

SUMMARY

Integrity, Evidence and Ideology : Rudd Government's Modus Operandi

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Ever since he won the Federal elections on 24 November 2007, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has managed to keep an extraordinary level of electoral support. Considering the fact that Rudd is not particularly endowed with burning charisma, the secret of his success must be lying with the way he has handled various aspects of politics. This paper pays particular attention to Rudd's *modus operandi*, that is how and why the Rudd government takes particular set of policies.

My hypothesis is that there are three-fold principles in the Rudd government's *modus operandi*. First, Rudd has made every effort to implement election promises. One of the reasons for his persistent popularity is said to be that voters associate Rudd with "integrity" because of his commitment to election promises. Second, as he has referred policy matters to more than 140 committees, his prime mode of operation is so-called "evidence-based approach". This paper analyses three cases, the education policy, the Rudd government's approach to the Howard-initiated intervention into Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory and Industrial Relations and its relationship with the union movement. These three cases indicate that the evidence-based approach can be a good and effective policy making as well as politically astute move by dampening over-enthusiastic expectations from its supporters.

Third, this rather cautious approach favoured by the government's earlier stage appears to be cast aside by the advent of the Global Financial Crisis. As the crisis demanded governments to make decisive and timely actions quickly, the Rudd government has abandoned the evidence-based approach temporarily, and introduced policies based on Rudd's and the ALP's social democratic ideology. The Rudd government has introduced large spending initiatives including direct payment to low to middle-income earners and massive infrastructure programmes. These programmes, as well as the end of mining boom, erosion of tax base and massive expansion of so-called "middle class welfare" under the Howard government turned the federal budget from A \$20 billion surplus to A \$57.6 billion deficit. However, unique among advanced economies, Australia has so far managed to avoid plunging into recession.

The Australian Labor Party has long been seen as having an unfortunate habit of winning the office just when the World Wars were fought, the Great Depression started or the OPEC nations increased price of petroleum by four-fold. From the cursory look, the Rudd government may be seen as following this pattern as the Global Financial Crisis just wiped out serendipitous export earning from the mining boom. But in fact this is the blessing in disguise as it has enabled the Rudd government to implement programmes based on its long-held ideology of social democracy.