

Webinar Title

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In conversation with

Ebony Bennett
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Ebony Bennett [00:00:03] G'day everyone I can see our attendees streaming through the virtual door. Thanks so much for joining us today. I'm Ebony Bennett Deputy Director at the Australia Institute. And welcome to our fortnightly Poll Position where we give you the scoop on all the latest results from Guardian Essential poll. Thank you so much for joining us on a Wednesday instead of a Tuesday. I hope you all had a wonderful Easter long weekend. I attended a wedding, so I'm full of love and joy and happiness, which you can't always say in the middle of an election campaign. I'd like to begin by acknowledging that I live and work on Ngunnawal and Ngambri country here in Canberra and pay my respects to elders past and present and to the traditional owners here. Sovereignty was never ceded, and it always was and always will be Aboriginal land. Dates and times for Australia Institute webinars do vary, so head on over to Australia Institute dot org dot a--you to find all our upcoming webinars next week. We'll be talking about Taiwan with Hugh White, Linda Jakobsen, Linda Jakobsen sorry, Dr Yu-Jie Chen and our very own Alan Behm, and that's in partnership with Australian Foreign Affairs, The Journal. That's next Thursday. Just a few Zoom tips before we get going, you can type in questions for our panellists using the Q&A box, and you should be able to upvote other people's questions as well. A reminder to please keep being civil and on topic in the chat or will beat you out. And finally, a reminder this is a live event the wonders of live broadcasting and it is being recorded. The video will be available later today at Australia Institute Dot TV, and the audio will go up as an episode of The Guardian's Australian Politics podcast tomorrow morning. For those of you listening from the podcast, you can play along today with all the results from Essential Report Dot AU, so we are in the midst of the election campaign. Proper campaigning has turned increasingly negative, particularly in the last week, with scare campaigns about trans women and boat arrivals from the liberal side of politics and putting aged pensioners on the cashless welfare card and cuts to Medicare from the Labor side of politics. There have been some further internal liberal ructions that captains pick candidates installed by the New South Wales Liberals in several seats in the premier state. Greens leader Adam Bandt addressed the National Press Club last week about the need to put dental care into Medicare and for a moratorium on new gas and coal projects. While Clive Palmer's advertising blitz continues unabated and of course, in the background to all that war in Ukraine has shifted back to the eastern provinces of that country. The Solomon Islands have

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signed a security deal with China and COVID cases on the rise again, and flu is back. After a couple of years of us all being nicely socially distanced and not having many cases of flu. So it's all happening in Australian politics and here to unpack all of that and the latest results of the Guardian essential poll. Our regular panellists Katharine Murphy, political editor at Guardian Australia, and Pete Lewis, Executive Director of Essential Media Thank you, Catherine and Catherine. I'll come to you. Firstly, we are going to deep dive into the latest poll results very shortly because we're all interested in the campaign. But I did just want to come to that Solomon Islands security deal with China. It is the big news from the last 24 hours. What's happened and what should people know?

Katharine Murphy [00:03:35] Yeah. Well, there's basically this this deal, there's this mooted deal between China and the Solomon Islands has been signed, which is which is sort of sent well, I mean, shock waves is ridiculously overstated, but it's certainly it's a very significant development. And and it's been observed not only within the region, but around the world. The Americans clearly very worried about it and have engaged in a full court press over recent days to try and forestall this eventuality. Also at the the Morrison government was deployed during the election campaign again to try and forestall the official signing of this agreement. So pretty amazing circumstances, elections or not. But yeah, that has been the big news over the last 24 hours. Labour's going on the offensive this morning really hit the airwaves hard this morning to accuse the government of presiding over a, you know, a substantial regional security failure by allowing this set of circumstances to proceed on, you know, on on their watch. The government is sort of has. That issue basically dominated Scott Morrison's press conference on the hustings this morning. Morrison said, You know, Oh, well, look, we take sovereignty in the Pacific very seriously and we've done what we've done, everything we can. And yet, he added, but it's sort of, I guess, the danger for the government is he he's this sort of he's this development in the middle of the campaign at a time when the government wants to go off as being very manly men on national security issues and khaki issues in general. And you know this this getting this getting away from Australia, this development, getting away from Australia cuts across that message. It goes to competency and it goes to competency in matters of national security. The other thing, the other sort of barrage of questions the prime minister faced on the hustings this morning and and folks today was about nuclear powered submarines because the prime minister was on the hustings in Adelaide today, where building defence material is a very, very big political issue. He faced loads of questions about whether or not, you know, the promised build of these new submarines agreed under the August deal will ever occur in Australia. And again, you know, the prime minister had to hedge his answers because it's not clear, you know, to what extent there will be an Australian build associated with these subs. So look, this sort of summary is, you know, national security defence that it's the iframes the coalition likes the frames that the message frames. I mean that the Coalition has sought to impose in this contest, particularly in the in the prelude to the contest. You know, we've we've been more on the economy, I think since since we've been in the campaign proper. But still, they like security as a backdrop. They like security as it's like a big, you know, one of those sort of on the Coles ends with the, you know, with the hands that sort of point down, you know, where, where the where the guys on national security? Well, not so much. It would seem so anyway. So that's been the sort of key development, I think, substantively and politically over the last 24 hours.

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Ebony Bennett [00:07:30] Yeah, he really definitely refused to give any kind of guarantee about those submarine building jobs in that, you know? And did I hear Andrew Cornell? I thought it was ask a question about where the foreign minister was and what she had a fundraiser instead of being in the Pacific. Did he answer that one? I had to step away.

Katharine Murphy [00:07:52] Yeah. Yes. I can't remember actually, whether we got a direct answer to that question ed. But no, but this was one of the points raised, I suppose attack lines raised by Labor this morning that, as you know, as things were escalating in the Solomons towards this conclusion, Australia deployed, you know, the junior, the Junior Pacific spokesperson, rather than sending Marise Payne off to the region to sort of, you know, I guess, show as well, as well as tell if that makes sense, you know, you send someone saying it's shows that you're you're serious, you're taking this seriously. So, you know, yet that certainly has been one of the one of the lines deployed against Morrison over the last 24 hours. Whether or not we've done enough, whether or not we were, we, you know, we were onto it early enough, forceful enough in in trying to persuade the Solomons. This was not a good idea. And of course, then that plays back more generally into Morrison's relationship with the Pacific, which is, you know, the family as the prime minister likes to to refer to our Pacific neighbours. You know, it's all peace, love and harmony, except except when it's not. And there's been significant disagreements, obviously, between Australia and the Pacific on climate change. And now we've got, you know, this, this extremely serious development in the Solomons.

Ebony Bennett [00:09:18] Mm hmm. Hey, we're going to go now to the slides and the whole price, so to speak.

Pete Lewis [00:09:26] Oh, let's let's not. Let's not. Yeah, let's do it before we go in, I just I wonder if in our own little way, we've helped the save the government from itself with our polling because it was only a couple of months ago, we were putting out data that clearly showed the government wasn't the preferred party, managing the complex relationship with China and not saying it was a causal connexion. But they kind of stopped running it after our poll position, Catherine, so maybe would be a little bit more exposed today if we hadn't been sharing our wisdom.

Ebony Bennett [00:09:59] Well, you can hear it here first. People have it's the. Place to be.

Pete Lewis [00:10:04] Anyway, here's the score, but after the first week of the political contest 2022, the most interesting number here is the one in the middle is actually the undecideds. So as you guys know, we changed our formulation to keep an eye on people who haven't made up their minds yet. The top line there. And for those playing at home on the Guardian podcast, if you want to go to a central report dot com dot a year, you can play with all these numbers. But we've basically got a primary vote of 35 Labor 37 Coalition nine to the Greens on the left, 11 other independents. I won't say the right any more because I don't know quite how you describe tail independents, but seven per cent undecided, which washes out. I'm not even going to say using the old figures because we

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are really conscious of not pretending that one side is above 50 and therefore winning. It's pretty tight. The big shift, if you go to the next one over the first week of the campaign was a bit of a drop in Labor primary and only a point margin of error. But the interesting bit there was the undecideds back up and this is all statistical noise, but it went from what I thought was a very low five back up to seven. So again, there was a lot of colour and movement last week. There has been a couple of movements in Alberta's approuvés, as we say in a SEC. I don't think anyone can sugarcoat that it wasn't a less than perfect start to the campaign and people go, Oh, it's just MSM or mainstream media baiting things up, but mis stepping on a key economic figure on day one. Isn't great, and it did have an impact on people that are watching politics out of the corner of their eye, but it's the first week of a six week campaign and it ain't over. What you'll see here is that for all that and for all the boost tourism that's going on around Morrison and sections of the media as well. His disapproval, the still 48, which is really high. Forty four, undecideds. The other bit, if you go to the next slide, ebony, which I've done my column in today's guardian about is the big, big gender divide. Still have a look at this 51 per cent male approval. They like, you know, the bellicose Hibeas do 38 per cent female. Likewise, 51 per cent claim our disapproval. That's a pretty substantial gender split. But also look down the bottom there twice as many women are still to make up their mind as men. So. I think they have an election, an election that does see a change of government, I think is one where women have a decisive say in the final result. I'm not predicting what's happening down the track. I know that a lot of people are feeling really disconsolate after the first week of the campaign. But those numbers, they tell me, Ladies, there's an election to be won here, and there's a whole bunch of issues that I also talk about in terms of my guardian, where pace, where I don't think this government has much to say and for all, they're for all the minimalism of the Labor policy offering. There are some significant economic propositions that we'll talk about a bit later that that that potentially talk to this cohort recognising, of course, that you can't reduce women down to a single demographic any more than. Any other demographic

Ebony Bennett [00:13:28] group I might just stick here with approvals and go to the Anthony Albanese approval disapproval.

Pete Lewis [00:13:34] So the big change here? Yeah. Five per cent increase in disapproval over the months. That isn't just on the week, but we're in the field last week. Approval down south. He's at net neutral now. And again, if you do have a look at the next slide at the gender split there again, big numbers of female voters who have yet to form a view. So unlike Morrison, it's not like the gender profile of approval or disapproval are inverse. It's pretty consistent. It's pretty line ball for both. But look at that large number of undecided female voters when it comes to Albo again, which again says to me, there is an election to be won here.

Ebony Bennett [00:14:17] Yeah, because how those 23 per cent of undecided women break could be decisive depending on which electorate they they voted.

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Pete Lewis [00:14:27] Yeah. And again, just to go back to what we started doing at the after 2019, keeping our eye on the undecideds and the people that say they don't now and try to understand what's going on for them is probably the most important piece of analysis we can do.

Ebony Bennett [00:14:46] Yeah, Catherine, did you have any observations there about that gender split in particular that's playing out?

Katharine Murphy [00:14:54] Well, I think it is really interesting and and it does indicate, as Pete says, that there's there's you know, there's there is a significant cohort there that yet that are on the fence and are yet to decide. But from a sort of standing start proposition, the prime minister is less approved of by female voters than by male voters, which I don't think would surprise anybody given events of the last eight months or so. So yes, it will be. But but again, it's sort of it lines up, I suppose, with these field trips that we did in marginal seats just before the election was called properly. There is this. There is this sort of broad dissatisfaction with Morrison, but there's and there's interest in Labor. There's certainly interest in Labor. But it's but it's soft. It hasn't solidified yet. People haven't really locked in. Yes, yes, I'm I'm cranky enough with Morrison now to vote for a change as represented by the other major party, right? That's that's that's their it's all around the country. And also, I suppose, overlaid on the top of that is the interest in this election cycle in independents and micro-parties. I mean, all those slides don't speak to that exactly, except in the broad metrics, obviously. But I suppose our poll is very much sort of tracking alongside our improvised focus groups in marginal seats that we've been doing. You know, the sort of, you know, the the main poll metrics line up with what voters are saying at this point in time. So it is it is interesting. And obviously, yes. Look, it wasn't a great start for Anthony Albanese. You know, it wasn't people, as Pete says, can criticise media coverage and I completely understand why. I really do. But it's but that was, as Albanese himself knows, a very bad stumble out of the gate. And and then, of course, was picked up by the media cycle and amplified for the best part of 72 hours, which is why we see, you know, a corresponding impact in disapproval of Albanese after the first week on the campaign trail. But all of those other metrics indicate one. It's one it's close to. There are a number of voters still undecided. And as Pete says, watch watch the women because I think that data suggests that that they are going to play a significant role in determining the next government of Australia.

Ebony Bennett [00:17:59] Yeah, which might take us back now. It's going back to the beginning.

Pete Lewis [00:18:03] Doherty a higher rate now looks like that.

Ebony Bennett [00:18:08] So I just want to dive back in here because I know we do have a few questions at the end of the slides next. But what some of those cost of living issues and whatnot that yeah, you've got a question which is closer to your own at the federal government. Does this is there a collected time to give someone else to go and. Unsure.

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Pete Lewis [00:18:28] Yeah, these are this is one of those stuff. There are a couple of stock standard polling questions that are used in the lead up to election that isn't who is going to vote for, but is allegedly indicative. And I've put two of them side to side to sort of almost illustrate the two campaigns. So forty eight, thirty four for close view is that forty eight is exactly the same number as the Prime Minister's disapproval rating, I might add. So forty eight percent time to give someone else to go. Thirty four percent deserve to be re-elected, which is pretty close to the coalition primary vote and then 18 percent unsure. So if you were just looking at that figure, hey, we're on for a change here. People are a couple more points and that's it. But if you go to the next slide, which is where I take a bit of caution, this is another one that we traditionally ask, which is, do you think the country is heading in the right direction or the wrong direction? And it's a pretty similar break, isn't it? Forty six right direction. Thirty seven wrong direction. It was reminding me of the final week of 2019 when all the polls, including mine, was saying labour would win narrowly. But we asked the question How happy are you? And we got this really high level of happiness, and it made me wonder whether people were so happy they weren't going to change things too much. And again, if you are, this is really the Coalition's election campaign. If you think we're heading in the right direction, why would you change it? Labour's is it's time to get someone else to go, and the way those two intersect will ultimately be the, you know, in in communications. We call it a battle box. They're the two messages that are being put out by either side. One of them wins and one of them loses. And I think the election determines on which of those frames ends up holding together the but.

Katharine Murphy [00:20:14] It's also, you know, they are they are sort of questions testing the salience in essence and all of the two major campaign messages. It's time for a change versus better the devil you know, right? Like that's that is that's been the opening sort of sort of the election campaign. And we see we see this phenomenon right. So that because it's sort of stuck because it hasn't really shifted decisively in one direction or the other yet. And it's and that's because it's early days and in part explains the resort to negatives by by both sides. Because generally what we we get a barrage of negative sort of after the midpoint of an election campaign broadly. I mean, that's a that's sort of a bit of a truism, but that's what experience would tell me that in the opening couple of weeks of an election campaign, both sides try to, you know, put their nice smiley, positive face forward. And then as the campaign accelerates to decision day, that's when the negatives tend to wane. You know, the sort of it's like an offensive, a ground offensive where the Air

Pete Lewis [00:21:32] Force general offensive, you know,

Katharine Murphy [00:21:34] the air support comes in, which is the advertising usually negative? Yeah. And with that, Michael, come a bit quicker in this campaign, I think because of because of that. That's my theory, anyway.

Pete Lewis [00:21:47] So the other thing is, I think those two slides also explain the extent to which a lot of people would say Labor with a bit of a policy straitjacket on in there trying to say we're going to have a change, but accepting that the majority of people don't think the country is heading in the wrong direction now. The other thing is, look back to February, it was much more. We're much more

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positive. It's a shift of what, you know, nine, 10 per cent since where it was line ball. Right. Wrong direction back in fame. So yeah, it's it is actually also explaining why Labor would be making the safe change argument rather than a radical change argument. We all thought we were heading in the wrong direction. It might be a very different campaign.

Ebony Bennett [00:22:34] Now this next slide here would each of the following be higher under a labour or coalition government say labour and coalition kind of head to head on a range of economic impacts?

Pete Lewis [00:22:45] Yeah, look, I was interested here in taking it one step from better economic manager. Who or who do you trust to handle these issues? To actually look at specifically, do people think different economic inputs would be higher under labour or coalition? And what's really interesting to me is I on areas like debt, interest rates and unemployment, the Coalition are seen as being lower Labor higher, but not by a lot. But then on wages thirty seven, twenty three and cost of living. Thirty one, thirty three. That's really long ball, isn't it? And then a high level of saying it makes no difference. So again, it makes you wonder whether there is that salience in terms of. The. The coalition totally owning the economy the way that I think they would like to and the, you know, most political textbooks would say they do.

Ebony Bennett [00:23:50] Yeah, I'm padding most trusted to manage the care economy. Why did you put this one in?

Pete Lewis [00:23:58] Well, if you look at what Labour's policy prescription is around health, aged care, early learning slash child care and also the disability policy released yesterday, where labour is putting different policies forward, it tends to be in this area which going back to my earlier statement or observation around where women are, and I don't want to characterise these as a pink economy because I think it diminishes them. But these are sectors of the economy that often just get sort of brushed aside as being service lines which are actually really hefty parts. The economy, the health is a large part of the economy. Aged care is a failed sector of the economy where old people are not getting the care they deserve because of a failed business model. Early learning childcare is a potential engine room of building the next generation of kids being more ready for school, delivering more productivity for for Australia's future and the NDIS. The work we've done with per capita around, you know, disclosure. I'm running the campaign in that field, so I've got a bit of skin in the game there for every dollar spent on the NDIS at two point twenty five dividends. So I think looking at those elements is part of the economy is actually a bit of a political statement in itself. I notice the great Peter Hartcher write a very compelling article in the Fairfax last weekend. Looking at the mummy versus the daddy models of government. I I challenge that. I think part of Labour's challenge is to say this is an economic reform agenda. We are looking at areas of care that will deliver long term economic benefit. You can say a lot of things about us, but don't say we don't have an economic agenda because it's there. And if they roll that out properly and you look at those undecided female voters, that seems to me to be, you know, political gold.

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Ebony Bennett [00:25:54] Mm-Hmm. And certainly, I know during the pandemic, you know, an attendant economic crises. At the time, the Australia Institute did a lot of research showing that all of those types of industries that because they are service industries, are highly jobs intensive too, you know, and if you're investing money in them, there's a huge jobs dividend compared to, for example, in the gas fired recovery, which employs hardly anybody by comparison. But Catherine, coming back to you, that's really the challenge, isn't it like Labour's trying to set out that on these issues that you know, they're hoping people care about and where the wages are low, that they are much more trusted by the community to deliver in those aspects? Whereas the Coalition's kind of much more macro macro level will keep interest rates lower and harking back to those kinds of campaigns. Do you have a sense of which has got more traction at the moment?

Katharine Murphy [00:26:52] I think both are a bit nascent, but before I drilling to that point, I've suddenly thought for people listening to the show as opposed to what you get. My very helpful crossed arm gesture with fingers pointing in opposite directions will be completely, completely lost on the audio audience. A minute ago, where we were talking about those two points of two points of messaging going in opposite directions. I made a gesture across the arm gesture with my arms with fingers, body in opposite directions just to translate my own stupidity for the audience. Now, listen with

Pete Lewis [00:27:26] more tasto than that, Catherine crier.

Katharine Murphy [00:27:29] Oh, sorry, guys. Sorry guys. Seriously, anyway. And thank you to the visual audience for bearing with this. While a while we explain things in multiple formats in terms of which is which is taken off. Which is your question. You know, I care and your government cares, but says this is keep you home interest rates low. And I mean, and don't forget, voters at the moment are being bombarded by Clive Palmer ads saying that he'll fix interest rates at three per cent or something. Absolutely absurd. So. So that's sort of being bombarded through Palmer's television advertising messaging at the moment. So anyway, that's that's just an interesting point to run that in the back of your mind, because all of you know, Palmer's ad spend is still massive, and even if those are the issues that he's highlighting aren't really sort of at the centre of the of the major party campaign, they are still in the background.

Pete Lewis [00:28:30] Yeah, I think it's quite an interesting shift in the last couple of weeks, Palmer shifting to those interest rates and those messages because it starts feeling like he's leaning behind the. Narrative and just just to read it, and I'm sorry to do this, I don't think Labor runs, we care. Like I think we care is an invitation to say we're going to spend more money. I think it's more that we are going to take responsibility for sections of the economy that the government has let fall apart or just dressed like aged care and disability. And you know what? This one got this, and I think Labour's line that Morrison doesn't take responsibility fits into that.

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Katharine Murphy [00:29:09] Yes. No. No, no. It's entirely true and good to draw out that distinction that it is a responsibility point. But I also do think that it is an empathy point. And I think if anybody watched Anthony Albanese's press conference this morning and the way he constructed arguments around failures in aged care, it was certainly a responsibility point that the prime minister doesn't take responsibility for anything other than the photo ops. But it was also an empathy point. It's like, you know what the contrast he was trying to draw is? I'm real. I care. And that bloke, he's not real and he doesn't care. So it's both, in my view. I don't think it's all responsibility. I think empathy is there, too. And then that plays in some sort of, you know, the broader point, which is Abe's point, like, which economy are we debating right in this election campaign? Well, the reality is both, but I don't think that any any particular message, be it responsibility, stroke, empathy or interest rates has really accelerated. Yet in terms of the main the main campaign message message, largely because because there is on on, certainly on the government side, you know, the principal difference between 2019 and now with that with Morrison as a campaigner is not that Morrison is has become less able at campaigning. Morrison is extremely able in the campaign space. That's his strength. So what's happening in this campaign that did not happen in 2019 is that he is being shadowed by his own record. Everywhere he goes, he wants to just get back into his preferred message machine mode, where he's like a combine harvester rolling around the country, spouting out messages wrong. And he'll roll over anybody who's not, you know, like it's basically like one of those, you know, public affairs systems that you know, is rolling down the road attached to a heavy vehicle. That's that's what he wants to do. That's his strength. But he is being shadowed constantly, either by internal disunity and roving straight battles in different sort of areas of his own political party or by his record in government, which leads us back to the Solomons, which is where we started the conversation today.

Pete Lewis [00:31:41] And you get the sense that the certner uptick. I'm interrupting today. That's right. Do you get any sense? The Magicians given up his tricks, though, like how is the gallery just accepting his message just the way they were three years ago? Or are they starting to go, Hey, this is just an announcement. What's the fund? What's the basis for the announcement? Or are they just taking it all in still?

Katharine Murphy [00:32:02] Well, well, sorry. Do you want to get a word in that point?

Ebony Bennett [00:32:06] Sorry, I've got one, but we can come back to it. All right.

Katharine Murphy [00:32:09] I'll just I'll just engage with this at all. I will correct you slightly, Peter Lewis. It's like you asked me the gallery as if there's a hive mind, if there's a daily meeting out there in the corridor that we all tend to take notes. That doesn't happen contrary to popular myth. That doesn't happen in terms of what is what, what, what a report is doing on the campaign trail. Well, I think wait, one, if I'm being honest, was predominantly amplification of the key messages of the coalition campaign. I think week two towards the end of week one and week two, we started to settle into that dynamic that I flagged a minute ago that that he can't outrun the record. That's the point. It's sort of like Morrison, I think, got 72 hours of clear air to establish the terms of the election.

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And then and since then, there's been this crowding in of of his record or or culture fights or institutional fights within the Liberal Party. And so he's now getting basically he's getting that quite aggressively, I think, each day through through the travelling media pack. So anyway, but that's there's a long way to go. I do think, you know these these two issues substantively, you know, sort of the, you know, call it the consumer economy with interest rates and wages and other things. And caring economy, the two aren't the two aren't contending with one another. They're all part of the same bloody economy. It's all the same thing. I think broadly that's where the campaign will kind of orbit around, but it's just that it's been very messy because there's constant sort of disruptions. You know, either, you know, in the first week of his Albanese and the gaffe cycle and in and now it's Morrison and the records.

Ebony Bennett [00:34:08] Yeah. Well, I just wanted to come back to that idea of the record, which we've spoken about in a lot of previous ones and propositions and how, you know, the more you're in office, the more you accumulate lead in the saddlebag, so to speak of mistakes or calls that you got wrong. And I just did want to reflect on not just the the horse race and what people say they care about, but why they care about it. You know, we recorded a podcast to follow the money this week. We will last week, sorry, with an aged care worker and someone from the nurses union, Annie Butler from the nurses union, about aged care and the problems in there that the royal commission uncovered and made so huge. And, you know, talking to Irene, who works in residential aged care, and she was saying she goes on every shift and sometimes has to make a decision between go and help the person who needs more morphine while the person who's fallen out of bed or the person who is, you know, dying in another room and kind of need someone to sit there with them. And these are the kinds of decisions that nurses and aged care workers are kind of faced with every day in a system that's still not working. And then, you know, getting paid peanuts for the for the privilege. And yeah, I just thought with kind of reflecting on what's at the heart of some of these issues and why people care so much about them is because, you know, they're having very real world consequences for a lot of people who either work in the industry or have people in the caring economy in some way. It's worth reflecting on on that. I can see we've got more than 830 people on the line with us today. Thank you so much for joining us for pole position this week, and thank you for coming with us to a Wednesday after Easter. We're so glad that you could join us. We've just gone through a lot of the slides from an essential poll from this week, but I will be going shortly to Q&A from the audience. Thank you so much for your questions. Don't forget you can type them in for our panel. You can upvote other people's questions if you think they're onto something. And just a reminder to keep things civil in the chat. I'm going to go to the first question from Robert Dels, who says given that minor parties appalling nearly 30 percent. Is it fair that nearly all media is Albo and ScoMo? Although I note a lot of media is trying to avoid those nicknames. Albanese and Scott Morrison? Shouldn't they be getting one word each with minor parties getting a third of overall media coverage? Catherine, I'll come to you on this one.

Katharine Murphy [00:36:48] Well, look, I think it's it's a balance, and I actually think there's been quite a lot of coverage for independents and micro parties in this election cycle, because if you do any work at the moment out in in marginal seats, what you'll detect is that there is a there is a pervasive pox on both your houses environment out there at the present time, and there is an appetite for alternatives for independents and micros. So I think actually this probably being

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truthfully, I think there's probably been more reporting about some of these other sort of contenders, I guess, than they than they usually is. With that said, though, we we basically maintain close watch on the major party campaigns for the very simple and blindingly obvious reason that it is the major parties in Australia that form governments now at the end of this election campaign. It may be close enough that that this is a minority government of one stripe or another that is absolutely certainly possible, in which case we know, I know from experience. Having obviously covered the forty third party element. Then your reporting sort of telescope is like, you know, has just has to pan out much more widely to basically make sure that you're across all of the relevant political actors, because that's the way you follow deliberations and decisions, right? That's in terms of how the parliament actually works. So while you know, I get that there's all kinds of legit reasonable criticism about media coverage and you know, I'm also a media consumer as well as a practitioner, and I sit there. A kind of whack in the head on the desk as much as anybody else, but I actually think the coverage this time is probably proportionate based on where opinion polls tell us the contest is tracking and we do need to maintain the most focus on the major parties for that simple reason they are at this point in Australian political history. I mean, I don't know what will happen in five years or 10 years or 20 years, but right now governments are formed either by the Labour Party or by the liberal and national parties. And that is why there is the lion's share of focus is on the major party campaigns.

Ebony Bennett [00:39:22] Yeah, I will note that Adam Bandt was at the press club last week, the Greens leader and I think he maybe appeared on 7.30 that night as well, with some of the key issues for the Greens, who Adam Bandt pointed out, no matter what happens, a likely to be in balance of power in the Senate, either by themselves or perhaps with one or two other senators. So he certainly brought attention to that. But yeah, I guess Catherine, too, with so many independents and it's not just til independents in safe liberal states, there's a whole range of micro parties and independents running against the Nationals in regional seats as well. So it's kind of a very big phenomena, but hard to pick which one is going to get across the line.

Katharine Murphy [00:40:04] But that's the thing, and it'll be interesting because you know where where we wash up at the end of this campaign in terms of when we look back professionally and think, OK, what's our focus in broadly the right place, right? Where we looking at the right seats? Were we looking at the right campaigns and candidates and actors? You know, it's very hard to do these things perfectly in real time. It is incredibly hard to do it perfectly. And as it observes, it's not only the tools which are obviously getting a lot of focus, it's there are independents in seats all around the country that will will make the sort of end result in some of these seats. Very interesting. And there is the phenomenon obviously of of Palmer and and One Nation and the residual anti mandate, anti-vax sentiment that is still in in minority in this country, but around broad in places all around the country. So look, I think to the extent that we are able to new media wise with the with the resources that we have, I think we have actually attempted to have our eyes in as many places as possible. But you know, will we make the right calls about who you know, which was the right independent to watch? I mean, look, it's not a science, it's an art. You know, in terms of, you know, we could we could do it perfectly. In hindsight, we absolutely could. But when you're doing it in real time, you know, your eyes are not necessarily exactly in the right place. But anyway, we'll find out pretty interesting this this this campaign and how and how that results in terms of, you know, how

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the kind of independent miners micro party. Vote resolves as a thing in itself and how the preferences from that disaffection are distributed will will, you know, a bit like the women, how we were saying earlier bit like women will decide the outcome of the election. I think, you know, preference distributions from a lot of these non major party actors will also determine, you know, who the next government is. Yeah.

Ebony Bennett [00:42:16] Just sticking with that, I've got a couple of people in here asking about Adam Ban's performance at the National Press Club last week and kind of what the panel thought of that those who didn't watch it. I was actually there. And he covered obviously some of the Greens key concerns and tried to set out kind of how they would negotiate if they end up in a position of balance of power and helping to, I guess, pick who gets into government at the next election. So some of the key asks where to put dental and medical care? Mental health care into Medicare was one of the key things. Another one was a moratorium on kind of new gas and coal projects, as well as really highlighting, I guess, all the subsidies that are going into that as part of their focus on on climate change. Obviously, as the Greens Party, Catherine, did you have any other reflections on on their contribution, particularly given that they, you know, they're likely going to be in balance of power, at least in the Senate, if not in the lower House as well?

Katharine Murphy [00:43:18] Well, the Greens remain a really important political force in Australia. You know, it'll be really interesting to say. I know the Greens are doing some slightly different style of campaigning in some of the lower house seats that they're contesting, like in Brisbane and other places. It's just some interesting tweaks to their campaigning style on the ground in some of those progressive seat tussles. Then in terms of where the Greens end up in the Senate is pretty important to, you know, the complexion of the next Senate of Australia. And one of the, you know, I've certainly touched on this point, but you know, we'll probably do more on it as as we get closer. There has been this really interesting. I don't know how I'd describe it exactly, but sort of like risk planning. I describe it as that. In terms of Senate actors, there's the Greens, obviously, that have a large bloc in the Senate. There's also been concern, you know, we've seen Nick Xenophon return to the Senate race, for example. You know, I think I've said on the show before a north west Tasmania, my god, Jacqui Lambie is a phenomenon. It's very hard to describe how big she is to a national audience unless you've been down there and had a look. I think there is this interesting kind of risk management planning going on between, call it, the non one nation Senate forces. Right. There is a there is certainly a desire on the part of the Greens and others that One Nation don't end up with with the balance of power, if at all possible at the end of this election result. I think that in large part explains the return of Nick Xenophon to attempt to get himself a Senate spot that, you know, I think in Jacqui Lambie's mind, she thinks if I can, if I can get back, if my candidate preferred candidate can get back. Tammi Terrell in in Tasmania. If if Xenophon's back then, there's a bloc of votes that are not necessarily sort of populist right wing votes in the centre or a block of representation, I should say. So anyway, that's a bit of a stroll away from the Greens. But the point being the Greens remained an important force in Australian elections like we'll be after the election, as Abe says, they'll certainly be in, you know, you know, in a position of significant influence in the Senate depends slightly on who the other actors are in the Senate and the final numbers. But they, you know, they are very important. And also, we could be dealing with a minority government

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situation in the House of Representatives and I can't say Adam Bandt losing his seat. So I imagine, you know, we're in for a pretty interesting time on the other side.

Ebony Bennett [00:46:09] Yeah, I also thought it was interesting. He got asked a lot about the deal, independents. And, you know, did he see them as a threat to the Greens because they're on climate? Doherty took an interesting tack with kind of saying No welcome, please. More people come and talk about climate change policy. I thought that was an interesting way to tackle it. Sticking with climate change for a bit, the next question is from Ronald Smith. He talks about Angus Taylor using undisclosed data sources to claim the cost of energy will increase under Labor and pointing out that we still don't know where he got the documents that turned out to be fake back Clover Moore. Catherine, do you know how The Guardian is reporting this, at the very least?

Katharine Murphy [00:46:51] Oh, I'm sorry, I'm not laughing this. This is post-traumatic stress. Yeah, look, it's you know. Yes. Look, there was there was a what we call in our line of work. There was a drop meaning, you know, figures are supplied to the News Corp tabloid tabloids earlier in the week, basically putting question marks over Labour's climate change policy and the impact on power prices and other things. Look, obviously every everybody's policy is open to scrutiny. There have been some minor criticisms that I'm aware of or questions raised around the tax modelling that sits behind the Labor policy. At this point in time, I think some entirely credible experts have said I'm not entirely sure that's right. Exactly right. It's kind of ballpark, but what a anyway. So there has been a debate. Then all of a sudden, you know, sort of work that was construed as modelling, you know, entirely unclear by whom. Highly unlikely to be actual modelling turned up in the news. The News Corp tabloids at the start of the week, which was, you know, shock horror Labor will do terrible things to your power prices and, you know, kidnap what unicorns or, you know, whatever the line was. Anyway, it's sort of, yeah, look like my my wonderful colleague Adam Morton, who's our climate and environment editor, wrote a very good piece in the Guardian today if he's not seen it, basically pointing out that this is how laws get seated during election campaigns look compared to 2019. I'm not sure yet whether or not the seeding of that particular lie will be as problematic as you know, the lie of the last campaign. The Principal Lie, which was the war on the weekend, which was the campaign launched against Labour's entirely sensible vehicle emissions standard policy. Look, I don't know whether it'll have the same salience as it did in 2019, but for those of us who've been around this rodeo to bloody long, you know, you see these things you say this, this is this is the beginning of a misinformation campaign needs to be called out early and often. And if you want to read something erudite and to the point on the subject, have a look at what Adams published today. It's very much worth your time.

Ebony Bennett [00:49:15] Yes. And as a person who works with a lot of economists who are skilled at modelling, I would tell you don't believe anything unless you can see the actual modelling, say the assumptions that have gone into it and those kinds of things that you should definitely ask for that up front page. The next one might be for you. Alan Collegato has asked, What's the important issue that will make the undecided cohort get off the fence? Do we have any sense of what those undecided voters care about?

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Pete Lewis [00:49:45] Oh, look, I think that for Labor, health is still the the opportunity. They have not really announced a lot at the moment, and health is something that can be as broad or narrow as you want to make it. But that's obviously a sweet spot for for labour. In most elections, I think it's got to be more than just they going to rip apart Medicare. So we've got to see what rolls out and whether they can build momentum around that. But I'd go back to the. This is not really an issue this election at the moment, and I think if Labour allows it not to be an issue this election, they may end up regretting it. At the moment, it's a personality contest between a guy that people don't really like and a guy that people don't really know. Now, if Albo can fill himself in in a way that is makes him appear a safe pair of hands and that's the whole election, then you'll say amazing three year strategy, well executed. But there is also a world that says, you just it. There is a world that says this is an overcorrection from 2019, when Labor threw everything at it, and this time they're kind of not putting anything out there. So I don't think the cupboards tightly been emptied out on what they're going to roll out. I don't know. But I think that the onus is really on them to not just be enough to say we're not the other guy, but here are some things that we are going to be doing that will make your life better. And again, back to the early stats. It's not like the libs have a mortgage on better wages, cost of living or the other economic indicators, for that matter. Labour's well ahead. When you start talking about the caring economy, there are there are rich veins to be tapped. It's there to be one, and I feel there's a lot of people probably on this call. A lot of people on our side of politics that feel, Oh my God, here we go again. The polls are wrong and the, you know, Morrison's going to pull off another miracle now. Maybe he will, but nothing is preordained. What happens over the next four or five weeks as those disengaged voters who look at politics out of the corner of their? I know they've got to turn up to vote and some of them won't be making their call until they're stepping in that booth. How you create that wave of change is still the real challenge to change government, and it is still there to be won.

Ebony Bennett [00:52:21] And it's so important to remember for those of us, the three of us who are all had in, you know, in politics for the whole six weeks that there's a whole bunch of people that don't tune in right until until the last minute. And this one might also be for you. Have you looked at the Senate race in the state and instead a soldier in danger against the two strong independents? That being, I think, David Pocock and Kim Rubenstein grains also in that mix as well? Have you looked at the ACTU recently?

Pete Lewis [00:52:52] Look, we do a poll of a thousand the ACTU, for all its dynamism as a place, doesn't write a statistically valid mention in our poll, so I can't pretend we do. But I do know that particularly David Pocock is one of the tail. Independence is being seen as a real threat to what to do. Penny Wong call out chief would chuka the ZELJKO. So there is a real there is a real battle going on in the Senate. I just don't pretend to have any polling numbers on it.

Ebony Bennett [00:53:26] I had forgotten about that, Monica from. Well, just

Katharine Murphy [00:53:32] to be clear. Yeah, yeah.

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Ebony Bennett [00:53:34] Yeah, Senator, that's a soldier. The Pacific minister who was sent over to the Solomons to try and fix that issue. And I've got one question here I did want to touch on from Mel Smith and Kathryn. I'll send this one to you. What impact does the issue of trans women have on at a suburban voters? And why is Scott Morrison jumping on this and using this as a strategy? So for people who aren't following that, it's come up both in Tasmania with the Liberal candidate in Tasmania and for their current candidate in Warringah as well, highlighting the issue of trans women in women's sports and trying to make that into a big issue. Catherine, I can't really say that that's the hugest issue facing women's sports. I was just thinking back to the half a million that went to a rugby union group from the sports riot scandal for women's change rooms didn't even have a women's game. But yeah, why is the prime minister picking up on this busy targeting?

Katharine Murphy [00:54:38] Yeah, it's a very interesting question, and I think if we sort of work through this sequentially, the whole sort of culture war around trans is huge in in the United Kingdom and and in America. It hasn't really hit Australian shores yet. We're sort of, as usual, a lagging indicator in the culture wars. So. So I just want to say that as a bit of backdrop, it's it's a very it's the new culture war in democracies, not unlike Australia in terms of how it's being inserted in this contest will look. I say there is some commentary around about whether or not the prime minister is just already written off the tail sates, whether he's just assuming losses in all of those sites. Eddie using weaponizing trends as an effort to try and appeal to outer suburban voters or voters in late red seats. By that blue light blue seats like seats that are currently Labor that might switch to the coalition column. You know, I see this sort of, you know, being speculated around the place as if this is some grand strategy or master narrative. I'm not really sure that's right. I think obviously the Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, like John Howard before him, has a long term political project to try and convert as many traditional blue collar Labour voters to the Coalition's cause as he as he possibly can. I think that's quite important to this Prime Minister, as it was to John Howard. So I think, you know any anything that he can weaponize that speaks to that demographic. He will. That is his past form, although interestingly, in government, he tends to back off the culture wars. It's quite interesting, actually. But anyway, putting that to one side, I think this is a long term project for the prime minister in broad terms. But look, I don't think that this is some sort of master strategy that they've cooked up, that they're just willy nilly shrugging their shoulders and saying, Oh yes, actually, we can afford to drop five. Seats in this election campaign,

Pete Lewis [00:56:41] including it treasurer.

Katharine Murphy [00:56:43] Exactly because we're going to pick up, you know, these kind of blue leaning red seats. Look, I mean, maybe that's the dynamic that happens. Possibly it happens. But I think it's probably more accurate to describe this or characterise this as a found strategy, right? And by that, I mean something that you you develop along the way you discover, Oh God, we've got a problem here. I'm not sure we can reverse the problem and buy a problem here. I mean, a problem that the Liberal Party has man amongst a Center-Right progressive voters in metropolitan Australia, which is what which is basically the dynamic sitting on underneath these two contests. The government obviously has that problem. It hasn't. Despite Morrison dragging the nets across the line on net zero and other things hasn't been able to defuse that bomb that the Liberal Party has in the

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cities, they steal independents. I don't know if any of them will win, but they're certainly they're running very professional campaigns, and the government is certainly very worried about those sites. So it is possible that Morrison, you know who you will have excellent polling the libs. The libs always have very good polling and very good data. It's possible he's looking at the sort of map of the country at the moment and thinking, Oh God, maybe, maybe we can't get those seats back. We have to we have to lean in. We have to look for gains elsewhere, and we have to do that by whatever means necessary. I think that is possibly happening. But sort of, you know, and and sometimes demonstrably happening, I shouldn't say possibly because it is demonstrably happening. But again, if we sort of realise we're kind of coming up against time and this is such a good question, and I'm trying to do it justice in my answer, it's sort of, you know, but but there's there's a little tiny test of that, whether or not Morrison's completely written off his tail states or not. And that's this private member's bill by the liberal senator. Claire Chandler and Morrison dangled that out in the first week of the campaign has being something that he might have something to say about during the election campaign. All of his moderates went to put it politely Typekit and the prime minister then said, Oh no, I will have nothing more to say about that in the campaign. You see what I mean? I don't think we're looking at a master narrative here. I think we certainly are looking at a fact and strategy, whether or not it works. I guess we'll find out. Pete wants to say,

Pete Lewis [00:59:16] I just want to say, I just think we got to be careful of not always ascribing Morrison with this amazing power. It seems to be much more a stuff up than a conspiracy. He's got frontbenchers now trying to blame the New South Wales office, which Morrison has overtaken for a candidate they don't want to be seen with. This would be the ultimate Wales treasurer. This is the ultimate in scorched earth policy. I just think they scrambled for candidates. He doesn't want to now be backing down because there is the war within the war, which is the war in the New South Wales Liberal Party, which he is actually only like he's losing. There is another story that all this focus on Labor being in disarray. This is a government in absolute freefall and disarray, and we will only know which one of those narratives is right when we wake up the day after election.

Ebony Bennett [01:00:08] And again, just to reemphasize women's sport, probably not at greatest risk from trans women. And of course, we've seen the trans community more or less thrown under the bus for three separate policy wars now around women's sport at the moment and previously in the religious discrimination bill. So sending all my love out to the trans community, trans rights are human rights and hang in there, everyone. Hopefully, it doesn't get uglier than it already has. Thank you so much for joining us today. We had upwards of 800 people. We really appreciate your support for pole position every fortnight. Don't forget to subscribe to Australia Institute Dot TV and to our podcast. Follow the money. Head on over to Guardian Australia for their What's It Called? Australian Politics podcast can catch up on the stuff you had to duck out for any reason. Thank you to Kathryn and Pete, as always, for your stellar insights. You can find Katherine on Twitter at Murpharoo, Pete Lewis is at Peter Lewis EMC and you can find me at Ebony underscore Bennet with a double in Double T.. And please join us next week where we talk about Taiwan with Australian foreign affairs. That should be really great and head on over to a central report. For all of today's results, if you want to dig down a little bit deeper. Thanks so much for tuning in today. Stay safe out there. Stay safe on the hustings and we'll see you a fortnight. For now, thanks, everyone. Bye.

Transcript: Poll Position
Recorded live on 20th April 2022
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