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Views on policy and politics on the eve of the 2022 Federal Election

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The survey data is available for download through the Australian Data Archive (doi:10.26193/AXQPSE).

Abstract

This paper focuses on the views of Australians on politics and policy, just as the 2022 federal election campaign got underway. We use data from the April 2022 ANUpoll which collected data from 3,587 Australians aged 18 years and over. The data collection occurred between the 11th and 26th of April 2022. The survey asked voters what the next government's priorities should be across more than 20 policy areas. Almost two-thirds of Australians (64.7 per cent) say reducing the cost of living should be the next federal government's top priority. The survey found the second highest priority was fixing the aged care system, with 60.1 per cent of voters highlighting this as a key issue. The other top five priorities among voters included strengthening the nation's economy (54.4 per cent), reducing the cost of health care (53.5 per cent), and dealing with global climate change (52.8 per cent) and. The policy area considered least important was dealing with issues of immigration, which was only of concern to 22.3 per cent of voters. Only 27.2 per cent of voters thought fixing the budget was a top priority. The April 2022 ANUpoll also outlined Australians' voting intentions. There wasn't any significant change in the number of people who said they would vote for the Coalition – 31.2 per cent in April compared to 31.7 per cent in January. There was a small drop in the number of people who said they'd vote for Labor, with 34.3 per cent saying they would in April compared to 36.3 per cent in January. This was counterbalanced by the slight increase in support for the Greens, increasing from 14.2 per cent of voters giving the party their vote in January to 16.2 per cent in April.

1 Introduction and overview

On the 10th of April 2022, the Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison set the date of the next Federal Election to be the 21st of May 2022. This is almost exactly three years after the previous Federal Election.

The day after the election was called, the Social Research Centre on behalf of the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods began collection of the 50th ANUpoll, a long running survey dating back to 2008. In addition to collecting information on a range of health, wellbeing, and economic measures (including a number of COVID-19 specific measures to be released in future publications), the survey asked a representative sample of adult Australians on their voting intentions if an election was held on the day of the interview, as well as views on a range of broader policy areas.

At the time of the survey, in addition to significant numbers of COVID-19 infections and prices for non-discretionary goods and services had been increasing at a much higher rate than wages resulting in falls in the real incomes of many Australians.

The April 2022 survey collected data from 3,587 Australians aged 18 years and over. The data collection occurred between the 11th and 26th of April 2022, with 56.7 per cent of the eventual sample completing the survey between the 12th and 14th of April. The vast majority (96.6 per cent) of interviews were completed online, with 3.4 per cent being completed over the phone. More details on the survey are available in Appendix 1. The survey data is available for download through the Australian Data Archive¹.

Surveys have also been conducted with the same group of respondents since January and February 2020, just before the COVID-19 pandemic started in Australia. Combined, data from these surveys allows us to track how outcomes have changed for the same group of individuals from just prior to COVID-19 impacting Australia, as well as during the most impactful times for the country. Of the April 2022 sample, 2,424 respondents (67.6 per cent) had completed the January 2022 survey.

Unlike other Australian political polling, the ANUpoll series of surveys is collected on a probability-based, longitudinal panel (Life in Australia™). By using probability-based recruiting (predominantly telephone-based) the unknown and unquantifiable biases inherent in opt-in (non-probability) panels are minimised. Furthermore, it is possible to quantify the uncertainty around the estimates due to sampling error using standard statistical techniques, which is not possible with non-probability surveys. The longitudinal aspect of the survey also means that it is possible to compare responses in April 2022 with responses to previous surveys for the same individual, allowing for a more detailed analysis of changes through time.

In this paper, we focus on the views of Australians on politics and policy, just as the 2022 federal election campaign got underway. We begin by extending our time series from just prior and during the COVID-19 pandemic on satisfaction with the direction of the country and confidence in institutions. We then look at reflections on vaccine policy and whether it has gone well or gone fairly. In Section 4 we look at voter preference based on type of candidate, whereas in Section 5 we look at policy prioritisation. In the final section of results, we look at the political party that a respondent would have voted for if an election was held in April, including an analysis of the relationship between voter preference and other measures presented in the paper. Section 7 concludes.

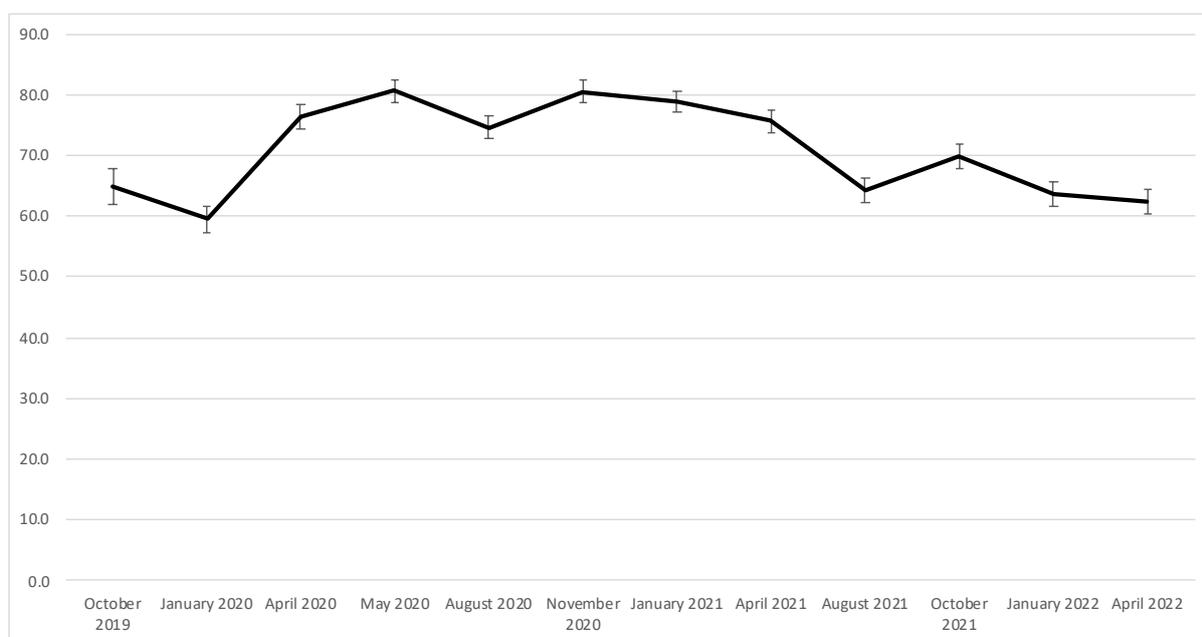
2 Views on direction of the country and institutions

This section extends our earlier analysis of Australian’s views about the direction of the country and level of confidence in key institutions to include the data collected in April 2022.

Figure 1 shows the per cent of Australians who say they were satisfied or very satisfied in response to the question ‘Firstly, a general question about your views on living in Australia. All things considered, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way the country is heading?’ There is little change in views between January and April 2022.

Between October 2019, just prior to the 2019/20 Black Summer bushfires, and January 2020 there was a slight decline in satisfaction with the direction of the country with the proportion of the population satisfied or very satisfied with the direction of the country being 59.5 per cent at our last data collection pre-COVID. At this point, satisfaction with the direction of the country was at its lowest over the period October 2019 to April 2022. Satisfaction substantially increased during the initial COVID-19 period, but has declined since November 2020 to April 2022, when 62.4 per cent of Australians were satisfied with the direction, only slightly higher than it was in January 2020.

Figure 1 Per cent of Australians satisfied or very satisfied with the direction of the country – October 2019 to April 2022



Note: The “whiskers” on the lines indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: ANUpoll: October 2019; January, April, May, August, and November 2020; January, April, August and October 2021; and January and April 2022

Confidence in key institutions rose sharply peaks during the initial COVID-19 period, but have since that time declined. For example, the proportion of the population with confidence in the Federal Government in Canberra fell from 60.6 per cent in May 2020 to 35.6 per cent in April 2022, only a little higher than in January 2020 (Figure 2a).

The levels of confidence in the state/territory government in which the respondent lives and the public service are higher than confidence in the Federal Government, there has been a similar pattern with substantial increases in levels of confidence during the initial COVID-19

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period followed by declines since May 2020 for the public service and November 2020 for state/territory governments and January 2021.

Of the three institutions the only one that experienced a statistically significant decline between January and April 2022 was the public service with 54.5 per cent of Australians having confidence in April 2022 compared to 57.6 per cent in January 2021 (Figure 2c).

Figure 2a Per cent of Australians who have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the Federal Government in Canberra

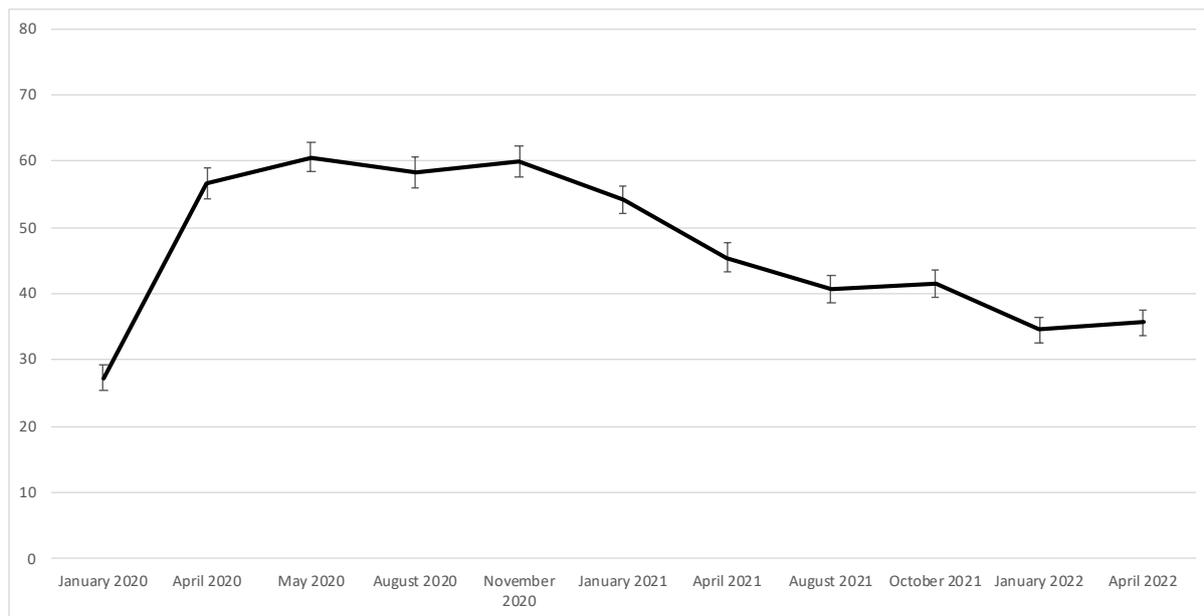
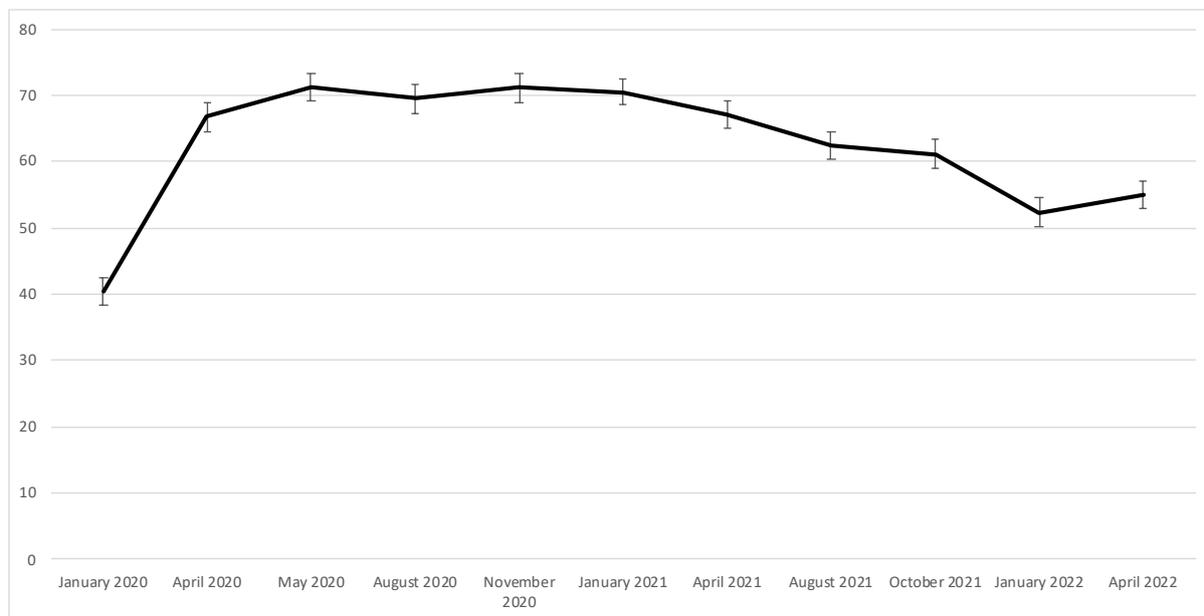


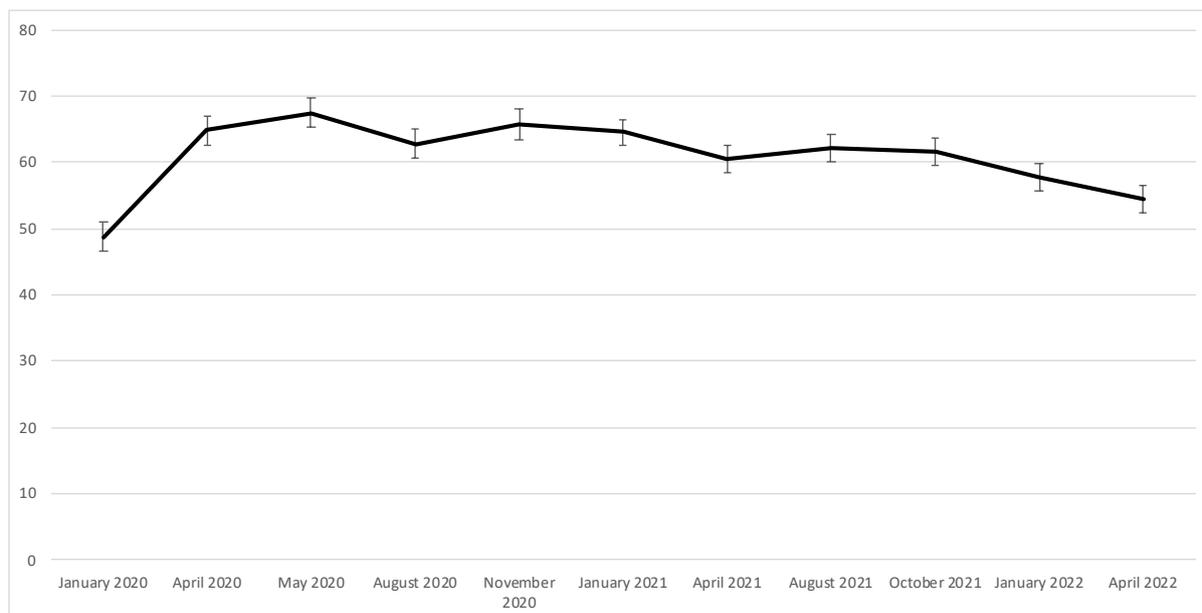
Figure 2b Per cent of Australians who have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in relevant state/territory government



Note: The “whiskers” on the lines indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: ANUpoll: January, April, May, August, and November 2020; January, April, August and October 2021; and January and April 2022

Figure 2c Per cent of Australians who have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the public service



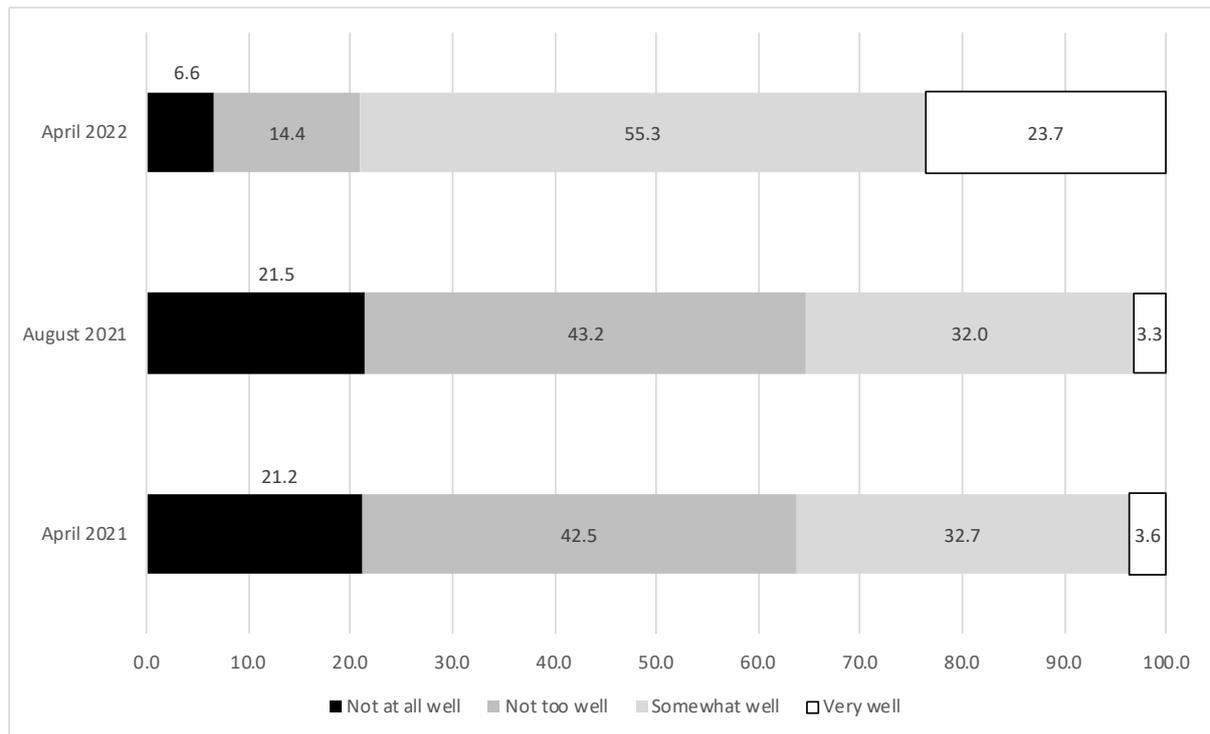
3 Views on vaccine policy

One of the key responsibilities of government over the last 12-18 months has been ensuring availability and widespread uptake of COVID-19 vaccines. The Australian Government linked the achievement of very high vaccination rates with the easing or lifting the various public health restrictions including the ‘opening’ of internal and external borders. Initially, Australia lagged other comparable countries in vaccine availability (and hence vaccinations), including but not limited to countries like the USA and the UK where vaccines were being manufactured. However, by late 2021/early 2022 Australia had one of the highest rates of vaccination in the world.

The delays in the vaccine roll-out undoubtedly delayed the easing or lifting of restrictions and some people may have caught COVID-19 when they otherwise wouldn’t have, or may have experienced worse symptoms. In the April 2021, August 2022, and April 2022 surveys, respondents were asked ‘Do you think the process for individuals getting COVID-19 vaccines in Australia is ...’ with half of the respondents asked whether the process is going well and the other half asked whether the process has been fair.

Figure 3a shows the responses for the question on whether the process has gone well, and Figure 3b shows responses for whether the process has been fair. In both surveys in 2021, it was estimated that more than one-in-five survey Australians thought the process was going ‘not at all well’ with less than five per cent of Australians estimated to be saying that it was going very well. This distribution had been almost completely reversed by April 2022 when only 6.6 per cent of Australians were estimated to think the process had been going not at all well compared to 23.7 per cent who thought it was going very well.

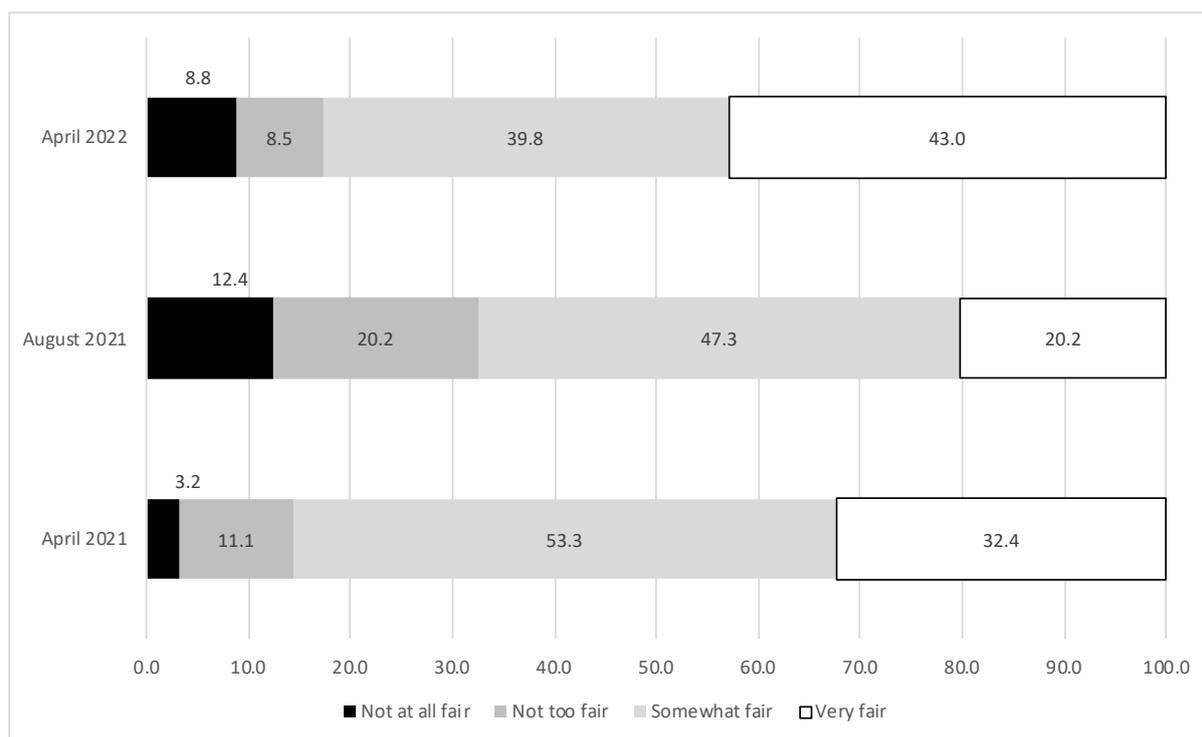
Figure 3a Views on how well the vaccine process was going – April 2021 to April 2022



Source: ANUpoll: April and August 2021; and April 2022

During 2021, Australians were more inclined to think that the vaccine process was fair than to think the process was going well. In April 2022, this was even more so the case. By this time, 43.0 per cent of respondents who were asked that question thought the process was very fair, with a further 39.8 per cent who thought it was somewhat fair. This leaves only 8.5 per cent who thought that the process was not too fair and 8.8 per cent who thought it was not at all fair. This later percentage is somewhat higher than the similar figure in April 2021 (3.2 per cent), but was lower than in August 2021 (12.4 per cent) during the third wave of extended lockdowns that were then taking place in the south-east of the country.

Figure 3b Views on how fair the vaccine process was going – April 2021 to April 2022



Source: ANUpoll: April and August 2021; and April 2022

4 The impact of candidate qualifications and characteristics on voting intentions

In a parliamentary system like Australia’s, people do not vote for parties or party leaders, but rather the ordering of the candidates running in their particular electorate (of which there were 151 as of the 2021 election). While it is not possible in a survey like ANUpoll with under four thousand respondents to test voting intentions for each particular electorate let alone each individual candidate, it is possible to measure people’s stated views on their willingness to vote for candidates with particular characteristics.

Utilising and adapting a standard survey question (from Gallup²), the April 2022 ANUpoll posed the following question to respondents (with bold as indicated in the online version):

Between now and the 2022 Federal election, there will be discussion about the qualifications and characteristics of political candidates – their education, age, religion, race and so on.

If the party you would normally vote for nominated a **generally well-qualified** person who happened to have the following characteristics, how likely would you be to vote for that person?

The characteristics asked about are:

- a) A woman
- b) A man

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- c) Born in Australia
- d) Born overseas
- e) An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- f) Gay or lesbian
- g) Under the age of 40
- h) Over the age of 70
- i) A Muslim
- j) An Atheist
- k) An Evangelical Christian

The response options are very likely, somewhat likely, not very likely, and not at all likely. Figure 4 shows the per cent of respondents who said they would be very likely to vote for a candidate with the particular characteristic (grey bars) as well as the per cent who said they would be either not very likely or not at all likely (hollow bars). The characteristics are ordered by the proportion of respondents who say they would be very likely to vote for a candidate with that characteristic, though it should be noted that the order the characteristics was presented was randomised in the survey.

In interpreting the data it is important to bear in mind that there may be some social desirability bias in some of the responses and that the impact of candidate characteristics on the likelihood of the respondent voting for a candidate with this characteristic may differ to their response to the survey question.

The candidate characteristic that has the greatest positive support (and lowest negative support) is being born in Australia with 53.6 per cent of respondents saying they would vote for a candidate with those characteristics (all else being equal) and only 4.0 per cent saying they would be not very or not at all likely to. By comparison, only 33.3 per cent of respondents said they would be very likely to vote for a person born overseas, with 19.4 per cent saying they would be not very or not at all likely to.

The sex of the candidate also appears to matter. There is a significantly higher per cent of respondents who say they would be very likely to vote for a woman (52.8 per cent) than a man (43.4 per cent). While there may be some effect of social desirability, the self-complete nature of the survey is likely to reduce this. The survey results give strong support for the notion that, despite making up less than half of parliamentarians, women candidates are as outwardly supported as men, and perhaps even more so.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are under-represented in parliament and have slightly lower support. Gay or lesbian candidates can often experience discrimination and also have slightly lower support according to the ANUpoll survey results.³ However, there is still quite high support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and gay or lesbian candidates with 42.0 per cent and 40.4 per cent of respondents saying they would be very likely to vote accordingly. A nuance to the finding for a gay and lesbian candidate is the higher per cent of Australians who said they would be not likely to not at all likely to vote for a candidate with those characteristics (18.0 per cent). So, while most respondents are supportive of a gay or lesbian candidate, there is still a sizable minority that may be resistant.

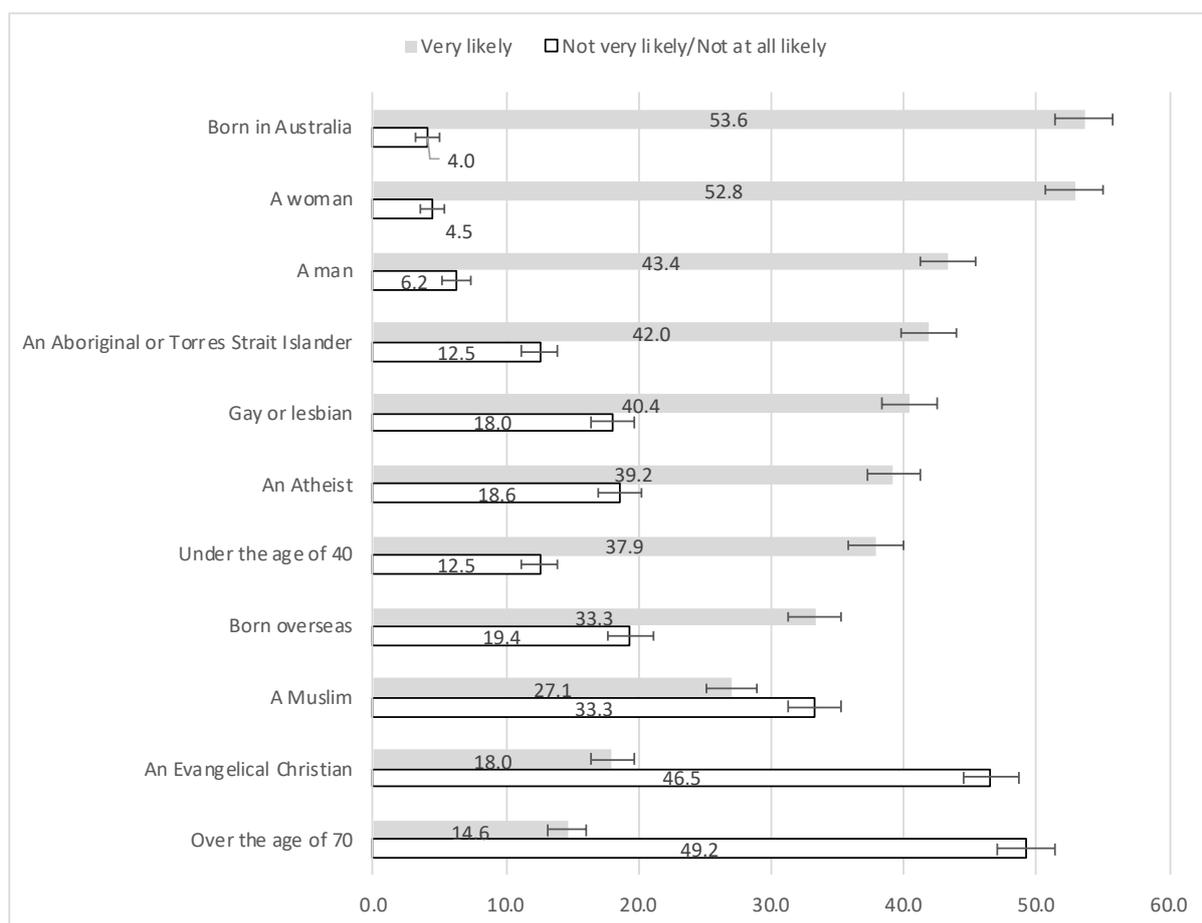
If ethnicity and sexuality does not appear to matter that much for candidate choice, age certainly appears to. There is lower support for a candidate under the age of 40 (37.9 per cent very likely and 12.5 not very or not at all likely) compared to a generic male or female

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candidate. However, the lowest level of support amongst all the characteristics in the survey was for a candidate over the age of 70. Only 14.6 per cent of respondents said they would vote for a candidate of that age, compared to 49.2 per cent who said they would be not very or not at all likely.

Finally, there are large differences by the religion of the hypothetical candidate. Of the three religious identifications considered, there was the greatest support for an Atheist, with 39.2 per cent of respondents saying they would be very likely to vote for an Atheist candidate and 18.6 per cent saying they would be not very or not at all likely. Only a little over one-quarter (27.1 per cent) of respondents said that they would be very likely to vote for a Muslim candidate, with the lowest level (18.0 per cent) being for an Evangelical Christian. Interestingly, this ordering is completely reversed in the US survey that we based our questions on, with the greatest level of support for an Evangelical Christian and the lowest support for an Atheist (and a Muslim candidate somewhere in between).

Figure 4 Support for hypothetical candidate according to their characteristics, April 2022



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: ANUpoll: April 2022

4.1 Factors associated with candidate support

This section reports the results of a regression analysis of the association between the characteristics of respondents and how likely they said they would be to vote for a hypothetical candidate with the different characteristics as about. For each hypothetical candidate asked about the factors associated with how likely the respondent said they would be to vote for a

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candidate with this characteristic is estimated. Because the dependent variable takes one of four values (very likely, likely, not very likely or not at all likely) an ordered probit model is estimated. The explanatory variables include demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the respondent. In the regression model higher values for the dependent variable representing a higher self-reported likelihood for a candidate with the particular characteristic being asked about.

The results of the regression model are reported in Table 1. For the most part people are more likely to vote for candidates that are like themselves. However, the strength of this association differs across the different characteristics, and there is also an association with seemingly unrelated characteristics.

Reading across Table 1, females are more likely to say they would vote for a female candidate. Females were not, however, any more or less likely to say that they would vote for a male candidate. The respondent's sex is also associated with the likelihood of voting for a person with a range of other characteristics, with females more likely than a man to say they would vote for a candidate born in Australia or overseas, an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, a gay or lesbian candidate, and a Muslim candidate.

For the most part, older Australians report a greater willingness than younger Australian's to vote for hypothetical candidates with the characteristics considered in the survey. This includes a greater willingness to vote for a woman, someone born overseas, a Muslim an Atheist and an Evangelical Christian. Older Australians are also significantly more likely to say that they would vote for someone over the age of 70. Younger Australians, particularly those aged 18 to 24, are less likely to say that they will vote for someone over the age of 70 but, apart from being more likely to vote for a Muslim candidate, are not that different from respondents in the middle part of the age distribution.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are more likely to say that they would vote for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidate, as one might expect. However, there was also an association between the Indigenous status of respondents and their voting preferences with regards to some other characteristics. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are less likely to say they would vote for someone born overseas (compared to non-Indigenous respondents).

There does not appear to be much a difference in preference for particular candidates between those who were born in Australia and those who were born overseas in an English-speaking country with the (not surprising) exception of being more likely to say they would vote for a person born overseas. There are, however, large differences in voting preferences between those who were born overseas in a non-English speaking country and those other two groups. Specifically, those born overseas in a non-English speaking country are less likely to say they would vote someone born in Australia or a gay or lesbian candidate, but more likely to say they would vote for an Evangelical Christian.

Language spoken at home also matters, with those who speak a language other than English being less likely to vote for a woman or a man, someone born in Australia, an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander candidate, a gay or lesbian candidate, someone under the age of 40, or an Atheist.

A candidate's education level is also predictive of some aspects of voting choice. Those with low levels of education (that is, have not completed Year 12) are less likely to say they would

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vote for someone born overseas, an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander candidate, a gay or lesbian candidate, a Muslim or an Atheist. They are, however, more likely to say they would vote for an Evangelical Christian. Degree qualifications also have an impact with a positive association with willingness to vote for a woman, someone born overseas, or an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander candidate.

Interestingly, someone with a trade qualification (Certificate III or IV) is more likely to say they would vote for an Evangelical Christian compared with someone with no qualifications at all.

The area in which a person lives does not appear to have a consistent association with candidate preference. Living outside of a capital city (which tends to be more rural) does not have any association with preference for the particular candidate types. There is also no association with the socioeconomic characteristics of the area. Of course, there may be different voting preferences across areas because of the distribution of the other characteristics in the model (for example, respondents born overseas being more likely to live in capital cities). However, there does not appear to be a direct association with location, controlling for these characteristics.

The characteristics discussed already are all questions asked as part of the profiling for the Life in Australia™ panel, and have been used extensively as explanatory variables for our COVID-19 Impact Monitoring series. The last three variables in the model, on the other hand, were asked specifically in the April 2022 survey. Specifically, we asked respondents ‘Do you currently identify as LGBTQIA+?, with further information given that ‘This term refers to a person who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer / questioning, intersex, asexual, or other terms (such as pansexual).’ We estimate that 9.7 per cent of adult Australians identify as LGBTQIA+.⁴

We also asked respondents ‘Do you consider yourself as belonging to any particular religion or denomination?’ with 35.5 per cent of respondents saying that they did. Finally, we asked respondents ‘Regardless of whether you belong to a particular religion, how religious would you say you are?’ Respondents were asked ‘Please answer using a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means not at all religious and 10 means very religious’ with an average value of 3.20, a median value of 2, and the modal response (given by 34.9 per cent of Australians) being 0.

These variables appear to have a significant association with candidate preference. Those who identify as LGBTQIA+ are more likely to say that they would vote for a gay or lesbian candidate, but they are also more likely to say they would vote for a woman, someone born overseas, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidate, someone under the age of 40, a Muslim and an Atheist, but less likely to say they would vote for an Evangelical Christian candidate.

Belonging to a particular religion appears to have less of an association than self-reported religiosity, though those who do belong to a particular religion are less likely to say they would vote for an Atheist and more likely to say they would vote for an Evangelical Christian. Self-reported religiosity is quite predictive of voting preferences, with high religiosity associated with a lower likelihood of voting for a woman (and a man, but with a smaller coefficient), someone born in Australia but even more so someone born overseas, an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander candidate, a gay or lesbian candidate, someone under the age of 40, a Muslim and an Atheist. Higher religiosity was associated, however, with a higher probability of voting for an Evangelical Christian.

5 Views on policy priorities

There are a range of policy areas that a national government could focus on. However, it is not possible for all areas to take on equal importance and receive the same amount of policy attention. Trade-offs need to be made. The April 2022 ANUpoll asked respondents ‘How much of a priority should each of these following be for the Federal government to address this year?’ across 22 policy areas (see Figure 5) with four response options:

- Top priority
- Important but lower priority
- Not too important
- Should not be done

This question is very similar to a question asked in the United States (US) in January 2022 by the Pew Research Center.⁵

5.1 Top policy priorities for Australians

The order in which the policy areas were presented was randomised, and Figure 5 shows the estimated proportion of adult Australian’s who think that particular policy areas was a ‘top priority’, ordered from the highest to lowest priorities. The policy area that the highest proportion of Australians see as being a top priority is ‘reducing the cost of living’ (64.7 per cent of Australians). The only other area which has more than 60 per cent support as a top priority is ‘fixing the aged care system’ (60.1 per cent). There are four other areas that have more than half the population supporting as being a top priority ‘Strengthening the nation’s economy’ (54.4 per cent), ‘Reducing health care costs’ (53.5 per cent), ‘Dealing with global climate change’ (52.8 per cent), and ‘Improving the educational system’ (51.6 per cent).

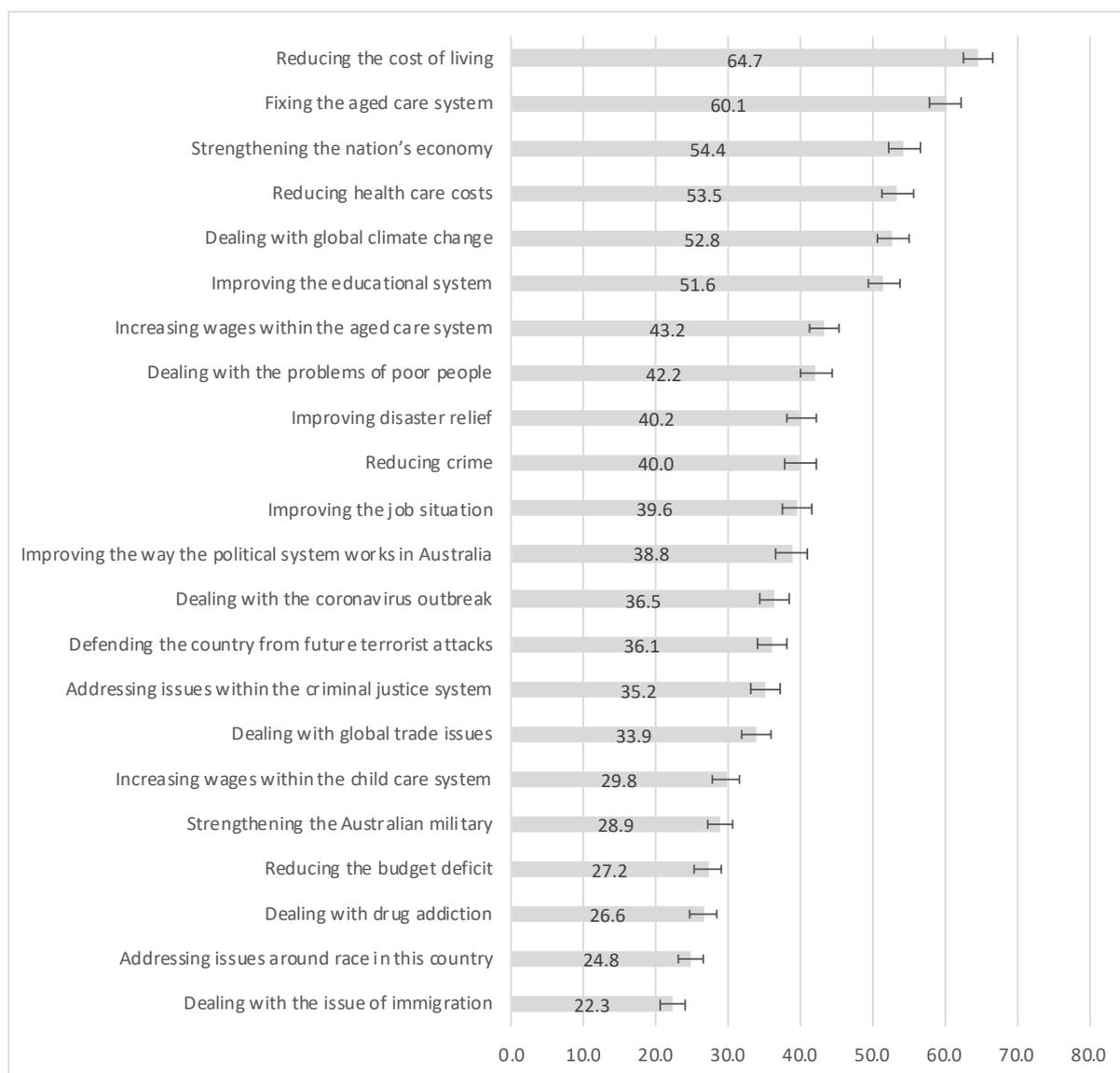
There are a number of areas of public policy which are not seen by the Australian public as being of high priority. The lowest two are seen by less than a quarter of the Australian population as being of top priority – ‘Dealing with the issue of immigration’ (22.3 per cent) and ‘Addressing issues around race in this country’ (24.8 per cent). Drug addiction is also seen as being of low priority (26.6 per cent), with only a small proportion of Australians (27.2 per cent) seeing reducing the budget deficit as being a top priority, despite the Federal Budget for 2022/23 being announced very close to data collection and having very large deficits by historical standards.

Interestingly, only about a third (36.5 per cent) of Australian’s think that dealing with the Coronavirus outbreak should be a top priority for government.

Two areas of public policy that make an interesting contrast are aged care and child care. We asked respondents how high a priority it was to increase wages in both these systems, with the results turning out quite differently. 43.2 per cent of Australians thought it a top priority to increase wages in aged care, whereas only 29.8 per cent said the same regarding child care wages. This is despite both having similar average hourly wages and qualification requirements. The difference in support for a wage increase may reflect the recent policy attention on aged care due to the Royal Commission and deaths due to COVID-19 outbreaks, and a recognition of the generally very difficult working conditions in aged care.

The final policy area that has low prioritisation (under one-third support) is ‘Strengthening the Australian military’, with only 28.9 per cent of Australians identifying this area as a top priority. This low level of support is despite the ongoing war in Ukraine, as well as the significant defence spending announced prior to and within the 2022/23 Federal Budget.

Figure 5 Per cent of Australians who reported policy areas as a ‘top priority’ – April 2022



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: ANUpoll: April 2022

5.2 Comparisons with the USA

Of the 18 policy areas asked about in the US survey conducted in January 2022, 17 were included in the April 2022 ANUpoll.⁶ Figure 6 gives the Australian and US figures alongside each other, ordered by the difference between the two countries (higher priority in the US at the top, higher priority in Australia at the bottom).

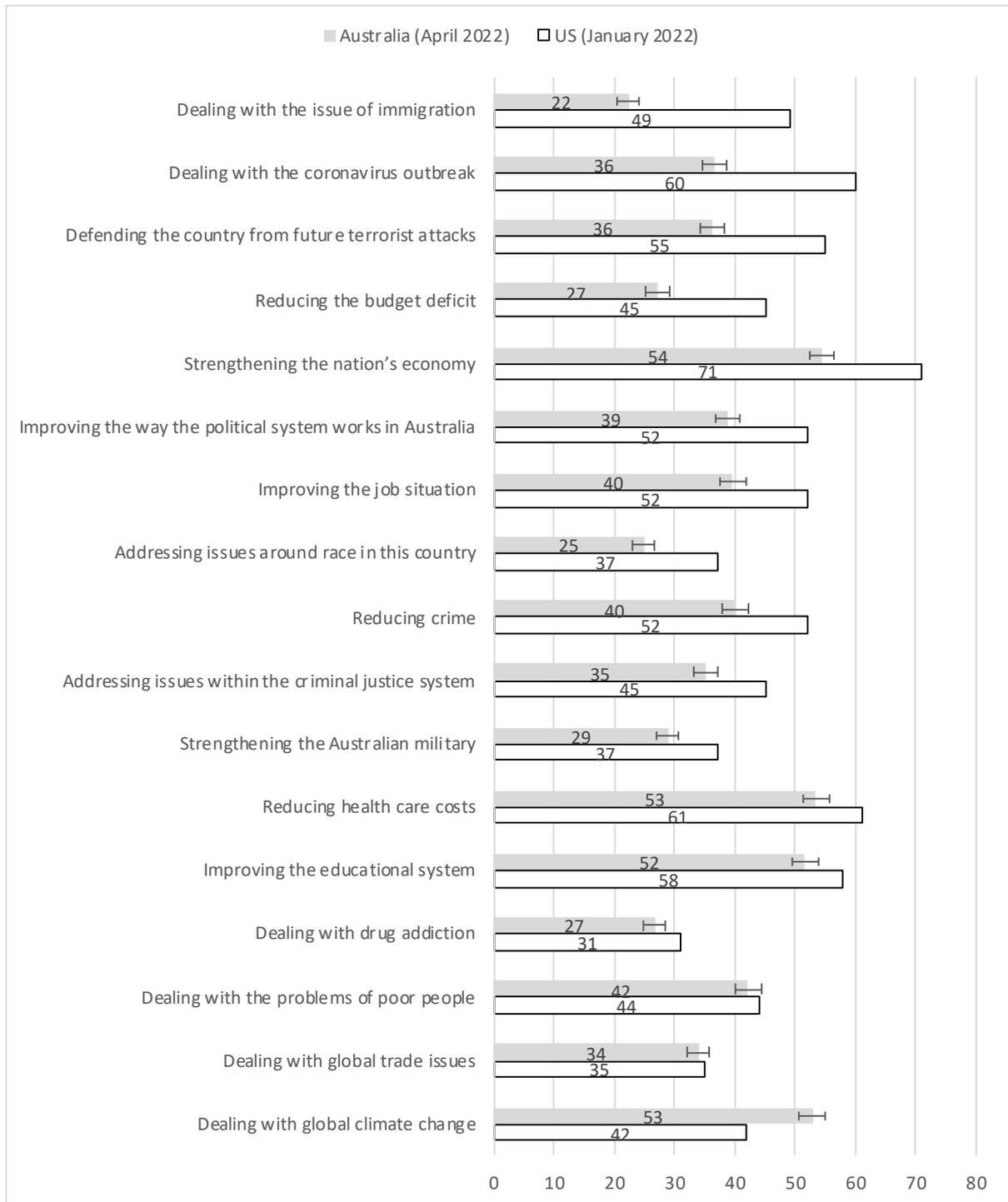
There was only one policy area that Australians saw as being a significantly higher priority than their American counterparts – Dealing with global climate change (53 per cent compared to 42 per cent respectively). This is despite, or perhaps because of, the US administration making climate change a point of difference between it and the Republican opposition, whereas the Australian Opposition and the Greens party highlighting the perceived lack of action on climate change by the Australian government. There are two other areas where support is not significantly different across the two countries (‘Dealing with the problems of poor people’ and ‘Dealing with global trade issues’).

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For all other policy areas, American adults saw the policy area as a higher priority than Australian adults. The area with the greatest difference between the US and Australia is 'Dealing with the issue of immigration' with almost half (49 per cent) of American adults saying that it was a top priority compared to less than a quarter (22 per cent) of Australians saying it was. Although the US receives a much greater absolute number of migrants in a given year, as a share of the resident population Australia had a much higher net migration rate in most of the years leading up to the Coronavirus pandemic (Figure 7). It may be that the slowdown in migration during the COVID-19 pandemic (which was greater in Australia compared to the US) lessened immigration as an issue of salience in Australia. However, it is perhaps more likely that the greater control and selection of migrants in Australia means that immigration is seen as less of an issue.

There was also a big difference in views about whether dealing with the Coronavirus is a top priority with 60 per cent of Americans thinking it is a top priority compared to 36 per cent of Australians. This perhaps reflects the higher vaccination rate in Australian, stronger social safety net and public health system.

Figure 6 Per cent of Australians and Americans who reported policy areas as a ‘top priority’ – April 2022 and January 2022 respectively



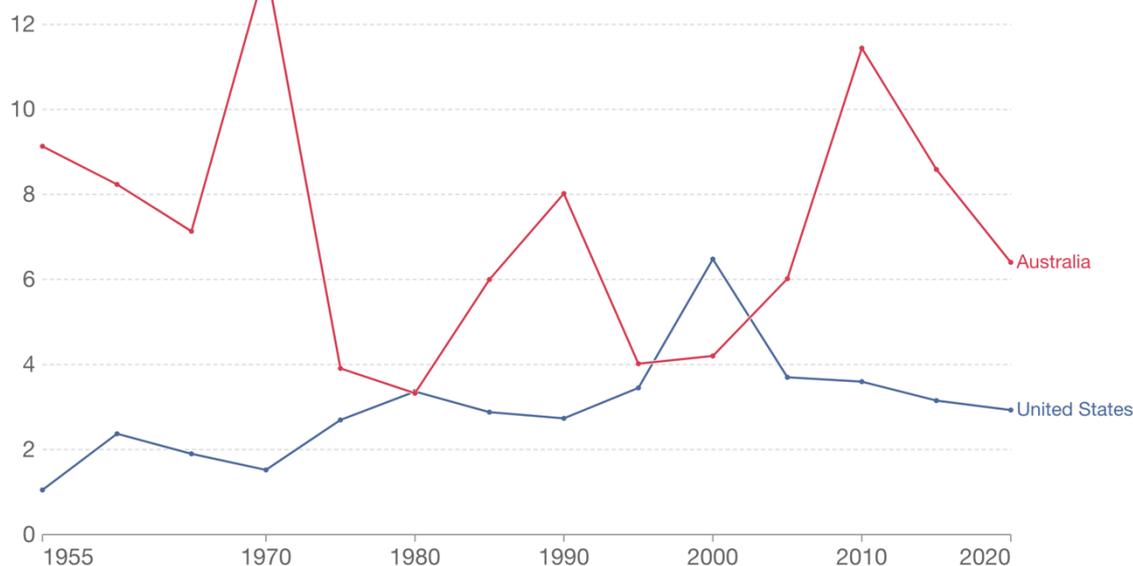
Note: The “whiskers” on the bars for the Australian figures indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: ANUpoll: April 2022; Pew Research Center American Trends Panel: January 2022

Figure 7 Net migration rate – Australian and the USA, 1955 to 2020

Net migration rate

Net migration rate is the number of immigrants (people moving into a given country) minus the number of emigrants (people moving out of the country) in the previous five years, divided by the person-years lived by the population of the receiving country over that period. It is expressed as average annual net number of migrants per 1,000 population.



Source: Calculated by Our World in Data based on UN DESA

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6 Voting intentions

After answering the question about satisfaction with direction of the country (reported in Section 2), respondents were asked ‘If a federal election for the House of Representatives was held today, which one of the following parties would you vote for?’ Figure 8 shows the per cent of Australians who said they would vote for each of the three major parties in January 2022 and April 2022, as well as the per cent of Australians who said they would have voted for another party (which includes an independent candidate) and the per cent who didn’t know who they would vote for.

The figure shows a fair degree of stability over the period. In the opening two weeks of the 2022 election campaign, the per cent of Australians who said they would vote for Labor was significantly higher than the per cent who said they would vote for the Coalition, though the difference was slightly smaller than in January 2022. Furthermore, neither of the changes between January 2022 and April 2022 for the two major parties were statistically significant.

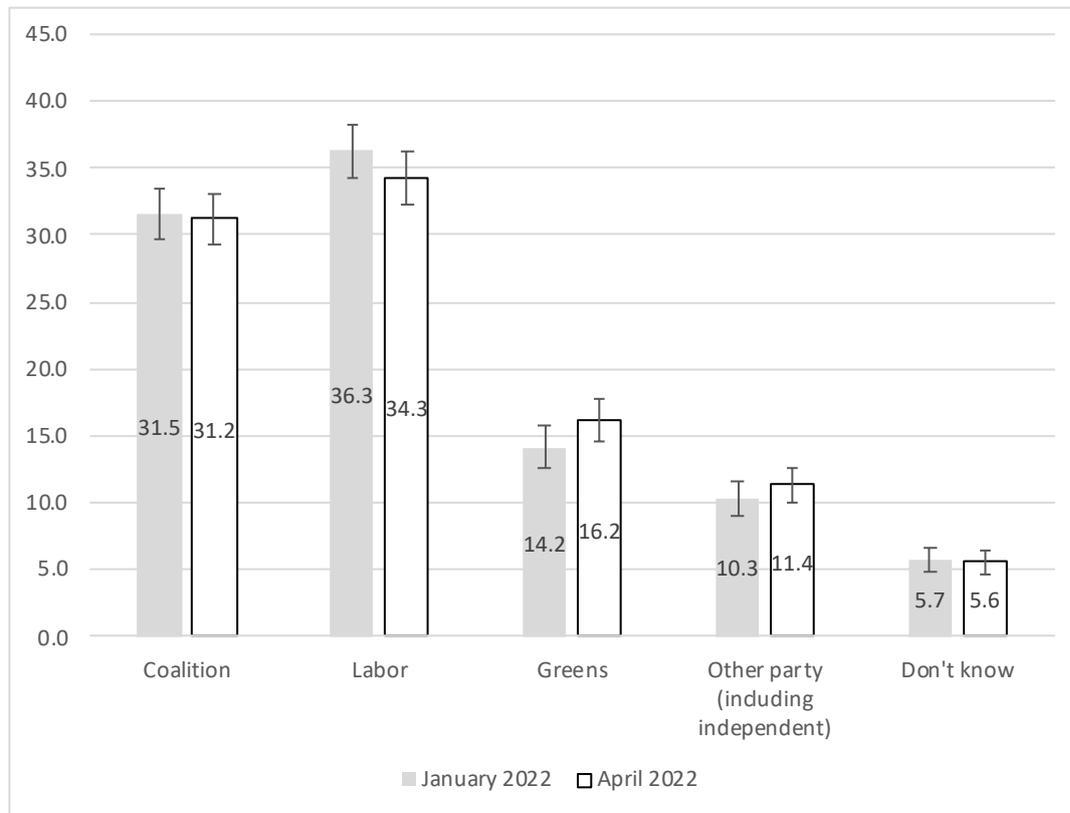
There were greater levels of change for the Greens and for ‘other parties’, with a higher per cent of Australians saying they would vote for them in April 2022 compared to January 2022. The per cent of our sample who said they would vote for the Greens increased from 14.2 per cent to 16.2 per cent and the per cent who said they would vote for another party increasing slightly (but not significantly) from 10.3 to 11.4 per cent.

Although we do not use ANUpoll to calculate two-party preferred voting or to predict the outcome of the election, the data suggests greater support for Labor compared to the

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Coalition, and the outcome of the election potentially influenced by where people allocate their second, third, or other preferences.

Figure 8 Voting intentions in January and April 2022 if an election were held that day



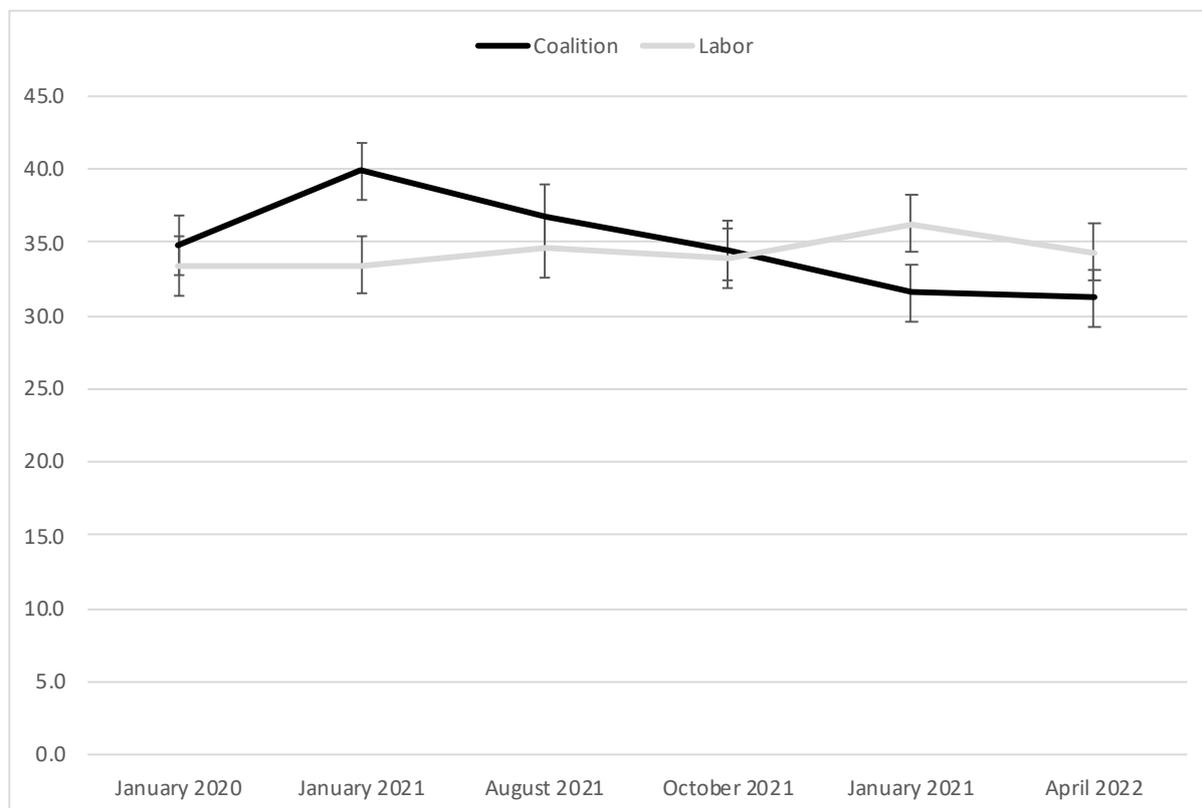
Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: ANUpoll: January and April 2022

Figure 9 tells the longer-term story about changes in voting intention with regards the major two parties. Since January 2020, during the Black Summer bushfire crisis and just prior to the spread of COVID-19 in Australia, we have asked about voting intentions six times (including the April 2022 survey). The figure shows that just prior to the pandemic in Australia, a roughly equal proportion of adult Australians would have voted for the Coalition and Labor if an election was held on that day. By January 2021, at a time of very few COVID-19 restrictions or cases in Australia, 39.9 per cent of Australians said that they would vote for the Coalition compared to 33.4 per cent who said they would vote Labor.

The gap between the two parties narrowed between January and August 2021 (when vaccination rates lagged well behind other countries), and had essentially disappeared by October 2021 (as the COVID-19 restrictions in the south-east of the country had only started to be eased). There was a large increase in voting intentions for Labor between October 2021 and January 2022, with commensurate declines in voting intentions for the Coalition. This is followed by the slight narrowing up until April 2022 documented and discussed earlier.

Figure 9 Per cent of adult Australians who would have voted for one of the two major parties, January 2020 to April 2022



Note: The “whiskers” on the lines indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

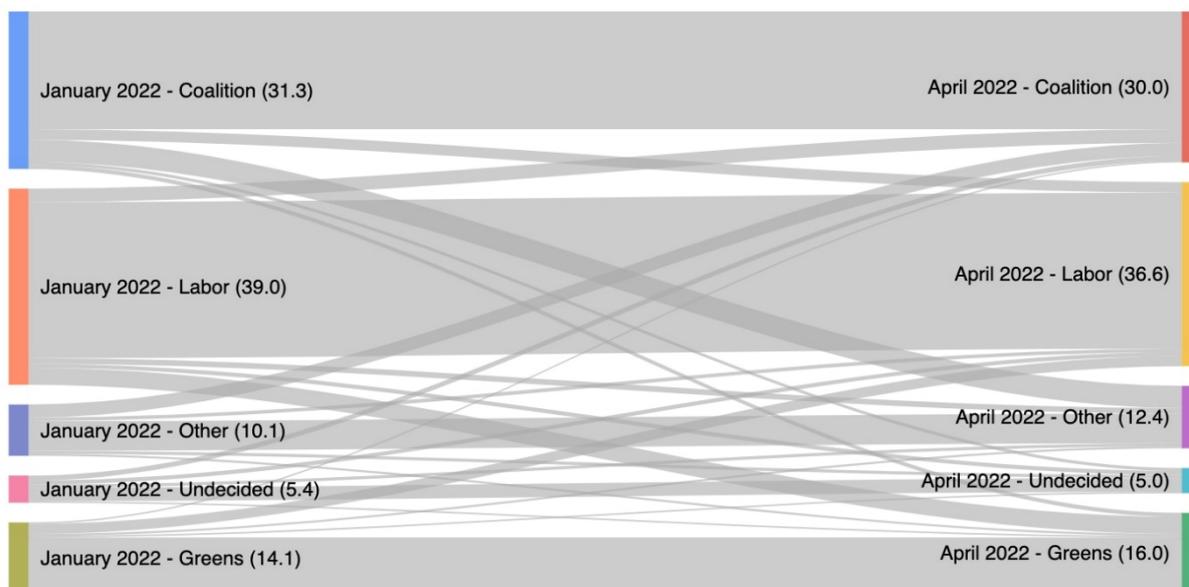
Source: ANUpoll: January 2020; January, August and October 2021; and January and April 2022

6.1 Flows in voting intentions

There was a fair degree of stability between a person’s stated voting intention in January 2022 and their intention in April 2022 (Figure 10).⁷ Only 26.0 per cent of respondents said they would have voted for a different party in April compared to January 2020 (a period of three-months). By way of comparison, 33.9 per cent of respondents changed who they said they would vote for between October 2021 and January 2022 (also a period of three-months).

There was a slightly greater degree of stability in voting intentions amongst those who said they would vote for the Coalition in January 2022 compared to people who intended to vote for another party. 79.4 per cent of those who said they would vote for the Coalitions in January 2022 also said they would vote for the Coalition in April 2022, compared to 74.6 per cent for those who said they would vote for Labor in January 2022. There were large flows away from the don’t know or undecided voters, with only half of those who did not know who they would vote for when asked in January 2022 saying they did not know who they would vote for when asked in April 2022.

Figure 10 Change in voting intentions between January and April 2022



Source: ANUpoll: January and April 2022

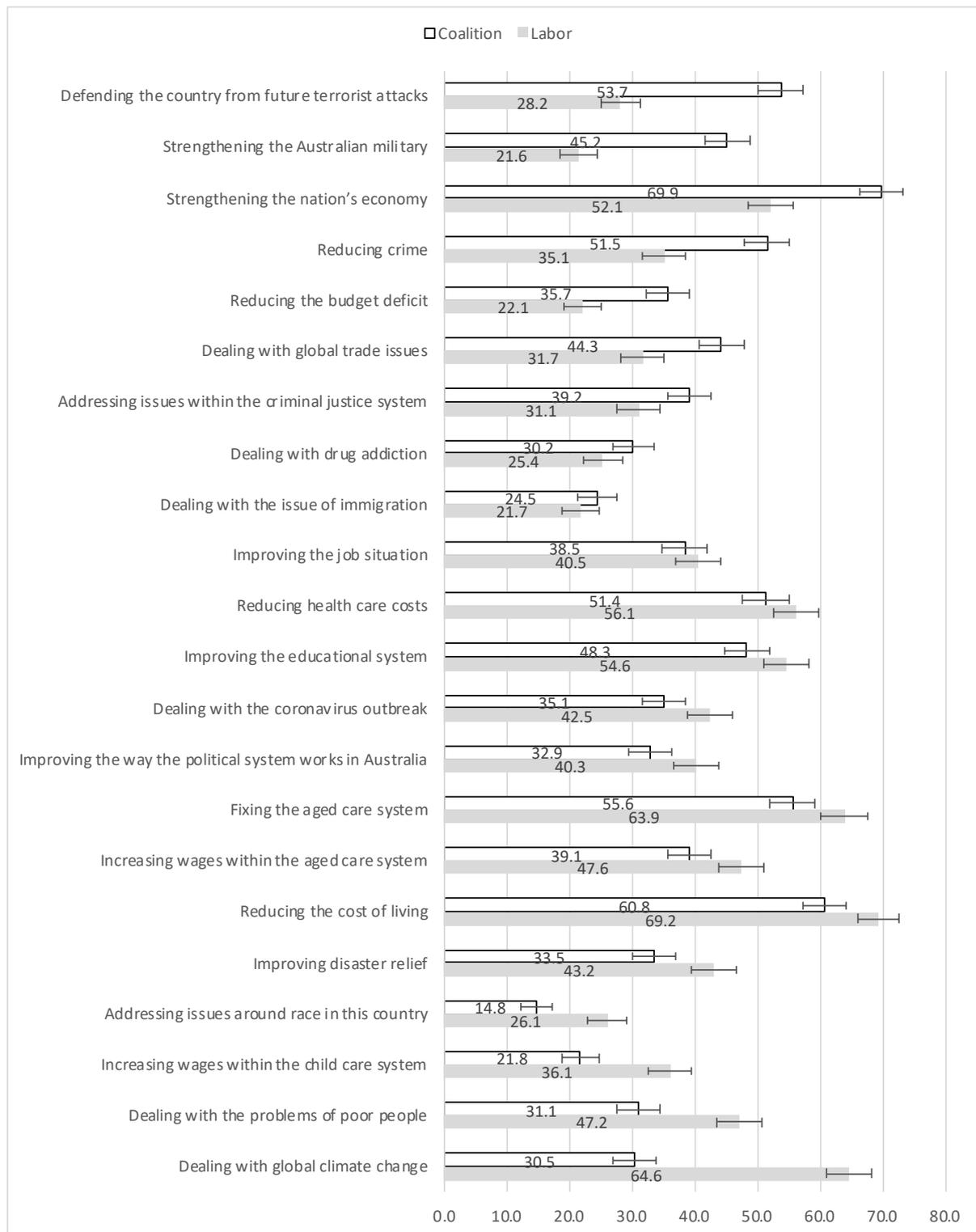
6.2 Policy priorities and voting preference

Figure 11 shows that those who intend to vote for the Coalition have quite different policy priorities than those who intend to vote for Labor. Specifically, the figure shows the proportion of respondents who think the policy area is a top priority (as is reported in Figure 6) with percentages reported separately for those who would have voted for the Coalition or Labor. The areas are ordered by the difference between Coalition and Labor voters with areas at the top seen as a greater priority by Coalition voters and those at the bottom a greater priority by Labor voters.

Coalition voters are far more likely to see defence, the economy, and crime as priority issues, with Labor voters more likely to see climate change, poverty, child care, and disaster relief as priority issues. What is perhaps as interesting are the areas where there are no significant differences between voters for the two major parties. This includes drug addiction, immigration, jobs, and health care costs, all of which have an difference of 5 percentage points or less.

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Figure 11 Per cent of Australians who reported policy areas as a ‘top priority’ by voting intention – April 2022



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: ANUpoll: April 2022

6.3 Candidate characteristics and voter preference

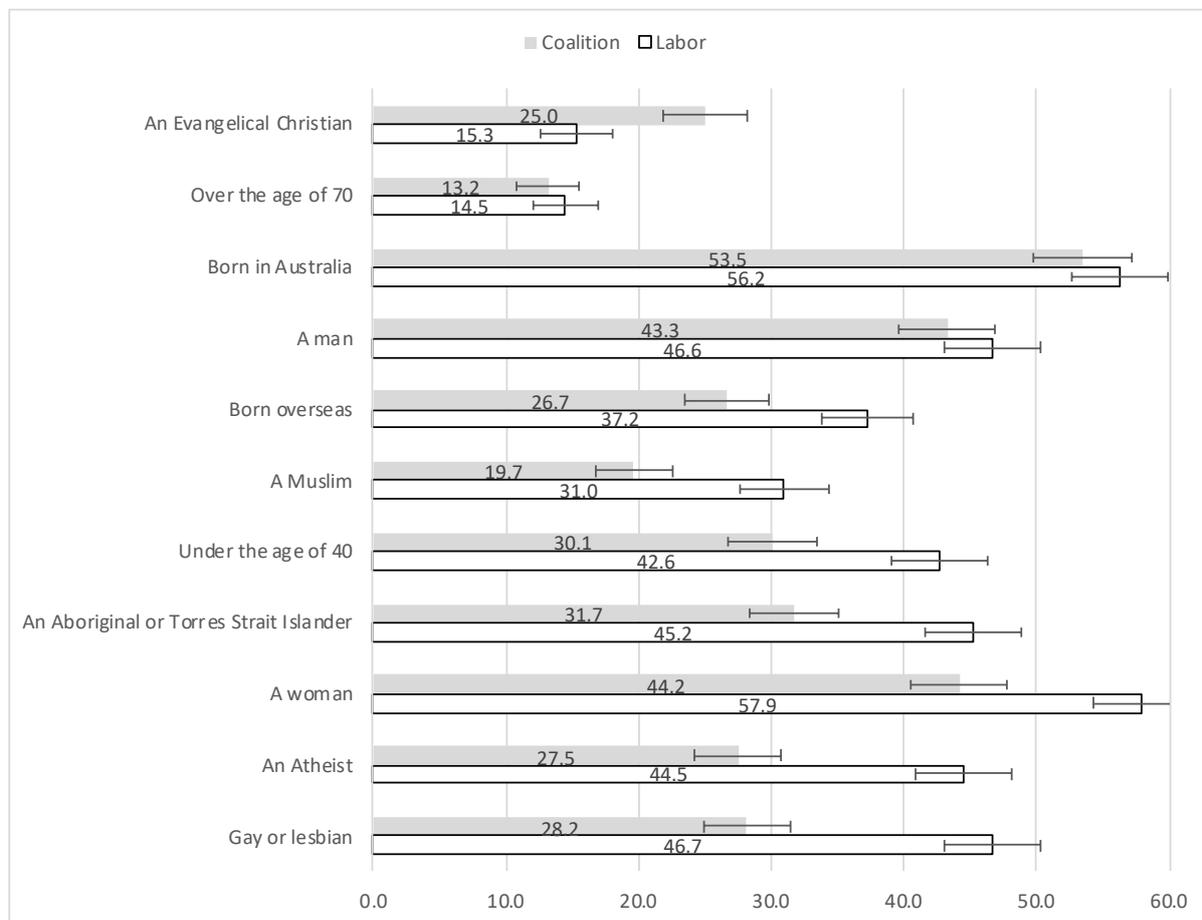
In addition to differences in the policy focus of parties, voters are likely to be influenced by the characteristics of the local candidates that they actually vote for, as well as senior members of the party (particularly the leader of the party). Figure 12 looks at support for a hypothetical candidate based on the party they said they would vote for if an election was held at the time of the survey. The candidate characteristics are ordered by the difference between Coalition and Labor voters.

There is only one “type” of candidate that a Coalition voter has a higher probability of saying they would be very likely to support – an Evangelical Christian. There are three characteristics where there are no differences – Over the age of 70, Born in Australia and a Man – with the remaining seven characteristics more likely to be supported by Labor voters compared to Coalition voters. The two biggest differences are for an Atheist, with 44.5 per cent of Labor voters saying they are very likely to vote for an Atheist compared to 27.5 per cent of Coalition voters and for a gay or lesbian candidate with 46.7 per cent of Labor voters saying they are very likely to vote for a gay or lesbian candidate compared to 28.2 per cent of Coalition voters.

It is interesting to note that 57.9 per cent of Labor voters said they were very likely to vote for a woman candidate compared to 44.2 per cent of Coalition voters. Indeed Coalition voters are slightly (though not statistically significantly) more likely to say that they are very likely to vote for a man compared to a woman, whereas there is a 13.8 percentage point difference (in favour of a woman candidate) for Labor voters.

In the current Parliament, there are far more Labor members who are female compared to Coalition members. It is unclear which way the causal direction runs, and whether support is driven by the candidates on offer or whether the parties chose their candidates based on the expected support. However, the data clearly shows that, with regards to gender at least, the preferences for hypothetical candidates correlates very closely across parties with the distribution of actual candidates.

Figure 12 Per cent of Australian who say they would be very likely to support a hypothetical candidate according to the characteristics of the candidate by voter preference, April 2022



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: ANUpoll: April 2022

7 Concluding comments

Australian’s satisfaction with the direction of the country and confidence in key institutions is well down on the peaks observed during the COVID-19 period. The institutions that has experienced the greatest decline is the Federal Government in Canberra, though confidence in the public services and state/territory governments is also lower than what it was during early to mid-2020.

Australians seem more positive about the vaccine roll-out in Australian than they were during 2021, when supply and access issues meant that many people who wanted to get vaccinated were not able to. By early 2022, almost all Australians who wanted to get vaccinated (or boosted) were able to with Australia having one of the highest vaccination rates of vaccines shown to be effective. It is demand, not supply that explains why some people are yet to be vaccinated in Australia.

While this success with vaccination should be a positive for incumbent governments across Australia, data presented in this paper show that dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak is now seen to be less of a priority than it might have been in the last two years, compared to other countries, and compared to other policy areas. In particular, cost of living pressures, ongoing

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crises in aged care, health care costs, and climate change are seen by more people as being a top priority. These aren't policy areas that are traditionally associated with the Coalition government, explaining in part why the primary vote for the Coalition continues to trail that of the Labor, and why the Greens party appears to have a much higher level of support than it has in years.

All of this means that, at the midway point of the 2022 election campaign, the Labor party is in an election winning position, and voter preference would have to change for the Morrison government to be re-elected. Another key finding in this paper points to challenges for the government, in that Australians seem quite willing to vote for women candidates over men, with the Labor party having a far higher percentage of sitting members who are women.

None of this means that it is guaranteed that Anthony Albanese will be the next Prime Minister, as what matters in an election is seat by seat voting, preference flows, and the ultimate decision of undecided voters. However, the data suggests a very challenging few weeks for Scott Morrison if he is to stay on as Prime Minister.

Appendix 1 About the survey

Data collection for the April 2022 ANUpoll commenced on the 11th of April 2022 with a pilot test of telephone respondents. The main data collection commenced on the 12th of April and concluded on the 26th of April. The final sample size for the survey is 3,587 respondents. 57.1 per cent of the sample had completed the survey by the 14th of April and the average interview duration was 20.3 minutes.

The Social Research Centre collected data online and through Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) in order to ensure representation from the offline Australian population. Around 3.4 per cent of interviews were collected via CATI. The contact methodology adopted for the online Life in Australia™ members is an initial survey invitation via email and SMS (where available), followed by multiple email reminders and a reminder SMS. Telephone follow up of panel members who have not yet completed the survey commenced in the second week of fieldwork and consisted of reminder calls encouraging completion of the online survey. The contact methodology for offline Life in Australia™ members was an initial SMS (where available), followed by an extended call-cycle over a two-week period. A reminder SMS was also sent in the second week of fieldwork.

A total of 4,364 respondents were invited to take part in the survey, leading to a wave-specific completion rate of 82.1 per cent. Taking into account recruitment to the panel, the cumulative response rate for this survey is around 6.8 per cent. Of those who had completed the April 2022 survey, 2,424 respondents (67.6 per cent) had completed the January 2022 survey

Unless otherwise stated, data in the paper is weighted to population benchmarks. For Life in Australia™, the approach for deriving weights generally consists of the following steps:

1. Compute a base weight for each respondent as the product of two weights:
 - a. Their enrolment weight, accounting for the initial chances of selection and subsequent post-stratification to key demographic benchmarks
 - b. Their response propensity weight, estimated from enrolment information available for both respondents and non-respondents to the present wave.
2. Adjust the base weights so that they satisfy the latest population benchmarks for several demographic characteristics.

The ethical aspects of this research have been approved by the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee (2021/430).

Appendix 2 Regression Tables

Table 1 Factors associated with preferences for candidate characteristics, April 2022

Explanatory variables	Candidate characteristics (dependent variables)							
	Woman		Man		Born in Australia		Born overseas	
	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.
Female	0.304	***	-0.045		0.182	***	0.100	**
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.141		-0.154		0.020		0.119	
Aged 25 to 34 years	-0.077		-0.254	***	-0.045		0.066	
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.049		-0.041		0.027		0.064	
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.088		0.017		0.023		0.235	***
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.304	***	0.169	*	0.229	**	0.374	***
Aged 75 years plus	0.307	**	0.172		0.175		0.454	***
Indigenous	-0.212		-0.269		0.073		-0.450	**
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.047		0.073		-0.032		0.263	***
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	-0.043		0.116		-0.269	***	0.249	***
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.344	***	-0.273	***	-0.197	**	-0.130	
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.019		0.010		-0.139		-0.215	**
Has a post graduate degree	0.302	***	0.131		-0.028		0.326	***
Has an undergraduate degree	0.275	***	0.119		0.016		0.217	***
Has a Certificate III/IV, Diploma or Associate Degree	0.087		0.064		-0.038		0.028	
Lives in the most disadvantaged areas (1st quintile)	-0.036		-0.006		0.047		-0.086	
Lives in next most disadvantaged areas (2nd quintile)	0.188	**	0.095		0.118		0.058	
Lives in next most advantaged areas (4th quintile)	0.020		-0.049		-0.036		0.106	
Lives in the most advantaged areas (5th quintile)	0.095		0.033		0.030		0.099	
Lives in another capital city	-0.076		-0.065		-0.021		-0.060	
LGBTQIA+	0.295	***	-0.071		0.158		0.320	***
Member of a particular religion or denomination	0.130	*	0.143	**	0.203	***	0.114	*
Self-reported religiosity	-0.054	***	-0.027	**	-0.033	***	-0.045	***
Cut-point 1	-2.149		-2.306		-2.368		-1.502	
Cut-point 2	-1.599		-1.680		-1.811		-0.657	
Cut-point 3	0.124		0.074		-0.084		0.695	
Sample size	3,373		3,366		3,375		3,375	

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Explanatory variables	Candidate characteristics (dependent variables)							
	Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander		Gay or lesbian		Under the age of 40		Over the age of 70	
	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.
Female	0.269	***	0.364	***	0.088	*	0.081	*
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.210	*	0.118		0.155		-0.424	***
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.016		0.090		0.150	*	-0.111	
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.045		0.003		0.001		0.069	
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.075		-0.003		0.020		0.125	
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.180	**	0.119		0.130		0.193	**
Aged 75 years plus	-0.037		0.018		0.077		0.199	*
Indigenous	0.482	**	-0.005		0.010		-0.232	
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	-0.017		0.046		0.066		-0.099	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	-0.049		-0.203	**	-0.086		-0.156	*
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.332	***	-0.240	***	-0.276	***	-0.041	
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.218	**	-0.194	**	-0.171	*	-0.139	
Has a post graduate degree	0.084		0.158		0.015		-0.013	
Has an undergraduate degree	0.131	*	0.108		0.095		-0.043	
Has a Certificate III/IV, Diploma or Associate Degree	-0.008		-0.029		-0.085		-0.081	
Lives in the most disadvantaged areas (1st quintile)	-0.084		-0.136		-0.033		0.029	
Lives in next most disadvantaged areas (2nd quintile)	0.146	*	0.007		0.140	*	0.097	
Lives in next most advantaged areas (4th quintile)	0.029		-0.020		0.089		-0.026	
Lives in the most advantaged areas (5th quintile)	0.130	*	0.034		0.048		-0.023	
Lives in another capital city	0.045		-0.008		0.027		-0.023	
LGBTQIA+	0.340	***	0.710	***	0.278	***	0.110	
Member of a particular religion or denomination	0.065		-0.103		-0.025		0.004	
Self-reported religiosity	-0.023	**	-0.069	***	-0.040	***	-0.012	
Cut-point 1	-1.699		-1.636		-2.108		-1.254	
Cut-point 2	-1.011		-1.072		-1.226		-0.106	
Cut-point 3	0.396		0.213		0.287		0.981	
Sample size	3,375		3,375		3,370		3,373	

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Explanatory variables	Candidate characteristics (dependent variables)					
	Muslim		Atheist		Evangelical Christian	
	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.
Female	0.163	***	0.088	*	0.042	
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.274	**	0.116		0.206	*
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.058		0.136		0.057	
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.004		0.011		0.017	
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.155	**	0.081		0.046	
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.231	***	0.226	***	0.153	*
Aged 75 years plus	0.227	**	0.149		0.254	**
Indigenous	-0.291		-0.276		0.054	
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.098		0.122		0.114	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	-0.056		-0.003		0.239	***
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.104		-0.403	***	-0.085	
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.351	***	-0.393	***	0.215	**
Has a post graduate degree	0.070		0.120		-0.048	
Has an undergraduate degree	0.086		0.107		0.092	
Has a Certificate III/IV, Diploma or Associate Degree	-0.018		-0.135	*	0.185	**
Lives in the most disadvantaged areas (1st quintile)	-0.105		-0.085		0.004	
Lives in next most disadvantaged areas (2nd quintile)	-0.007		0.098		0.030	
Lives in next most advantaged areas (4th quintile)	-0.048		-0.027		-0.098	
Lives in the most advantaged areas (5th quintile)	0.097		0.034		-0.011	
Lives in another capital city	-0.006		-0.026		-0.015	
LGBTQIA+	0.303	***	0.400	***	-0.306	***
Member of a particular religion or denomination	0.008		-0.249	***	0.371	***
Self-reported religiosity	-0.042	***	-0.107	***	0.076	***
Cut-point 1	-1.109		-2.114		-0.364	
Cut-point 2	-0.402		-1.409		0.487	
Cut-point 3	0.674		-0.079		1.564	
Sample size	3,364		3,374		3,378	

Source: ANUpoll, April 2022

Notes: Ordered Probit Regression Models. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; non-Indigenous; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a post-graduate degree; lives in neither an advantaged or disadvantaged suburb (third quintile); lives in a capital city; does not identify as LGBTQIA+ or as a member of a particular religion or denomination; and has a zero value on the religiosity self-reported score. Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *.

Endnotes

- 1 doi:10.26193/AXQPSE
- 2 <https://news.gallup.com/poll/254120/less-half-vote-socialist-president.aspx>
- 3 Due to constraints on the length of the survey we did not ask about preferences for non-Indigenous or heterosexual/bisexual candidates.
- 4 There is limited data available on the proportion of the Australian population that identify as LGBTQI+. Wilson et al (2020) estimate 3.6 per cent of Australian men and 3.4 per cent of Australian women in 2016 describe themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or “other sexual minority identities”. <https://bmcrenotes.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13104-020-05383-w>. While this is lower than the estimates in ANUpoll, Wilson et al. (2020) note that the way the question is asked matters a lot, and also it should be noted that questions that are more similar to ours find much higher rates, including in the US where Gallup found that in 2021 ‘the percentage of U.S. adults who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or something other than heterosexual has increased to a new high of 7.1%’ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/389792/lgbt-identification-ticks-up.aspx>.
- 5 <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2022/02/16/publics-top-priority-for-2022-strengthening-the-nations-economy/>
The Pew Research Center survey that the ANUpoll question was based on asked 5,128 adults for their views on public policy priorities between January 10-17, 2022 using the American Trends Panel (a probability-based panel).
- 6 Views on ‘Securing Social Security’ was not asked in the Australian survey due to substantial differences in the systems in Australia and therefore lack of comparability.
- 7 The analysis of the individual level flows in voting intentions is based on the longitudinal sample.