

## Victorian Liberal Party leadership contest widens after disastrous election result

ABC Radio Melbourne / By [Melissa Brown](#) and staff

Posted Mon 28 Nov 2022 at 10:09am, updated Mon 28 Nov 2022 at 5:35pm



Liberal party stalwarts vie for the vacant leadership role

Senior Victorian Liberal figures have indicated they intend to contest the party's leadership, as the fallout from the party's bruising election loss continues.

Former shadow attorney-general John Pesutto and shadow ministers Ryan Smith and Richard Riordan on Monday confirmed plans to challenge for the position vacated by Matthew Guy after the weekend's massive election defeat, as did Berwick MP Brad Battin.

But Mr Pesutto must first regain the seat of Hawthorn, which remains on a knife edge with just a few hundred votes separating Mr Pesutto from teal independent Melissa Lowe, with more than 70 per cent of the vote counted.

[Saturday's election has left the Coalition fractured and the future of the Liberal Party uncertain](#), with leader Matthew Guy announcing on Sunday he would step down from the role after his second election defeat.

### Key points:

- John Pesutto is still neck-and-neck with independent Melissa Lowe in the seat of Hawthorn
- He says he has the support of colleagues to run for Liberal leadership
- Mr Pesutto was tipped to take the leadership before his shock 2018 election defeat

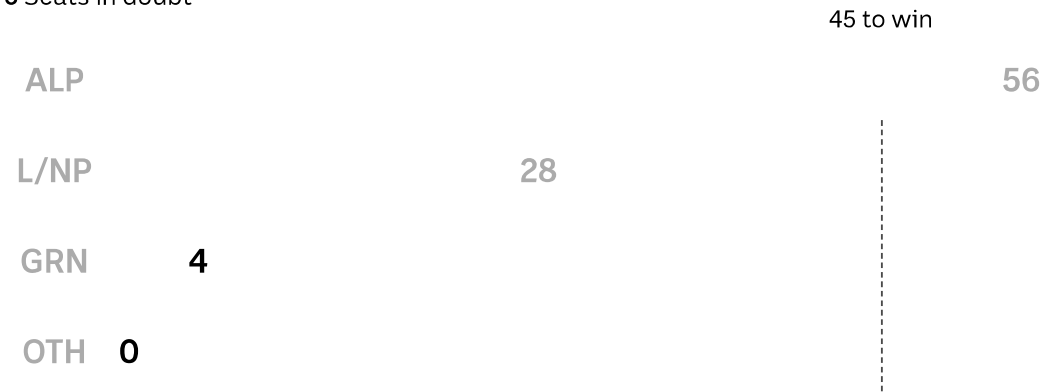


Matthew Guy has announced he's stepping down from the Liberal leadership after Saturday's election loss. (AAP: Jonathan Birrell)

VIC ELECTION 2022 | FULL RESULTS >

88.0% turnout, final figures

0 Seats in doubt



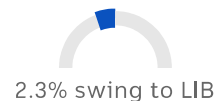
Mr Pesutto was on air on the ABC's election night broadcast in 2018 when he learnt of his shock defeat to Labor's John Kennedy, who is expected to poll in third place this election.

Heading into the 2018 election, Mr Pesutto was widely tipped to take over the Liberal leadership.

## Hawthorn VIC

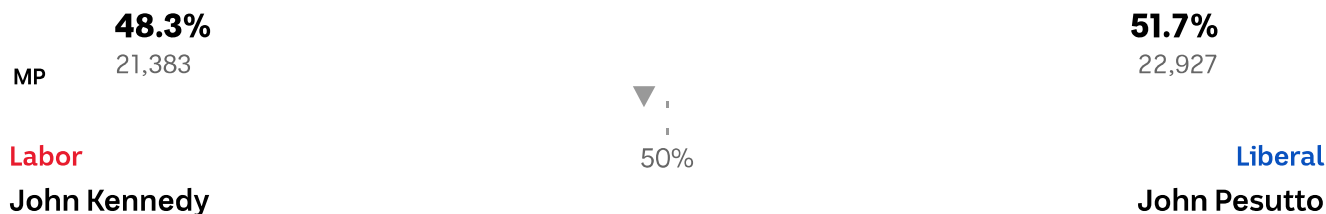
LIB GAIN

John Pesutto elected



### Preference count

90.8% turnout, final figures



If he prevails over Ms Lowe, he will take up where he left off.

"If I am successful, I intend to nominate for leader," he told ABC Radio Melbourne on Monday morning.

"I haven't talked to everybody yet but the discussions I've had so far have been really positive and everybody seems receptive to the concept of me being a potential leader.

"I'm subject to a contingency, obviously, which is the elephant in the room. I do have to win the seat and that is by no means a given."

In conceding defeat in 2018, Mr Pesutto [urged the party to reform its language, policies and culture to make it more attractive to socially progressive but economically conservative voters.](#)

He said the weekend's election result was "disastrous" for the Liberal Party.

"The different results around the state doesn't cover up the fact that there's a really painful loss for us," he said.

Mr Pesutto said it was clear the party made an error in running a negative campaign focused on the Labor premier.



'I intend to nominate': John Pesutto announces tilt at Liberal leadership, if he wins Hawthorn





John Pesutto says the party needs "dramatic" organisational reform after the election loss. (ABC News: Danielle Nica)

"The broader strategy of attacking Daniel Andrews didn't work," he said.

"I know that there was a view that there was research saying that that would work. That clearly didn't happen."

Mr Pesutto said the party had a number of challenges to grapple with, including a dramatic rebuild of the organisation to reflect the diversity of the community.

"I think elections are a reflection of what you've been doing on many fronts," he said.

"It's clear that we are not the strong organisational outfit we were, say, 20 or 30 years ago when we had a strong presence in Bendigo and Ballarat and in Geelong in those areas."

## **Smith and Riordan declare tilt at leadership**

With almost 69 per cent of the vote counted in Warrandyte, the ABC has projected incumbent Ryan Smith will retain the outer north-eastern suburbs seat.

The shadow finance minister has held the seat since 2008.



## Warrandyte VIC

LIB RETAIN

Ryan Smith elected

0.5% swing to LIB

### Preference count

91.6% turnout, final figures

**45.7%**  
20,593

Labor

Naomi Oakley

▼  
50%

**54.3%**  
24,482

MP

Liberal

Ryan Smith

He said the Liberal Party now had an opportunity for members to come together to plan for the next four years.

Incumbent Richard Riordan is ahead of Labor's Hutch Hussein with 75 per cent of the votes counted in the country Victorian seat of Polwarth.

Mr Riordan said he intended to offer an alternative to the partyroom when his colleagues met to vote on a new leader.



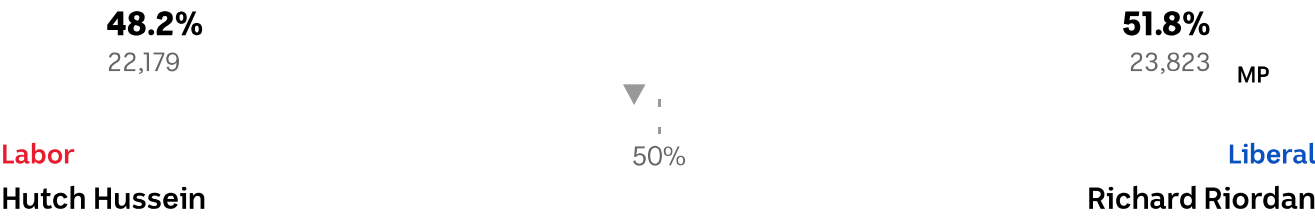
**Polwarth** VIC

LIB RETAIN    **Richard Riordan elected**



**Preference count**

90.4% turnout, final figures



"I believe fundamentally we can win in 2026," he said.

"Our core beliefs and values are what most Victorians believe in. We just have to sell it better."

Mr Riordan has served as Shadow Minister for Local Government, for Housing and for Resources.



He said he stood by his statements during pandemic that Victorians should be able to make individual health decisions, including their actions during COVID.

## **Battin returns to contest top spot**

Brad Battin, who retained his new seat of Berwick following an electoral redistribution, announced he would also contest for the Liberal leadership.

Mr Battin resigned from the shadow ministry last year following [a failed attempt to oust then-leader Michael O'Brien](#), being outvoted 22 votes to 9.

The former police officer said the Liberal party needed to turn its focus back to forgotten outer suburban voters.

"The Liberal Party needs a new start. We need to focus on our values and the community we represent," Mr Battin said.

"I'm an outer suburb representative who took a seat from Labor and increased my margin ... and I think that's a community that's been forgotten."



will be Brad Battin's second attempt to win the Liberal Party leadership in as many years. (AAP: James Ross)

Mr Battin supported the large field of contenders in the leadership contest and said the Liberal party needed to shift course.

"I actually dread the idea sometimes of being an opposition leader. But I know that we need a strong opposition to hold this government to account," he said.

"We also need someone who is going to put forward ideas to build Victoria's future.

"We can't just continue just to bag out the premier who is there now."

### **Former federal MP says party must speak to 'young Australians'**

Despite Mr Pesutto's warning about the negative focus on Daniel Andrews, former federal Liberal MP Tim Wilson said he had doubled down on his belief that the community does not support the Premier.

"Labor had a terrible primary vote," Mr Wilson told ABC Radio National.

"Essentially, less than two thirds of Victorians voted against them so it's not like there was a great deal of love."

"The question was, we convinced people that they shouldn't vote for Dan Andrews, but it didn't translate to them being convinced that they should go on to vote for us."

Despite some pessimism over the amount of time it would take Liberals to recover, Mr Wilson said party did have a future in Victoria.

He agreed with Mr Pesutto that the party must become more inclusive, particularly of the younger generations.

"We need a Liberal Party that speaks to the aspiration of young Australians to be able to get a good job and buy their own home but home ownership isn't even factoring into the core part of our narrative as a party," Mr Wilson said.

"It should be central to who we are because it provides the economic security and the opportunity for people and their families to take an investment, a stake in their community, their state and their country.

"It's a foundation in which they go on then to form small businesses and create the economic opportunity for the next generation."