

Election tightens in Newspoll – Labor lead narrows to 51-49%

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

The Coalition has made up ground in Newspoll, now trailing Labor by just 49-51%, compared with 48-52% a fortnight ago.

The tightening of the May 18 race, coming after Scott Morrison was seen to out-campaign Bill Shorten early on, will boost Coalition morale as pre-polling begins on Monday.

But both sides have lost support on their primary votes in the Newspoll, published in the Australian, while Clive Palmer's United Australia Party is polling 5%, becoming the leading minor party behind the Greens.

Labor is down 2 points to 37%; the Coalition has fallen a point to 38%. The Greens remain on 9% and One Nation is static on 4%.

Shorten's personal ratings are encouraging for him – he has had a 2 point rise to 39% in his satisfaction rating and reduced the gap on the better prime minister measure.

While Morrison still has a substantial lead as better PM, Shorten has increased his rating by 2 points to 37% and Morrison has fallen a point to 45%.

Morrison's approval stayed on 45% while his disapproval was 46%, up 2 points, in the poll of 2136 voters taken Friday to Sunday.

Morrison and Shorten have arrived in Perth for Monday evening's debate, their first face-to-face encounter of the campaign, which has under three weeks to run.

In a day of mega spending, Shorten on Sunday promised A\$4 billion over three years to provide 887,000 families with relief on their child care costs; \$2.4 billion over the forward estimates for a pensioner and seniors dental plan, and \$537 million over the forward estimates to lift the pay of

child care workers.

Read more: [Bill Shorten promises \\$4 billion for child care, benefitting 887,000 families](#)

Under Labor's dental plan, age pensioners and those holding a Commonwealth seniors' health card would be entitled to up to \$1000 worth of free essential dental care every two years. Some three million people would be eligible under the plan, which would expand Medicare.

Shorten told a rally of volunteers in Melbourne: "Under a Labor government, after May 18 if you're a pensioner or a seniors health care card holder your dental work will be backed by Medicare for the rest of your life. This is the fair go in action".

Shorten said an ALP government over the next eight years would boost the average wage of child care workers by about \$11,300. This would be on top of any rise in the award rate.

It would be "a 20% pay rise for the early educators because we value early education," he said.

"This is an investment in quality early education, for good jobs and a strong economy of the future.

"And this is an investment in pay equity for a female-dominated industry. A fair reward for a workforce that has about 96% women, has been undervalued and underpaid for too long."

Labor says the pay rise would not increase child care fees because the government would fully fund it.

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In an initiative on cyber security the government is announcing it would invest \$156 million “to protect older Australians, small businesses and national security assets from the risk of cyber-attacks”.

A range of measures to combat cyber crime would include developing “a comprehensive online cyber security training program providing practical cyber advice for small businesses, older Australians and Australian families”.

The government says cybercrime costs the economy more than \$1 billion a year.

In the vulnerable state of Victoria, the government is sandbagging the Liberal heartland seats of Higgins and Kooyong with a promise of \$260 million to eliminate a level crossing on busy Glenferrie road in the suburb of Kooyong.

The project would take the train line under the road. The crossing is technically in Higgins but right on the border of Treasurer Josh Frydenberg’s seat of Kooyong. Frydenberg is being targeted by GetUp and various candidates especially on climate change.

In another Victorian seat, Flinders, Health Minister Greg Hunt has been dealt a blow by the decision of Liberal defector Julia Banks to preference Labor ahead of him.

Coalition campaign spokesman Simon Birmingham on Sunday accused her of walking away from her principles. “You’ve really got to wonder about the various positions of Julia Banks, who was until not that long ago urging people to vote Liberal and now is suggesting she will preference Labor. [...] I think it shows gross inconsistency on her part”.

Read more: [**View from The Hill: Palmer flypaper sticky for both sides**](#)

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Clive Palmer on Monday is due to formally announce his preference deal with the Liberal party.

The debate about the debates has continued with Morrison wanting the third debate to be hosted by the ABC next week, on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday nights.

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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