How important will minor parties and independents be in this federal election? And how significant is the latest Newspoll result, showing a record 15% of those surveyed said they'd rather vote for an independent or “other party” than the Coalition, Labor or the Greens?

Watch Griffith University's Anne Tiernan and Duncan McDonnell discuss those issues and more, including:

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The crucial lessons the Nick Xenophon Team learnt from the Palmer United Party – and how that's shaped that party's choice of candidates in this election.

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How populists around the world – including Pauline Hanson in Australia, Donald Trump in the US and Marine Le Pen in France – have successfully tapped into some people's feeling being "under siege".

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How Australia's system of compulsory voting is masking people's dissatisfaction with democracy and the major parties in particular, which mirrors problems across Western Europe and the United States.

Below is an edited transcript of this video, which was created in partnership between Griffith University and The Conversation, with time markers beside each question.

Hi, I'm **Professor Anne Tiernan** and I'm director of the Policy Innovation Hub of Griffith University. Welcome to Scrutineers, our coverage of the 2016 Federal Election Campaign. I'm delighted today, to have as my guest, **Dr Duncan McDonnell**,

a senior lecturer in the School of Government and International Relations at Griffith University and a great expert on populism.

And so it's topical this week, Duncan, to be talking about populism with the rise of Pauline Hanson and the expectation that she may indeed pick up a Senate seat in Queensland this time.

So who is the Hanson voter? Who votes for populist parties in Australia? What's the archetype?

Duncan: Well, I think it's pretty similar to populist voters across Western democracies. It's people who feel left behind by politics. It's people who feel that the major parties, be they centre-right or centre-left, have essentially abandoned them. That politics has become something in the hands of financial interests, the banks, the markets, intellectuals, cultural, media elites, who don't represent the people, who don't say what the people are worried about, what they want and so on. And the likes of Hanson – Palmer to a slightly lesser extent – come into politics and say, "you know what, we are going to give democracy back to the people. I say what the man standing around his barbeque is thinking." That's a very powerful message.

[1:44] **Anne:** And it is in parts of regional Queensland, I imagine. Have you done any calculations on where you think her support will come from?

Duncan: Well, Hanson's support has always been more a non-urban support. It's more been provincial areas and that's exactly the archetype of populist parties in Europe too. You would expect parties like these in Europe, for example, to do well in cities where there are high levels of immigration and so on because they are radical right parties. They don't. They tend to do much better in the peripheral areas – areas which maybe don't have very high immigration but people are worried about it.

They think the world around them is changing, that their identity, their values, their traditions have all been undermined somehow. Hanson taps into that in Australia when she talks about the danger of Muslims coming in and wanting to introduce sharia law and suddenly we won't be able to have nativity plays before you know it and the world around you will change terribly and the elites don't care. That's the Hanson message. It's the message of all right-wing populists. It's the message of Donald Trump.

[2:43] **Anne:** Absolutely, and I guess this is an international phenomenon that's playing out in Australia as well. And I think, to what extent is it the economic conditions that give rise to it? I'm struck by similarities between the economic outlook in 1996 and how things are now. Or is it more than the economy? Is it more than sort of technological changes? And to what extent are the parties responsible for this in terms of their own incapacity to respond to these legitimate concerns people might have?

Duncan: Well, I think it's all of the above. Certainly, the fact that parties have increasingly withdrawn from the zones of engagement in society with ordinary voters. It's a common complaint, that we only see major politicians at election time and we don't see them at any other point in time.

Right-wing populists are very effective at actually establishing grassroots presences, being around the community, being seen in a way that we don't really associate with mainstream politicians anymore. So, the populist vote is in part an anti-mainstream party vote; it's in part an anti-immigrant vote; it's in part a response to, as you say, economic conditions, the fear that my children are going to be worse off than I was. And to some extent, they're right.

[4:00] **Anne:** To some extent, they are absolutely right. Which is why I think young people are really going to feature in this campaign quite a bit and that's something we'll talk about down the track.

In terms of other populist parties that are emerging in the 2016 campaign, we had the extraordinary Newspoll yesterday that showed that as many as 15% of Australians won’t vote for any major party , including the Greens. Now, [ABC election analyst] Antony Green's raised questions about whether that's accurate or not. But you know, one gets the sense that the disenchantment with the major parties is more significant than it's ever been. And particularly given the leadership chaos on both sides, which is actually getting less of a run in this campaign than I thought it might. The big ads haven't come out yet. But it's an interesting [issue] – what do you make of the 15%? Where do you think those votes are going to go?

Duncan: Well, I don't think it's particularly surprising. If we look at stats, for example, on satisfaction with democracy in Australia, it's essentially plummeted over the last decade. Faith in the major parties has plummeted. Membership of the major parties over several decades has plummeted.

So, although because of the compulsory voting system you have in Australia, everything looks fine and dandy if we just look at turnout. Of course, if we look at who actually registers to vote then we start getting worried again. But if we just look at turnout, everything looks fine in Australia. But then when you scratch beneath that surface and look at how people feel about their democracy, how they feel about the major parties, it's clear. There's the exact same type of fertile terrain of dissatisfaction with democracy that we see across Western Europe, that we see in the United States as well.

[5:33] **Anne:** So Duncan, populism seems to be a pejorative term in politics. What distinguishes a populist like [Nick] Xenophon who doesn't seem to attract that kind of negative connotation from you know, a Palmer or a Pauline Hanson or some of the other populist movements that we've seen emerge?

Duncan: It is a pejorative term. At least for academics, we tend to understand it as meaning that a particular party has an ideology which essentially views the world as being split up into two groups. On the one hand, there is the people who are good, they are virtuous, they are attached to their traditions, they are a silent majority, they are hard-working, clean-living, and so on and so forth. Then on the other side of politics there's the bad elites. Maybe the media elites, financial, political so-on-so-forth, who have somehow usurped democracy, which have taken democracy and used it for their own interest, to push their own agendas and so on, who do not reflect the voice of the people.

So in a way, populism, it's a conversation about democracy. It's saying that the sovereign people have somehow had democracy taken away from them and the job of the populist is to restore democracy back to the people. So, it's really about democracy.

But I suppose what distinguishes the likes of Hanson, or Marine Le Pen in France, or even Donald Trump, is that they propose a vision of which … the people are not only under siege from above from a series of elites, but also from below by a whole series of undesirable others. In the case of Trump they may be Mexicans. For most populists, they tend also to be Muslims; Muslims, anti-Islam feeling is something that tends to ignite populists the world over. We see it with Hanson, we see it with Trump, we see it with Marine Le Pen. So, right-wing populists have that idea: the people are under threat from all sides, both by the elites, from below, by all these dangerous others. That's a very simplistic but quite compelling message.

[7:35] **Anne:** And I think that binary, I mean, you draw that binary really well. Do they ever

deliver? Do populists ever deliver on their promise, or do they just increase the disaffection where they have gained power?

Duncan: Well, they do both to some extent. We did a book last year called Populists in Power , in which we looked at what happens when right-wing populists get into government in major democracies. And we did that in Switzerland and Italy and did a lot of research going from parliament level right down to the grassroots to look at what happens in these parties and what their policies are, and what they do when they get into government.

And we found that actually they do, certainly, not only change the debates on things like immigration in their countries, it becomes acceptable to say things that were not acceptable a decade ago about immigrants. They also get to introduce some of their key policies. For example in Switzerland, they were able to really tighten up on asylum policy. And the Swiss People's Party held the Justice Ministry. In Italy, The Northern League, proposed all sorts of repressive measures about immigration including even fingerprinting people. They weren't able to get it all through, but you can see how those kinds of things do change the debates in a country.

[8:43] **Anne:** Hmm, and so far we haven't seen too many of these candidates have to step down for behaviour or issues from the past because the other parties are not watching them, you know, the major parties aren't watching them in the same sort of way.

Duncan: That's absolutely true. I think it also does help though. For example, I know in the case of the Xenophon team, that they learnt some of the lessons of the Palmer United Party and they scrutinised their candidates extremely well. Those that are running for the NXT have been through all sorts of vetting procedures lasting months, psychometric tests, interviews, presentations, which are things that I think we can very clearly see were not the case in PUP. Otherwise Palmer may not have chosen some of the people who ended up being senators for that party.

Anne: And I think we would have to say it's not the case in the major parties either at Commonwealth or state level, or we wouldn't have the kinds of embarrassments and scandals that we have had.

Duncan, that's been a fantastic discussion. Thanks so much for your time this morning for being on Scrutineers.

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