

Coalition narrows gap to trail 48-52% in post-budget Newspoll

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

The government has narrowed the gap in the post-budget Newspoll, now trailing 48-52% in two-party terms, compared with the 46-54% margin a month ago.

As Scott Morrison readies to call the election, with speculation he will announce next weekend for May 18, he has also increased his lead over Bill Shorten as better prime minister in [Newspoll](#), published in Monday's Australian. Morrison's rating has risen to 46% and Shorten's declined marginally, with the gap now 11 points.

The Coalition's primary vote is up 2 points to 38% in the poll, while Labor is down 2 points to 37%.

Meanwhile in an [Ipsos poll](#) in Nine newspapers, Labor leads 53-47% in two-party terms, an improvement for the opposition from the last poll in February when the gap was 51-49% in the ALP's favour.

Morrison leads Shorten 46-35% as preferred prime minister in the Ipsos poll, which was taken after the budget and largely after Shorten's reply.

Both polls showed the budget, which contained tax cuts and forecast a surplus for next financial year, has been received favourably by voters.

Newspoll found people ranked it the best budget in a decade and the most likely to give cost of living relief and improve their personal circumstances since the Howard government's last budget in 2007.

In the Ipsos poll, 38% thought they would be better off as a result of the budget compared with 24% who believed they would be worse off. The budget also scored positively on the measure of fairness, Ipsos found: 41% thought it fair, compared to 29% who believed it was unfair.

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While the election is considered most likely to be on May 18, after the government let the option of May 11 pass, May 25 is still an option.

The government says May 11 would have maximised the complication of the public holidays (Easter, Anzac Day). But more importantly, delaying the start of the formal campaign gives the Coalition extra time to run its taxpayer-funded advertising, as well as to tie up loose ends before the caretaker period and bed down its arrangements.

Morrison could have called the election at the weekend for May 18 but that would have cut off the government's access to publicly-funded advertising.

But the downside is that it has to endure the unpredictability of Senate estimates hearings this week.

The ALP will have its campaign headquarters at Parramatta up and running on Monday. Shorten will be in Brisbane on Monday and spend much of the week talking about health in the wake of his promise last week of \$2.3 billion to slash out-of-pocket costs for cancer sufferers.

Shorten said the government was buying time "to pump up their own tyres" with advertising. "If they've got some spare money in Treasury, they should be spending on services for kids with cancer".

Labor frontbencher Anthony Albanese said the only reason Morrison had not called the election already was so the government could continue its rollout of taxpayer-funded advertising.

"They are spending around about \$680,000 a day on advertising," he said on Sky.

He said Morrison should either immediately call the election or commit to stopping all taxpayer-funded advertising now "because this is an outrageous abuse during what we all know is the caretaker period in reality".

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Treasurer Josh Frydenberg would not give a figure for the spending this week but told the ABC "money is being spent in accordance with approved processes and that's all transparent [...] all of that information will be available".

Morrison said Shorten's impatience about the election not being called was "born of arrogance".

"The election will be called in April and the election will be held in May. We're not doing this with any haste and we're not doing it with any delay. There have always been three dates, the 11th, the 18th and 25th.

The Ipsos poll showed Labor with a strong margin on climate change. Asked whether Labor or the Coalition had the best policy on climate change 42% said Labor, and 25% said the Coalition. But about a third did not know.

Labor released its climate policy early last week, including an ambitious target of electric cars forming 50% of all new car sales by 2030. The government has been raising scares and deriding the electric car policy. Morrison said on Sunday: "Bill Shorten wants to end the weekend, when it comes to his policy on electric vehicles, where you've got Australians who love being out there in their four wheel drives. He wants to say 'see ya later' to the SUV when it comes to the choices of Australians".

Read more: [Shorten's climate policy would hit more big polluters harder and set electric car target](#)

Nine has [reported](#) Liberal sources saying internal Liberal Party polling is "diabolically bad" for Tony Abbott in Warringah, with Abbott facing a 12% swing. The challenge to Abbott is coming from independent Zali Steggall.

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