

## Webinar Title

**Pete Lewis**

Executive Director, Essential Media

**Paul Karp**

Political Reporter, Guardian Australia

*In conversation with*

**Ebony Bennett**

Deputy Director at the Australia Institute

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**Ebony Bennett** [00:00:03] Gday everyone. I'm Ebony Bennett, deputy director at the Australia Institute. And welcome to Poll Position, the Fortnightly Show, where we dive into the politics and latest results from The Guardian Essential Poll. I'd like to begin by acknowledging that I live and work on Ngunnawal country and pay my respects to elders past and present. A reminder to head on over to Australia Institute dot org AEW for upcoming webinars and events, including our Revenue Summit, where we'll be holding an event in Parliament House on Thursday, the 6th of October, a couple of weeks before the budget, where we're going to try and put the issue of revenue back on the table in the lead up to the budget. It should be an excellent discussion. Speakers include Rod Sims, former chair of the ABC, a new speaker announced just this week. Bernie Fraser, former head or governor of the Reserve Bank of Australia, as well as Sally McManus, head of the ACTU. And many more speakers that you can find on our website. Don't forget to subscribe to our podcast. Follow the money where we explain big economic issues in plain English and also head on over and subscribe to the Guardian's Australian Politics podcast, where this audio should show up tomorrow morning. And for those of you listening on the pod from home, you should be out to find all the essential poll results today at a central report. Gqom dot aew a reminder that you can type in questions for our panel in the q&a box there and you can also upvote and comment on other people's questions as well, but will allow the best questions to come to the top there. And a reminder to please keep things civil and on topic in the chat. Well, we'll have to beat you out. Lastly, a reminder that this discussion is live and being recorded and you can find that up on Australia Institute TV later today. So obviously it's been a two weeks now, at least a veritable orgy of mourning for the passing of Queen Elizabeth, the second and the ascension of King Charles. The third happening at the same time. There's been wall to wall coverage across a lot of Australian TV networks. And apart from that, obviously we've got the federal budget coming up in just a few weeks. An announcement from the Treasurer today at a press conference that Paul, I might ask you to get into shortly. And of course, Parliament is sitting next week after being suspended due to the death of Queen Elizabeth, the second. So, as usual, it's all happening in politics. And to discuss all that and more, I'm delighted to introduce our panel today. Paul Karp, our special guest, political reporter at Guardian Australia. Paul is very kindly filling in for Sarah, who's feeling unwell today. Thanks for joining us, Paul. And Peter Lewis, executive director at Essential Media. He's going to take us through the poll results today. So,

Paul, if I can just come to you first. Obviously, quite a historic time in the news business, but lots of politics happening. House Guardian covered the death of Her Majesty.

**Paul Karp** [00:03:18] Well, we obviously have a huge presence in the UK and lots of reporters, so we've been very dutiful subjects reporting on the sadness of her passing and the proclamation of the new king. I think we've got a had a pretty good balance. If you look at our sort, the containers, Queen Elizabeth's the second's passing was was the top contain it for about the first three days. But then if you came to the site about four or five days after you get headlines and news extra and then plenty of queen content if you if you wanted it. But it was the it wasn't it was opt in. It wasn't, it wasn't wall to wall all the time.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:04:00] Yeah. And obviously there's a lot happening in politics apart from that, as I mentioned, the budget's not too far away. I believe you've just finished a press conference with the Treasurer. What did he have to say today?

**Paul Karp** [00:04:13] Yes. So Jim Chalmers and the finance minister Katy Gallagher have announced that the budget, the final outcome for the last year, 21, 22 is \$50 billion better than expected. They're trying to play down the significance of that by saying that although it's better than expected, a lot of the costs that we avoided in that year were going to be pushed into future years. So if PPA and other COVID vaccines spending on infrastructure slower than expected, that might be a saving one year, but it's going to be costs in future years. But there's also a significant underlying improvement in terms of terms of trade. So just getting better prices for for resources that we export and that that in. Racing black, the tax tag. So a bit of a boost to the budget, but it will still be in deficit by 30 billion that year.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:05:09] Yeah, and kind of just taking a big picture view of the last couple of weeks, how much has I guess the death of the monarch derailed things or to what extent that kind of things getting back to back to normal now in politics.

**Paul Karp** [00:05:25] Which she passed away on what was the Friday in between two sitting weeks and that that second sitting where I do include the introduction of the National Anti-Corruption Commission bill. And so last week when when Parliament was cancelled for a fortnight out of respect for Queen Elizabeth, the second there was a discussion about whether or not that was going to delay the National Anti-Corruption Commission, it delays the start of an enquiry by a few weeks. There are some crossbenchers like Jacqui Lambie who are happy to push consideration of the bill into 2023. So there was there was some some discussion of that, but but really we're going to come back for condolence motions on Friday. And then next week, Monday to Wednesday, we're going to make up the rest of the sitting days, including the introduction of that bill. So while while some Republicans might be scratching their head about, oh, what's this, cancelling parliament for two weeks business, it hasn't had a huge impact on on on the agenda of the government. It's just something that they needed to explain to slightly bemused Australians. Yeah.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:06:38] Yeah. And Pete, obviously you've polled a couple of questions in the Guardian essential poll this fortnight relating to Her Majesty's death. Shall we shall we dive in or do you want to give us a bit of a snapshot before we get into.

**Peter Lewis** [00:06:55] Oh, no, I think a couple is being kind. We've done blanket polling coverage, sort of like a blanket media coverage to try to work out what's going on here. And largely because it did drown everything out. So we thought it was an opportunity to gauge where Australians were in this moment in history. Look, the first thing I'm going to take you through are a number of different ladies and spoil it will go into the royal family just in terms of favourability ratings. Now, favorability is different to job. Normally it's job approval that we asked do you approve the job Albanese of the Prime Minister's doing or the Opposition's leader's doing? Some of the people we're talking about really have jobs, so we thought it was better to run a favourability rating on a couple of so our ladies, a couple of world leaders in the royal family. And so what we do is we and again if you're listening to this on the pod this this'll sound a bit esoteric but essential report dot com dot aew if you want to go and have a look at the slides for H later. We gave people effectively an 11 point scale. So 0201, two, three and negative four 56a neutral and then 789 ten a positive and then clustered those around positive negative neutral so much like we're finding with approval rating the net. Favourability rating for Anthony Albanese is pretty positive 46 positive 17% negative, 31 neutral. Peter Dutton Not so great. 23% positive, 33% negative with another 34 not having an opinion. Also 3% never heard of him. If you go to the next slides to world leaders, that sort of thing can start playing a bit of a game. So Joe Biden is at 30 positive, 28 negative. Vladimir Putin not doing so well in Australia though. It is interesting that eight 9% favourability 9% positive amongst Australian voters, 71% negative. But what is interesting to go to the next one. The Queen's writings are basically a mirror image of Vladimir Putin. The Queen is at 71% favourability, 8% negative. Charles 4421 positive to negative. So with a lot of people on the fence with Bonnie King, Charlie.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:09:29] Going to wait and see how the rain goes.

**Peter Lewis** [00:09:32] And then and then the next generation, a bit of difference there, too. So William is more popular than his dad, 63% negative, whereas Prince Harry, the second son syndrome, God knows what's going on there. I don't get the whole Meghan Markle thing. 4222 Positive, negative, but still, you know, double the positive to negative. So. I don't know what that is that it says that. I think one of the things that I think we assume is that there would almost be this rejection of King Charles from day one. And I know that part of the IRS playbook has been the queen's death is the moment to double down on a republic. I don't think that plot lines up. We can talk a bit more about the republic a bit later and we've gone deeper into that. So when we go back into the numbers, we can talk to that again. But yeah, in the midst of you call it an orgy of call it a bacchanalia of mourning. There is a reflected goodwill towards the succession of the crown. I just. I just think the whole thing's been played out without any sense of context whatsoever. And I suspect if they hadn't produced that Netflix series, it would have been even weirder.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:10:53] That's a good point. The role of the Crown and certainly.

**Peter Lewis** [00:10:56] One of the most watched series, I don't think anyone would have had any understanding or at least younger generations, if not for that series, start with a brilliant piece of propaganda with really good storytelling as well.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:11:09] Yeah, the favourability there. You know, politics is often, you know, a popularity contest poll, not so much with the monarchy as as as we were saying, we might get stuck into the Republican implications of this in a moment. But just to stick, I guess, with the pageantry for a second, I mean, there has been weeks of kind of all these formal ceremonies and the formal mourning and world leaders, you know, flying in for paying for the ceremony. But it does suck you in a bit. I was just saying before, you know, I'm a Republican, but I really I did sit down to watch the funeral last night. I'm a bit amazed that the TV stations at least haven't run out of things yet to talk about the Queen. But I guess there is plenty to talk about across a 70 year reign and.

**Peter Lewis** [00:12:06] About been using as an opportunity to finally get through Breaking Bad so that the.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:12:12] History that her reign has covered. It's quite something, Paul. We probably won't see something similar again in our lifetime, certainly.

**Paul Karp** [00:12:21] Yes. And, you know, the parade of world leaders and all the formalities, it is it is a spectacle. And it does it does have both the private significance of, you know, the family in mourning and subjects in mourning. But it also has that sort of. Yeah. Propaganda purpose of transmitting to people that there's this continuity and that, you know, one of the benefits of monarchy is that, you know, while there's no meritocratic process to pick them up, it's job applicants. You you at least know who the next person to have the job of monarch is going to be.

**Peter Lewis** [00:13:02] The crisis here in Spain is the bit that I think has been most key has been the the st if that sense of manufacturing consent, the entire story has has has imposed a national mood. And then you saw the pile on on someone like Maureen Farooqi when she questioned, you know, the British Empire's contribution to misery in her homeland and just the absolute that views cannot be held. And at this moment and I found that quite disquieting, I must say.

**Paul Karp** [00:13:37] In in fairness, it was it was mainly Pauline Hanson leading the attack against against Marine Farooqi. I mean Prime Minister Albanese has when he's been asked about oh well what, what do you think about First Nations people who focus much more on, you know, her role in the history of colonialism and so they don't experience mourning for her passing in the same way necessarily. I think he's been very respectful, but people have different opinions and different

feelings about it and that that and that that's fine. It's just that his job is to yeah. Reflect the Australian Government's you know, respect for her. He maybe has carved out a little less space for the Republican viewpoint. He's been quicker to shut, quicker to shut that down. But I can see how you would feel. But you know, there's this undertow where everyone must be everyone must be equally sad, you know, is the prevailing mood. Yeah.

**Peter Lewis** [00:14:44] Unless he's come up with the genius Republican play, which is when you've got a kid that asks for a lolly over and over again, you give them a whole pack until they're sick, second lollies, and then they want to move on to something else. So that is the other theory that Albo has just given everyone so much royalty that we can now sort of move beyond that.

**Paul Karp** [00:15:03] Well, I think that the promise was in this term to do voice to Parliament for first nations Australian to achieve constitutional recognition. So in, in, in many ways he he didn't have a dilemma, you know when he discovered at the Queen had passed about whether or not to hit the big Republic button or not. There was no dilemma there because it abide by the own terms that he'd set out. And the quickest he was going to move onto that debate is going to be in the next term of government. And so that made that made, you know, applying the respectful you know, now is not the time role actually quite easy for him to do because he had this more important priority that he promised promised first to point to.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:15:52] Yeah. Having said that, it has really raised the issue of whether or not Australia should be a republic. Once again, as Paul mentioned, really the chief argument for the monarchy seems to be continuity and, you know, stability. I'm not sure how persuasive that is to people, but you are looking into this question of whether or not we should be a republic in the polling or.

**Peter Lewis** [00:16:25] Based on the media coverage. There are 10% of Australians who would like a little bit more of what we'd been getting over the last two weeks. That's my take out from that table we've got.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:16:37] All right. So Australia becoming our.

**Peter Lewis** [00:16:39] Yeah I said this is obviously a long term trend line. There's actually been a dip up in the people that oppose our republic since June three points, which is kind of on one level margin of error. But there is from those numbers, it has not kickstarted a Republican edge. And the backlash that we might be feeling is being felt more broadly. Go to the next one that's showing what what has shifted is. And we haven't trendline that so strongly support and strongly oppose. Those numbers have both gone up in the last cycle. Fewer people in the somewhat support somewhat opposed. So for those that are listing on the pot apologies. So we've now got 22% who are strongly in opposition, 21% who are in strongly support. And so that's a more polarised debate than it was

before the Queen's passing. Hmm. And then Charlie. 5050. We didn't give it no option. We force people to make a choice and they've gone down the line. If you go to the next one, what's interesting here is the age difference. So. If are 18 to 34, you are 6832 saying no child. The third should not be Australia's head of head of state. If you are over 55, it's almost universal 6436 thinking the child should be in the big state. And I think this is this is the last one. So guess what? Young people wanted a public holiday, much more than retired people. 61% support the public holiday. 60% think it's alright for our PM to go over for the big show and 38% were okay with the suspension. I reckon that's enough for a public. A few people in the chat are saying we thought we'd come here to get away from it. Can I just say one more thing on that though, that I think these numbers say that they sense that there's a natural progression towards a republic are problematic. There isn't that groundswell in The Guardian today. I suggest we probably if we if you want to get enthusiasm around constitutional reform, we have the voice is the first step of that process. But it should really be a broader discussion about the way democracy is working in the 21st century. We're seeing Republican models of 18th century government failing at the moment, that the system isn't working the way most people would like to see it work. And I just to reference Jaime Susskind, who's a UK lawyer who recently put out a book at Digital Republic. And I just think to frame what is a Republican debate. He writes, In essence, to be a Republican is to oppose social structures that enable one group to exercise unaccountable power, also known as domination over others. They reject the institutions of absolute monarchy, not just the flaws of particular kings. They fight for tenants rights, not just for more beneficent landlords. They demand legal protections at work, not just kind of bosses. So if we're going to have a public debate, let's not just have a minimalist one because it ain't going to win. And if people want constitutional reform, I think there needs to be more ambition in it. Yeah. That's it for me. I'm off my high horse. I'm happy. Not to mention the republic again for the rest of the hour.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:20:06] No, but I do think, Paul, you were right about the role that the voice plays. That's really the the primary question of constitutional amendment that Australia is looking at. It's what the Prime Minister has prioritised as well. And I think this really kind of showed up that actually that is the more urgent question for Australia to deal with.

**Paul Karp** [00:20:31] But but similar concerns about whether or not, you know, the case for change has been made there as well, in that conservatives are saying that they think that Albanese's in danger of a of not achieving the voice because of not giving enough detail and not giving people enough enough reason to vote for it. So there's going to have to be a big a big campaign to explain that change to people and to to generate excitement. As a progressive person, I'm excited about that opportunity. But it's there's a lot of people that are going to be voting for something that are not all directly affected by it. It's not like same sex marriage where, you know, it was the message was to vote for, you know, your neighbours and your friends. I mean if, if hopefully people do know enough Indigenous Australians that they recognise that that would be an important thing for them to be included in the Constitution and a voice to Parliament for a lot of people. It's a bit more abstract than that and they don't they don't know what it means yet.



**Ebony Bennett** [00:21:45] Yeah, yeah. A long way to go in that debate. Certainly coming back to Parliament next week and the Federal Integrity Bill is scheduled to come into parliament. How is that shaping up? I know the in a lot of independents have been concerned about whether or not it's going to be strong enough. And there's still quite a lot of support in the parliament for it. How's that debate looking to shape up next week, do you think?

**Paul Karp** [00:22:16] Well, we're definitely going to have a debate about toughening the bill up because the Greens have some ideas about including political donors and not just third parties that contract with government. Helen Haines wants stronger whistleblower protections. So we're definitely going to see an argument about toughening it up. But we might also see an easier pathway for the government to pass it with the Coalition support, which would make all of those debates about amendments pretty, pretty short. So we'll get a month or two for a parliamentary enquiry. A joint committee is going to examine that bill and then, you know, there's still aiming to have a vote in the November sitting of Parliament to try and pass it this year. So there's a few months for the debate to run for the crossbench and the Greens to make the case. It should be tough. But just be interesting to see what Peter Dutton does in terms of his four most policies. He's a Tony Abbott style Opposition Leader of oppose everything. But this is one of the few things that he said, yep, we should do it, you know. Helen Hunt I like the Helen Haines model. So this is something that could conceivably pass with Labour and the Coalition on the same side.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:23:33] Yeah. I mean, moving on to the issue of climate change, just briefly, there's been a bit more discussion about Labour's safeguard mechanism in the last couple of weeks, making mooted changes to that. Also, while carbon offsets are kind of under review and a few questions around the timing of all that and if that all makes sense. This is the Parliament with the climate super majority. We are kind of headed towards the next cop in November. How much is climate going to be on the agenda in the next week of Parliament and I guess as we head into the end of the year?

**Paul Karp** [00:24:14] Well Labour's got their 43% emissions reduction bill through, but the Greens have signalled that they're going to use the review of the safeguard mechanism to argue that there shouldn't be any more fossil fuel projects. So I think it will continue to be a debate as the electric vehicle tax changes that are still before Parliament. There are fossil fuel subsidies. Today, my colleague Anne Morton had a story that there's 1.9 billion subsidies that Scott Morrison promised for the gas fired recovery that, you know, haven't been formally committed yet by the Australian Government. So they could be scrapped in the October budget. So, you know, getting the target legislated is one thing, but there are going to be continual climate debates through this term of Parliament.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:25:08] Yeah, I'm just a reminder, you can type in questions for our panel today in the Q&A box, and I'll come to those shortly. But Pete, I just wanted to get a reflection from you. We're a few months into a Prime Minister Anthony Albanese government now and a few curveballs

like the death of the Queen. You've been tracking approval, but how overall do you think he's travelling? And, you know, it's navigating these things as they come at his his government.

**Peter Lewis** [00:25:42] Well, creating a long term government is a marathon, not a sprint. But you'd have to say the government's found its stride. I think it's a model of government, of not trying to manufacture division for short term politics, but take heat out of issues for long term objectives has worked really well. The optics of the jobs summit, which horrific. As Paul said, his handling of the of the queen's passing has quelled any sense that he was going to play politics with this. I contraire. I think there's a few minefields coming. I think the voice will be really challenging and he's really staked a lot on that. And I still think that. This stage three tax issue is just the landmine that's there. I'm going to do some polling over the next few weeks because I don't think we're describing what's actually going on properly either. This is a flattening of Australia's progressive tax system, which will be a long term change to our system. And I totally get why the Government didn't take that as a line in the ground before the election. But gee, it's a hard thing to work through. It's almost, I think, as we've said here before, a magic pudding now. Anything we don't have enough money for that, Will. Why are we flattening the tax base? And it's not just about tax cuts for the rich. It's a restructuring of our system to look very different to the Australia we've had for over 100 years.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:27:28] Yeah. Paul, and your reflections on stage three tax cuts before we go to questions from the audience?

**Paul Karp** [00:27:33] I think you can see the change in rhetoric and the beginning of repositioning in that they've now they've now stopped making any arguments that they're that they're good for their own sake. The only argument that will make for it is that we promised we would do it. And to try and restore trust, we want to keep our promises. But they have. They have started talking about, you know, the October budget is going to be a bread and butter budget. But in future budgets, we're going to have to have a conversation about what quality of services Australians expect and you know, the revenue base to pay for that. Phil Lowe was making the point that it's bizarre that with unemployment as low as it is in terms of trade, as favourable as they are, that we still are in deficit. So I do think that there is plenty of time before the next budget to have a conversation about it. It's just where they, Anthony Albanese, Menzies personal disposition is that you must die in a ditch over every, every promise taken to an election.

**Peter Lewis** [00:28:42] And are we in a world. And it's a really good point, isn't it? Do you maintain trust in government by flattening out progressive tax system, or do you have to break a promise to restore trust in government? That will be interesting to think for.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:28:58] Yeah, and certainly a long way to go as you've both said that that element where any time we can't afford something, it's just sitting there as as a reason and something that people can say makes sense or doesn't make sense anymore, I guess. Not that we ever thought it did at the time. Certainly economically.



**Paul Karp** [00:29:21] I think Jacqui Lambie has reversed her position from voting for the tax cuts to now being one of the ones calling for them to go. Has there been any blowback to her? Has she suffered any huge hit to her reputation? If anything, I'm seeing more people angry at her that she voted for them in the first place and very few people upset at her that she's now changed her mind in favour of scrapping them. So if that were to play out, if the government were to do it, then then they could survive the opprobrium of people earning, you know, \$200,000 plus quite, quite easily. But yeah, people have a different standard for crossbench senators than they do for government, and it would be a betrayal.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:30:02] That's true, too. All right. Going now to questions from the audience. The first one I've got here is from John Knox. He's picking up on the subsidies that you were just mentioning, Paul. He says we need to reduce emissions fast, but we also have a budget emergency. Surely removing fossil fuel subsidies could help with both of these. Are we likely to see any movement or reduction to fossil fuel subsidies in the upcoming budget? Just going to a little bit more detail. You were talking there's a story today about \$1,000,000,000 kind of promised that hadn't been actually spent yet or offered yet. Do you think it's likely that we'll see anything like that in the budget?

**Paul Karp** [00:30:42] PAUL Well, so that that funding was for things like road upgrades for the gas industry and carbon capture and storage. I think that there is some leeway for the government to to say that, you know, these are boondoggles that won't actually work or that will make the problem worse. But then their own position is not to oppose new fossil fuel projects. So for them, it's going to be difficult to calibrate what what forms of government support can they successfully characterise as being, you know, pork barrelling and favours for one sector and for a particular region and which which forms of. Subsidy. Are they going to be accused of, you know, hastening the destruction of, you know, mining and energy jobs if they if they get rid of. So it's quite a difficult consideration for them.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:31:50] Yeah, I paint a little bit like the stage three tax cuts, you know, fossil fuel subsidies. While the government is so focussed on reducing emissions, it's money being spent on making the problem worse, essentially on making fossil fuels cheaper. Does that catch up with the government at any point, do you think, in the in the next kind of I don't know, across the next two budgets, I guess.

**Peter Lewis** [00:32:17] Yeah. I think the context for the fossil fuel rebates and also for a lot of its support for the mining sector is a little bit different than the fast impact on tax cuts. I think there is a legitimate piece that says that the transition from a fossil fuel economy needs to be managed in a way that maintains confidence and particularly of the mining communities and they the non grain inner city electorates and I'm not saying that they should be in forever, but to be removed there would need to be a really clearly articulated problem solution narrative, which is not simply a celebration of attacking fossil fuels, which I think sometimes those of us who want to see action on

climate fall into that, it's that that measure is that attack. The fossil fuel industries ought to be celebrated rather than to be seen as part of a transition that needs to be sensitively managed.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:33:29] Yeah, the next question I've got is from head the decrees. He says how might the failings of republics today like the USA, India, France, etc. be avoided by an Australian Republican movement? It's alarming. And while the Republic aspect isn't a precursor to the rise of or for authoritarianism, it is what most people see as a failure. Woody What's your response to that? Pete?

**Peter Lewis** [00:33:57] Look, I think it's a really good point, and it's the real change in atmosphere from 1999 when the last referendum failed, which was a very minimalist, do things as normal model. I go back to the point I know since then, obviously we've seen the rise of Trump. We've seen a number of other Republican systems where the system is effectively being gamed by populist leaders who then have this mandate as individuals to exercise power beyond what was probably comprehended originally. So this is why I think that if we are going to have a debate about a republic, we need to define what a 21st republic should look like. And I'm really interested in if we are going to have this debate. It is not just whether our titular head of state is called the Governor-General or the President or whether it's elected from a small group of or appointed by the Parliament. But what makes the Republic is the voice of the people, and how do we create a legitimate voice for people in these democracies that were really set up at the tail end of the 19th century, emerging from Republican movements that were totally reflective of their time. But the challenges they've got now big tech, global capital, geo political shifts that undermine the value of a nation state and a disengaged populist are a very different set of challenges. But if we could run and the nature of Republicanism is to ask the question, how do we put power back in the hands of the people? I'd argue a voice to Parliament is a Republican discussion. Citizen initiated referenda, deliberative democracy. There's a whole lot of models that we should be talking about rather than just sort of locking in the current model with a different name on the coat of arms. So I reckon the fact that we're not going to rush to a referendum in this term of government I think is a good thing. But it does strike me that having an have an experience of Republican discussion about the sort of democracy we want because the numbers, if you compare the numbers that support a republic, which I think is 43, 32 or something, with the number of people that want integrity in government, which is like 80 to nothing, like there is a sweet spot there and I just think that I do there's some terrific people working in the room, but I feel like they've just been sitting on the 99 referendum and getting ready to roll it out again, rather than recognising that the best part of two and a half decades have passed in the. The world is a very different place.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:36:36] Yeah. Paul, what are your reflections on that? Points raised a couple of really good points there. Certainly, I think Donald Trump has done a lot to highlight the fact that democracies are very fragile by their nature. They don't just chug along healthily by themselves. They are subject to bad faith actors and and other movements. Do you think that's a lesson that Republican movement has taken on or that Australia needs to, I think think about more seriously?

**Paul Karp** [00:37:09] Well, the lesson from the 1999 referendum is that you can't allow a split on the preference for the model of republic to control the whole exercise. And so there are there are risks if, you know, if a leader were to say that. I think the direct election model would be more popular than the government appointing them, that there'd be risks that you'd lose some some votes from people that just want the most stability is possible and just rename the Governor-General to the President and keep the same system without direct election. There have been different suggestions for how to solve this over the years. I remember Bill Shorten in Opposition was suggesting first to have a plebiscite on the principle of whether or not we should have an Australian head of state and then if that gets majority support, to then winnow it down to one model to put to the people in a referendum to change the constitution. I think we should probably be considering a parliamentary republic model where like the nominee would have to pass both houses of Parliament. That way, you know, the popular will rather than just what the Prime Minister in the Cabinet is reflected. But it's a choice being made through their representatives rather than a direct election, which then creates the conflicting mandates and the the sort of problems that you might experience that you've described.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:38:37] Yeah. And presumably we've got the check and balance of the Senate in that type of a process where it's not necessarily dominated by the major party who's in government. The next question that I've got is about from Allison. Allison. There's a lot of craziness in your surname there, and I'm not confident I'm going to pronounce it correctly. Coca-Colas. I hope I've got it correct. Is there anything happening from the Australian Government in relation to getting Julian Assange out of Belmarsh and back to Australia up? Is that come up while the Prime Minister's headed to the UK?

**Paul Karp** [00:39:20] Well, I know that they've said that they're working on it behind closed doors, that they don't engage in megaphone diplomacy. So you wouldn't expect Anthony Albanese to call a press conference before boarding the plane saying that he's going to shirtfront Liz Truss to get Julian Assange back. And I understand this is being complicated by the difference of opinion about whether or not it's practically better to ask for him to come to Australia now or whether he should accept extradition and then we should ask for him to be brought from the US. So so it's a difficult question. I don't personally know whether he raised it with Liz Truss, but I wouldn't assume that just because he hasn't said so publicly that it's not happening behind the scenes. But that's tough for people who are rightly wanting to keep that in the public debate and keep, you know, put their feet to the fire about why they're not doing well.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:40:19] Yeah. And paint any thoughts on Julian Assange?

**Peter Lewis** [00:40:25] It's been interesting to gauge attitudes to Assange over over a decade. And I do think that we've reached a point where Australians want to see their government acting and that hasn't always been the case. I'll pull up the numbers and put them in a chat if I can find them as we're talking.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:40:43] Yeah, thank you. And I think apart from the fact that he's an Australian citizen, the issues for freedom of the press that it raises are so alarming because yeah, particularly in the context of Australia where we've seen, you know, newsrooms being raided in recent years, prosecution of whistleblowers and all of that kind of thing. With a new government, you would hope to see stronger advocacy for his release as part of, I guess, repairing some of those attacks on freedom of the press. I do know that I think Jennifer Robinson, Julian Assange's lawyer based in the UK, is addressing the Press Club later this year. And for those interested in the voice to parliament and that debate coming up. On the national agenda on the 9th of November. Megan Davis, Professor Megan Davis and Pat Anderson will be also addressing the Press Club on the issue of the O'Leary statement to the Air and the voice to Parliament. They're accepting the 2020 122 Sydney peace prize for the O'Leary statement of the hat. So you can check that out if you're interested. And tickets are on sale now for both of those. The next question that I've got is about the budget from a Jaap who says the budget numbers discussed by Paul are extremely interesting. Do you think this will help the approval rating of Labour or the Coalition? And another person, Alan, asking about predictions for the budget. Key features to look out for. Paul what should people be looking for in the budget?

**Paul Karp** [00:42:25] I think I think people do care about smaller deficits and getting back to getting back to surplus. But it's not it's not going to happen for for a long a long while yet. But a lot a lot of these things are not the product of conscious government decisions. So commodity prices being higher. Isn't infrastructure projects being delayed? So spending happens in a light of years? You know, a lot of that was sort of stuff that's taken out of their hands. So I don't think they'll be I don't I don't think they'll reward the coalition or Labour specifically for it. I think people are going to be paying more attention to what conscious decisions are made in the October budget. Like what? What did I rule is waste and rorts and take out of the budget? And is there any additional cost of living relief in addition to the childcare package and the cheaper medicines that they put into it? I think those are the decisions people will be judging the government on.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:43:32] And just to follow up on that, Jim Chalmers, I think has kind of been alluding to they're saying this as as a true budget strategy, more or less, that there's key things for October. But May the May budget isn't that far away. Yeah. Anything to kind of say across those things. They're obviously this one kind of focussing on delivering budget promises. But in terms of like inflation, cost of living, those types of things, how much is he setting this up as kind of, yeah, that to budget strategy.

**Paul Karp** [00:44:06] Well, I think you and I. I think they want to contain people's expectations because anything that helps with cost of living is pumping more money into the economy. And the biggest problem we have at the moment is is inflation. And they don't want to give the Reserve Bank more reason to worry about that and more reason to lift to lift interest rates so that that they're allowing the petrol excise halving to expire. And so that's going to be 23 cent tax going going back on back on petrol. So I don't think they're going to be pumping lots of money into the economy. I think they're looking for for programmes to kill, to make savings and say that they're wasting roads. They've said the next stage is we're going to have to have a conversation about funding services and

that will be for next year and for the rest of the term. Hopefully by then, hopefully by then inflation is under control. So not every not every spending measure is going to be causing concern of adding to inflation. And they have more more latitude to move.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:45:20] Pat, do you think inflation is the key danger for the Albanese Government? Like what? What, what will they be looking to get out of this budget do you think?

**Peter Lewis** [00:45:28] Yeah, like inflation. Go straight to the kitchen table on cost of living. I'm interested in the budget on the extent to which resource exports are still underpinning the budget, the degree to which for a diversified economy or still just a, you know, a big pit. I think the second thing I'll be looking at is whether the costs of the NDIS stabilised. I think there's a third piece on hospitals and the amount of money the Government is putting into hospital funding. And then of course there's the rollout of the Government's election promises. I don't think this is the budget and to Paul's point, this is almost the financial statement as opposed to the budget of what the economy is inherited. As we know, traditionally you discover the black hole. I think this time the black hole is pretty real and unsurprising to anyone. But I don't think you're going to be seeing lots of the sort of one off checks or payments like I don't think we're at the part of the cycle where we're trying to to throw those sweeteners. But early learning hospitals, disability aged care, like there's a pretty full funding agenda from services, which is again, maybe that two step. We talk about what we can afford with this budget and then we talk about what we need to afford into 2023.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:47:00] Yeah. And as I said, the Australia Institute is going to be looking to kind of I guess just acknowledge that there are growing public spending needs that everyone is aware of. You know, certainly the Opposition isn't out there advocating for cuts to the NDIS or cuts to aged care funding or any of any of that. So yeah, I think establishing the case that the public does expect any level of services from the government, you know, certainly since the pandemic at least, there's much more comfort I think with the government intervening and providing those kinds of services. And so then yeah, the revenue question comes up again. I did want to ask about the next question from Paul Stevens. Pete, I might throw this one to you first. He says, Do you think the opposition's apparent strategy to just say no if, for example, on the climate legislation and the decision to boycott the Jobs and Skills Summit is a politically clever one.

**Peter Lewis** [00:48:07] I think the temptation of a first term opposition, even after what was quite a crushing defeat, is to still act like you were robbed. And that in both saying no to everything, it took Labour a couple of terms to build nuance into their model of opposition. If we're honest with ourselves, it's hard. It's hard to be in opposition when you're used to having the power and then you've just got no resources. If you haven't thought of the really interesting story that I haven't even done something like, they've been started doing their election review. On what actually went wrong after 2019. Six months in, there was a very clear strategy of what Labour needed to do when.

**Paul Karp** [00:48:53] They delaying its release, but they are definitely working on it.

**Peter Lewis** [00:48:57] A few.

**Paul Karp** [00:49:01] They haven't interviewed Morrison yet, but they are. They have been receiving submissions and doing other interviews. So. So it is being worked on. It's just delaying the release until after the Victorian election.

**Peter Lewis** [00:49:13] Thanks. Thanks. That's that does make a bit more sense. But you know, they're a rabble, they've lost one of their points of gravity, which was their their moderate wing. What can they do apart? There's two things you can do at this point. Just do the reflex of saying no and at least stay in the cycle or sit back and let the government establish itself. And I don't blame them for trying to create some friction in the system. I think, you know, it's it's unsurprising.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:49:45] Yeah. Paul, any other any other comments on that? I guess before we move on to the next question.

**Paul Karp** [00:49:53] I only did that the 90% just say no, but that there might be a few things that I can agree with the Government on. But certainly playing hardball about the war by Peter Dutton was suggesting that the Minerals Council be able to wage the voiced might result in vetoing agreements between local Indigenous groups and resource companies, which is not something that it does. So they're certainly playing hardball on some of those big issues. Yes.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:50:20] Yeah. And in terms of that review being delayed, how are things internally at the moment for the opposition with, as Peter said, so much of the moderate faction gone and certainly Peter Dutton seemed to make a few early captain's calls, have things kind of calmed down or do you expect them to kind of be inflamed again once we get that review of the election?

**Paul Karp** [00:50:49] Well, yeah, he's made Captain's calls about the climate target and he tried to settle the moderate wing by saying, oh, well, we might have a higher target next time and we'll review it. But while they're reviewing it, including, you know, whether to have nuclear power, Dutton's out giving speeches saying, you know, nuclear power is great. I just think that the moderate faction is too small for there to be any real consequence for for Dutton when he when he engages in that sort of behaviour and you know when they are in government and they only had a few say majority for, for two terms, it only took a few people to kick up a fuss in the conservative wing to bring Turnbull down. It didn't take many people to threaten to dissent, to to achieve a different internal outcome, but they don't really have that dynamic information. And there are so few moderates left that what would what would they what would they do to to give Dutton a headache, go on afternoon briefing in a sitting way. I mean.



**Peter Lewis** [00:51:57] Can I just like the other point that this opposition doesn't even have the capacity to oppose. They they cannot they do not have a majority or any workable why really blocking things in the Senate? Labour needs to work with a number of crossbenchers at the Greens, but there isn't a real trigger there and I, you know, they're well short of the line in the Lower House.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:52:25] Yeah, that's a good point.

**Paul Karp** [00:52:27] Yeah, I think they want to just oppose things and then hope that the Greens are at such a high price for Labour that Labour's dragged to the left or or the Greens and you know do a CPRS and join with the Coalition in blocking something. I think they're, they're just going to keep opposing things in the Senate and hope that that sort of dynamic develops of collapsing cooperation between the progressive parties.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:52:58] Before we go poll, there's a lot of crossbenchers as you mentioned, as well as the Greens being much bigger in numbers as well across both the Lower House and the Upper House. I think at the perhaps at the last poll position we talked about that housing policies from Max Chandler make that in the Greens, putting the focus back on renters just to stick with I guess the cost of living issues that we've been raising in the context of the budget. I know housing has been raised as an issue by employers with people who are available to work. But. Accommodation or somewhere to live near where they need to work, particularly in regional areas. How much is housing shaping up to be a big issue for this government, whether or not it's it's a big issue in the budget?

**Paul Karp** [00:53:52] Oh, absolutely, Leigh. They they've made the promise to create tens of thousands of social and affordable housing where, you know, it's more like hundreds of thousands or millions that are needed. And they are working to try and leverage more money from superannuation to to invest in in housing construction. But but really it's, it's such a difficult problem because a lot of the issue is land supply and zoning rules at the state level. A lot of it is tax measures that they think contributed to them losing the 2019 election at the federal level, like negative gearing, capital gains tax. So, you know, there aren't there aren't a whole lot of levers that they feel comfortable pulling, basically, even though everyone agrees that we need more housing to prevent rental stress and homelessness.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:55:00] Paint anything in response to that?

**Peter Lewis** [00:55:03] Yeah. Look, I do think that the status of renters is a massive sleeper, both at a federal and state level. It talks to people's real experience a lot more than you know. And the housing affordability frame has shifted. We've been doing a bit of work on this in New South Wales. Labour's got a social housing policy which again could be something that starts rolling out through the budget. We know in Victoria there was a big push in social housing. It's, it's crickets up here in

New South Wales at the moment. But renters rights, access to affordable housing and social housing that puts downward pressure on the rental market seem to me to be key drive is that both major parties just are missing at the moment.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:55:45] And it does seem to play into some of those measures that Labour has been taking where like Pete said, it's not going to be, you know, necessarily cash handouts at the budget, but looking at what is driving the cost of living increases for people and addressing them directly. So those things like childcare and housing would definitely fall into that as well. Final reflections, I guess, poll for the next couple of weeks coming up as we head to the as we head to the budget, how much is that going to be dominating parliament even given? I guess we've we've had to shift it and ICAC's going to be one of the main things is the we're in the lead up to the budget now effectively. Is that going to be dominating politics for the next couple of weeks?

**Paul Karp** [00:56:35] Well, definitely, in terms of demands on the government, you know, save this money by scrapping fossil fuel subsidies, you know, you can pay for better paid parental leave in childcare if you start to scrap stage three tax cuts. These are all arguments that are going to be made. I mean, the budget narrative is really within the government's control because they could. But, you know, it depends how much they want to brief ahead of the budget. There are often, often budgets where there's a drop every other day in the in the fortnight and months before the budget. I don't know if there are enough announced bills in this one for them to do that. So I suspect a lot of the debate is things that we all recognise would be good things to spend on that we're being told we can't right now like pipe into life and bringing the childcare changes forward by six months.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:57:27] Yeah, well we might wrap it up there. Thank you very much, everyone, for you. Fantastic questions. I'm sorry we couldn't get to all of them. Hopefully we've covered everything from the Republican movement to voice to renters rights and everything in between. Thanks for sticking with us through the tour of the Royals that we had at the beginning. And knowing what people think about the royal family and and all of the morning that we've been in for the passing of the queen, I know you'll all be in mourning on Thursday for our public holiday. I'm not sure how many of you need an extra day's morning and making a long weekend of it. But best of luck. Don't forget to head on over to Australia Institute dot org. Are you to buy tickets to our Revenue Summit on the 6th of October and head on over to Guardian Australia to find all the latest essential poll results? The write up of that today is should be easy to find on the front page, as well as Pete's article on on on those polling results as well. And it should be up on the Australian Politics podcast within the next day or so as well. We'll see you in a fortnight from now and thanks very much for joining us today and thanks, Paul, for stepping in at the last minute. We appreciate it.

**Peter Lewis** [00:58:48] Thanks, guys.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:58:49] Please, everyone. Bye.

*Transcript: Poll Position*  
*Recorded live on 20 September 2022*  
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