

Labor's lead cut to 51-49% in latest Ipsos poll

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

The government has substantially narrowed the two-party gap in the Ipsos poll - it now trails Labor by just 49-51%, compared with 46-54% in December.

The poll, [reported](#) in the Australian Financial Review and other Nine newspapers, was taken between Wednesday and Friday, with the debate about the legislation to facilitate medical transfers running hot.

The result will be a major fillip to government MPs, who are hoping the revival of the boats issue will swing public opinion in the Coalition's direction. It will reinforce the concerns in Labor about the political risk brought by supporting the bill.

In the poll, Labor's primary vote was 33%, down 4 points; the Coalition was on 38%, up 2 points. The Greens were unchanged on 13%. Scott Morrison leads Bill Shorten at 48-38 as preferred prime minister.

Meanwhile security staff [have arrived](#) at Christmas Island detention centre following Morrison's announcement that it would be reopened in the wake of the legislation's passage.

A video has also been [released](#) in which Morrison warns asylum seekers not to try to get on boats. It will be translated into multiple languages and used in the region.

Morrison at the weekend stressed the reopening of Christmas Island was on the advice of the Department of Home Affairs. "That will cost us, in the next couple of years, we estimate, half a billion dollars and \$1.4 billion over the next four years.

Read more: [**Morrison may reopen the Christmas Island detention centre**](#)

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"Now, I can't describe to you the fury that is within me that I have to now go spend money on opening a centre that I didn't need to open a week ago, when the farmers and communities of North Queensland are crying out for our support", Morrison said.

Officials will face questions at Senate estimates on Monday about the implications of the legislation.

Also under scrutiny will be Home Affairs' decision-making in relation to the \$423 million contract awarded to Paladin for security for refugees and asylum seekers at Lorengau in Papua New Guinea. Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton has said he had "no sight" of the process.

The Australian Financial Review, which [broke the story](#) of a limited tender, has reported that Paladin was "thinly capitalised ... with little experience and a poor reputation".

The issue of a royal commission on the abuse of the disabled will also be to the forefront early this week.

The government won't obstruct a Senate motion supporting a royal commission when it comes to the House on Monday but has left open how it will respond to it - although it appears to be moving towards an inquiry.

Morrison said on Sunday: "The government will do the proper work of consultation, liaising with the states and territories as appropriate, liaising with those advocates in the disability sector by working with those who work in that sector and rely on services in that, to ensure that we get the right way forward as to how we can address the issues that will support people with disability.

"I will do [that work] in a bipartisan way just as I have on the other royal commissions ... and ensure that people with disability can get the support they need".

After its defeat on the Medevac bill last week – and its filibuster on Thursday when it feared

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Labor had an ambush in preparation – the government is anxious at all costs to avoid another defeat in the House, where it is in a minority.

Read more: [Morrison government defeated on medical bill, despite constitution play](#)

Manager of opposition business Tony Burke said on Sunday: “There are at least three issues returning to the House of Representatives on Monday: a royal commission into violence, abuse and neglect of people with a disability, small business access to justice measures, and stronger penalties for corporate misconduct.

"Last Thursday, the government was opposed to all three. Four days later, the government is preparing to backflip on all three.

"Labor would welcome each of these policy reversals. But ... the government isn't changing its mind because it's listened to the arguments. These backflips are from a Prime Minister who will say and do anything to stay in office, even if that means clinging to power by his fingernails," Burke said.

Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

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