual ALP = 55 seat; Coalition = 90 seat split), with independents holding the remainder.   This outcome would have provided the Coalition parties with a 12 seat buffer in the House of Representatives, in contrast to the 18 seat actual buffer – that is, the LNP would likely still have won the election, although with a much lesser margin in seats.   Indeed, it could have made the difference between the LNP potentially being a two, rather than a one, term government.

Conclusion

Campaign visits by political leaders to individual electorates are an important part of the theatre of Australian elections. For political leaders, their strategists and advisers it is a chance to show he/she is engaged and popular with ordinary people, and to generate favourable advertorials on the nightly news, social media and the newspapers. However, such visits involve considerable strategic planning, designed to garner votes from the seats visited. As the modelling reported in this study has shown, single visits by political leaders to an electorate do not translate in any meaningful way into votes than not appearing in the electorate at all, voters seemingly regarding them as just another episode in the permanent campaign.

By contrast, multiple visits (especially two visits) appear to have real effects on vote outcomes, with the more voters saw of Mr Rudd the greater the vote swing against his co-partisans, whilst the more they saw of Mr Abbott the greater the swing against his contra-partisans. The better political strategy for the ALP would appear to have 'spread Mr Rudd more thinly' with fewer repeat visits to the same seat, while for the LNP it would have been to 'better concentrate Mr Abbott' with more repeat visits to a fewer number of seats. For the ALP candidates/members in the seats of Dobell and Hindmarsh, and likely Capricornia and Eden-Monaro, it may well have been better had both leaders simply stayed away – period.

Regardless, as the counterfactual demonstrated, making substantial changes to the pattern of leader visits would not likely have changed the overall outcome of the 2013 Australian federal election. The LNP would still have won, and the ALP still have lost, albeit by a much narrower margin than otherwise, although it may well have been the difference between the LNP being a one and a two term government.

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Appendix 1: Effects Models

Swing	Rudd and/or Abbott Visit			Beta	SSD
	b	t	p	Beta	SSD
Polvisit	1.69	2.65	**0.01**	0.25	41.0
Safe	0.23	0.68	0.50	0.06	2.5
Geo	-0.10	-0.28	0.78	-0.03	1.7
Female	0.04	0.08	0.94	0.01	3.3
Median Age	-0.18	-1.03	0.30	-0.18	8.2
Income	0.00	-1.31	0.19	-0.14	10.3
Owned	0.19	2.25	**0.03**	0.35	33.0
Constant	3.51	0.16	0.87	…	…
R Sq	0.094				
Adj R Sq	0.047				
Log Like	-360.99				
AIC	737.98				
SBC	761.58				

Swing	Rudd Visit			Beta	SSD
	b	t	p	Beta	SSD
Ruddvis	-0.73	-0.49	0.63	-0.08	1.9
Safe	1.06	1.64	0.11	0.23	18.8
Geo	1.43	1.88	0.07	0.38	30.0
Female	-1.87	-1.91	0.07	-0.33	14.9
Median Age	0.25	0.80	0.43	0.23	16.3
Income	0.00	0.97	0.34	0.18	4.0
Owned	0.15	1.06	0.30	0.26	14.1
Constant	76.00	1.60	0.12	…	…
R Sq	0.371				
Adj R Sq	0.249				
Log Like	-110.18				
AIC	236.37				
SBC	250.64				

	Abbott Visit				
Swing	b	t	p	Beta	SSD
Abbottvis	-3.06	-0.66	0.51	-0.12	1.6
Safe	1.26	1.94	**0.06**	0.28	19.2
Geo	1.30	1.68	0.10	0.35	29.9
Female	-2.07	-1.93	**0.06**	-0.36	14.3
Median Age	0.29	0.89	0.38	0.27	16.5
Income	0.00	1.03	0.31	0.20	4.0
Owned	0.13	0.91	0.37	0.23	14.5
Constant	84.43	1.66	0.11	…	…
R Sq	0.374				
Adj R Sq	0.253				
Log Like	-110.06				
AIC	236.13				
SBC	250.40				