# Research note: Policy priorities and the 2022 Australian Federal Election Result

# ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods

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## Acknowledgements

## Abstract

This research note focuses on the policy priorities that appear to have shaped the 2022 Australian Federal Election Result, and is written to accompany the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods/School of Politics and International Relations Symposium on 'Realignment or dealignment? Survey perspectives on the 2022 Federal Election. There were three policy areas where support predicted 2019 Coalition voters to stay with the Coalition: Defending the country from future terrorist attacks; Dealing with the issue of immigration; and Dealing with global trade issues. There were, however, four policy areas where support predicted 2019 Coalition voters switched their vote: Dealing with global climate change; Improving disaster relief; Improving the way the political system works in Australia; and Addressing issues around race in this country. The policy areas that predicted a vote switch were seen as a much greater priority going into the election campaign than those that predicted staying with the Coalition.

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# 1 Introduction and overview

The May 2022 Election led to a change in government for the first time since 2013, with a slim majority for the new Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's Labor Party. The historically low vote for the two major parties suggests that this election may have ushered in a major realignment in Australian voting, with the election of six 'Teal' Independents in previously staunch Liberal Party seats, a dramatic increase in the number of Greens MPs concentrated in Brisbane, and the lowest primary vote ever for an incoming government.

Immediately after the election, the Social Research Centre on behalf of the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods and the School of Politics and International Relations began collection of a combined ANUpoll/Comparative Study of Electoral Systems survey. Using the probability-based Life in Australia panel, this survey has detailed information on 3,556 adult Australians on who they voted for, their views on policy and institutions, leaders, the pandemic and a range of demographic, socioeconomic, and political attitudes. The vast majority of respondents who undertook the May 2022 survey also undertook the April 2022 ANUpoll, meaning information is available on voting intentions and policy attitudes at the start of the election campaign.

On the 20th of June 2020, the first paper from this dataset was released through the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods' website (Biddle and McAllister 2022). The aim of that paper was to analyse the factors associated with voting behaviour in May 2022, how that related to voting intentions at the start of the campaign as well as voting behaviour in the 2019 election. The paper found that age and education were key factors explaining voting choice. These two factors were much stronger predictors than sex, country of birth, location, and even household income. These two characteristics – age and education – were the most important demographic characteristics factors explaining the loss in support for the Coalition.

Focusing on the 2022 election as a cross-section, in general Coalition voters were found to be older, non-Indigenous, with low education, living outside of the capital cities, and with a household income that puts them outside of the bottom income quintile. Labor voters tended to have high levels of education, lived in capital cities and had low income. Greens voters tended to be female, young, born in Australia or another English-speaking country, and without a trade qualification. Those who voted for another party tended to have high levels of education, lived outside of a capital city, and had a relatively low household income.

On the 24th of June, researchers from the ANU and externally will utilise the ANUpoll/CSES and other data to convey an in-depth understanding of the outcome of the 2022 election at the Symposium titled: *'Realignment or dealignment? Survey perspectives on the 2022 Federal Election*. The presentations will examine the factors that influenced people's vote, the changing political and policy opinions held by the Australian public, and what these changes mean for the incoming government, opposition, minor parties, and independents. The May 2022 data will also be placed in the context of long-term trends in voting behaviour and attitudes.

This research note accompanies one of the presentations, focusing on the policy priorities that appear to have shaped the 2022 Australian Federal Election Result. In the next section we describe the data and the methods, and then in Section 3 we present the main results. Section 4 provides some brief concluding comments.

## 2   Data and methods

### 2.1   Data and main questions

Data collection for the May 2022 ANUpoll/Comparative Study of Electoral Systems occurred between the 23rd of May and the 5th of June 2022, with 61.1 per cent of the eventual sample of 3,556 respondents completing the survey between the 24th and 26th of May. The vast majority (96.8 per cent) of interviews were completed online, with 3.2 per cent being completed over the phone. Most respondents who undertook the May 2022 survey (93.4 per cent or 3,350 respondents) also undertook the April 2022 ANUpoll, meaning information is available on voting intentions and policy attitudes for a very large number of adult Australians at the start of the election campaign and after the election had taken place.

The average survey length for those completing the survey was 18.7 minutes. The survey was longer for members completing over the phone (26.8 minutes) compared to members who self-completed completed online (18.4 minutes). 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 4,338 respondents were invited to take part in the survey, leading to a wave-specific completion rate of 82.0 per cent. Taking into account recruitment to the panel, the cumulative response rate for this survey is around 6.8 per cent.
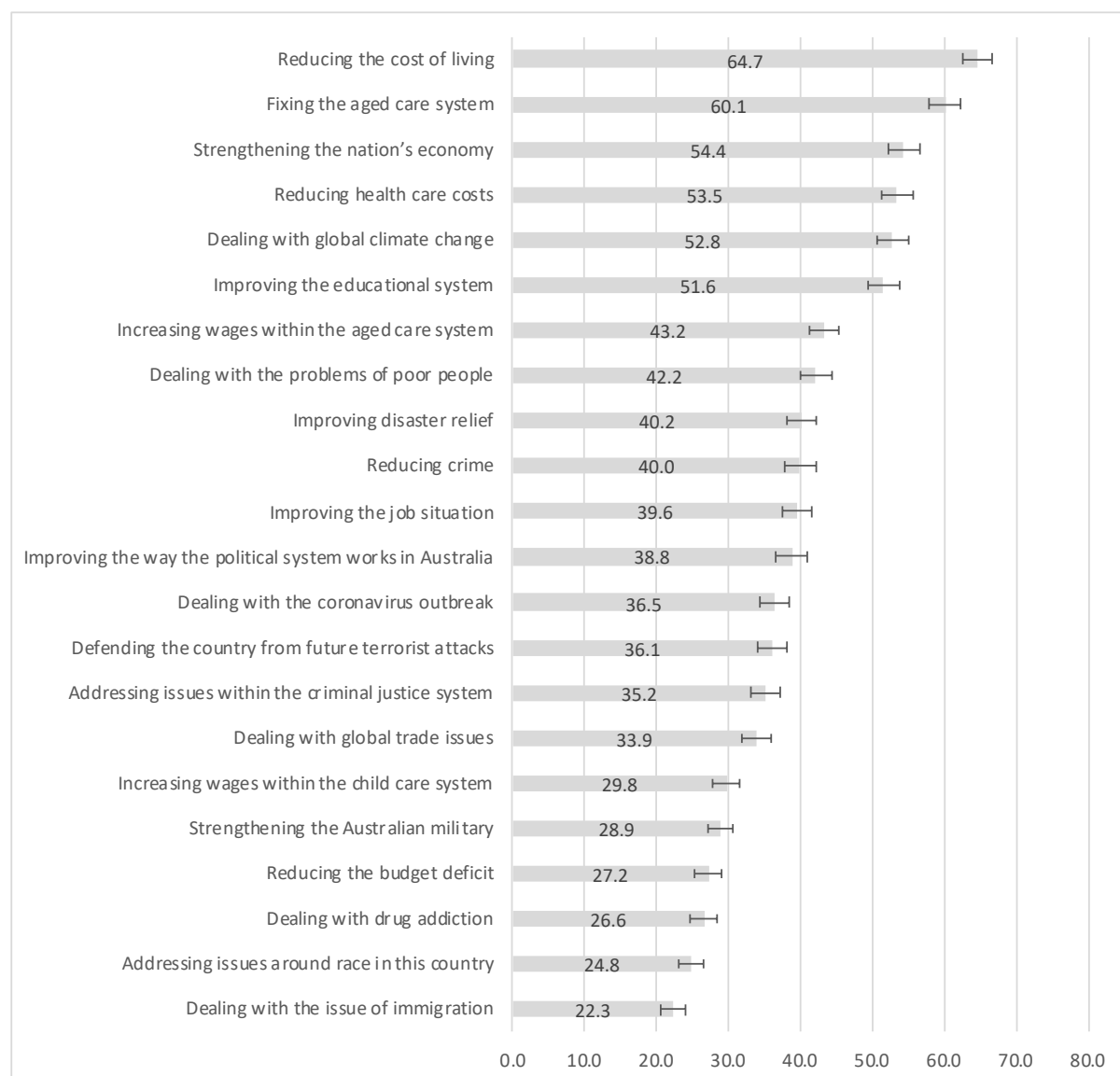
Respondents to the May 2022 ANUpoll were asked 'In the Federal election for the House of Representatives on Saturday 21st May, which party did you vote for first in the House of Representatives?' with the instruction given that: 'If you voted in person or by mail, this was the smaller, green ballot paper.' Respondents were also asked 'In the last Federal election in May 2019, when the Liberals were led by Scott Morrison and Labor by Bill Shorten, which party got your **first preference** then in the **House of Representatives** election? [bold in original].

Respondents to the April 2022 ANUpoll were asked 'How much of a priority should each of these following be for the Federal government to address this year?' across 22 policy areas with four response options:

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

The order in which the policy areas were presented was randomised, and Figure 1 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. More discussion on these priority areas is available in Biddle and Gray (2022).

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**Figure 1          Per cent of Australians who reported policy areas as a 'top priority' – April 2022**

| Policy area | Per cent |
|---|---|
| Reducing the cost of living | 64.7 |
| Fixing the aged care system | 60.1 |
| Strengthening the nation's economy | 54.4 |
| Reducing health care costs | 53.5 |
| Dealing with global climate change | 52.8 |
| Improving the educational system | 51.6 |
| Increasing wages within the aged care system | 43.2 |
| Dealing with the problems of poor people | 42.2 |
| Improving disaster relief | 40.2 |
| Reducing crime | 40.0 |
| Improving the job situation | 39.6 |
| Improving the way the political system works in Australia | 38.8 |
| Dealing with the coronavirus outbreak | 36.5 |
| Defending the country from future terrorist attacks | 36.1 |
| Addressing issues within the criminal justice system | 35.2 |
| Dealing with global trade issues | 33.9 |
| Increasing wages within the child care system | 29.8 |
| Strengthening the Australian military | 28.9 |
| Reducing the budget deficit | 27.2 |
| Dealing with drug addiction | 26.6 |
| Addressing issues around race in this country | 24.8 |
| Dealing with the issue of immigration | 22.3 |

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

Source:          ANUpoll: April 2022

## 2.2   Analysis methods

Using the person's vote in the May 2019 election and the May 2022 election, we can analyse the factors associated with the main change that led to a change in government over the period – those who voted Coalition in May 2019 but voted for a different party in May 2022 (27.7 per cent of those who said they had voted Coalition). To analyse this change, the dependent variable is the probability of voting for a party other than the Coalition, and we estimate the model across all individuals who voted in 2022.

We first control for the party grouping that a person voted for in May 2019. The base case individual in the model voted for the Coalition in 2019 with a separate dummy variable for whether someone voted Labor; Greens; another party (including independents); did not vote in 2019; was not eligible to vote in 2019; and did not know who they voted for in 2019. That is, six separate dummy variables. We also control for a range of demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic variables, as observed in May 2022.

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To reduce the number of policy priorities in the model, we follow a stepwise regression approach, with backward selection. Specifically, we run our first model with a dummy variable for all twenty-two priorities (0 if someone doesn't think it is a top priority, 1 if they do) and then exclude all those priorities that had a coefficient of less than 0.1 (in absolute terms) from the model, leaving 11 remaining priorities. None of the priorities that were excluded were statistically significant. We then re-estimate the model and exclude those priorities that had a coefficient of less than 0.15 (in absolute terms) leaving eight priorities that appear to predict voting in 2022, conditional on voting in May 2019. From this third and final model, we focus on those priorities that had a p-value of less than 0.1, leaving seven priorities in total. Results are presented in Appendix Table 1 and summarised in the next section.

## 3   Factors that predict vote switching

Looking at the control variables to start with, not surprisingly those who did not vote for the Coalition in 2019 were more likely to have not voted for the Coalition in 2022. Labor and Greens voters in 2019 were the most likely to have voted for someone other than the Coalition in 2022, with those who voted for another party still substantially more likely to have. Those who did not know who they voted for, didn't vote, or were not eligible to vote all had a positive coefficient (more likely to have not voted for the Coalition in 2022 than a 2019 Coalition voter) but the differences are a bit smaller. While these differences are not surprising, it is important to recognise that these are controlled for in the model.

Of the other control variables, older Australians, those who lived in the most advantaged suburbs and those who lived outside of capital cities were the least likely to vote for a party other than the Coalition. Those who live in a household in the lowest income quintile seem slightly more likely to have voted for a party other than the Coalition, but the difference isn't quite statistically significant (p-value = 0.110).

Focusing on the policy priorities that appear to be associated with people changing their vote, there were three priorities that predict a lower probability of voting for a party other than the Coalition and four that predict a higher probability of a vote for another party.

Outside of the modelling framework, we can look at the scale of these differences by focusing on those who voted for the Coalition in 2019, and consider the per cent who voted for a party other than the Coalition in 2022. We show this in Figure 2 separately by whether or not they think the policy issue is a high priority, with those priorities that appear to increase the probability of a change at the top, and those that appear to decrease the probability of change at the bottom.

There were four policy areas for which support predicted 2019 Coalition voters being more likely to have switched their vote. The biggest difference was by the policy area of 'Dealing with global climate change.' If a Coalition voter in 2019 thought this was a top priority when asked in April 2022, then they have a 40.3 per cent chance of switching their vote. If they didn't think it was a top priority though, then they only have a 22.5 per cent chance of changing their vote. Other priorities that appear to have predicted a loss in support for the Coalition are: Improving disaster relief; Improving the way the political system works in Australia; and Addressing issues around race in this country

On the other hand, there were three policy areas where support as of April 2022 predicted 2019 Coalition voters staying with the Coalition in May 2022. The biggest gap was for prioritising 'Defending the country from future terrorist attacks.' If a Coalition voter in 2019

thought this was a top priority when asked in April 2022, then they have an 18.9 per cent chance of switching their vote. If they didn't think it was a top priority though, then they have a much higher chance (38.5 per cent) of changing their vote. The two other issues that predicted staying with the Coalition were: Dealing with the issue of immigration; and Dealing with global trade issues

Figure 2     Per cent of 2019 Coalition voters who voted for another party in May 2022, by policy prioritisation as of April 2022
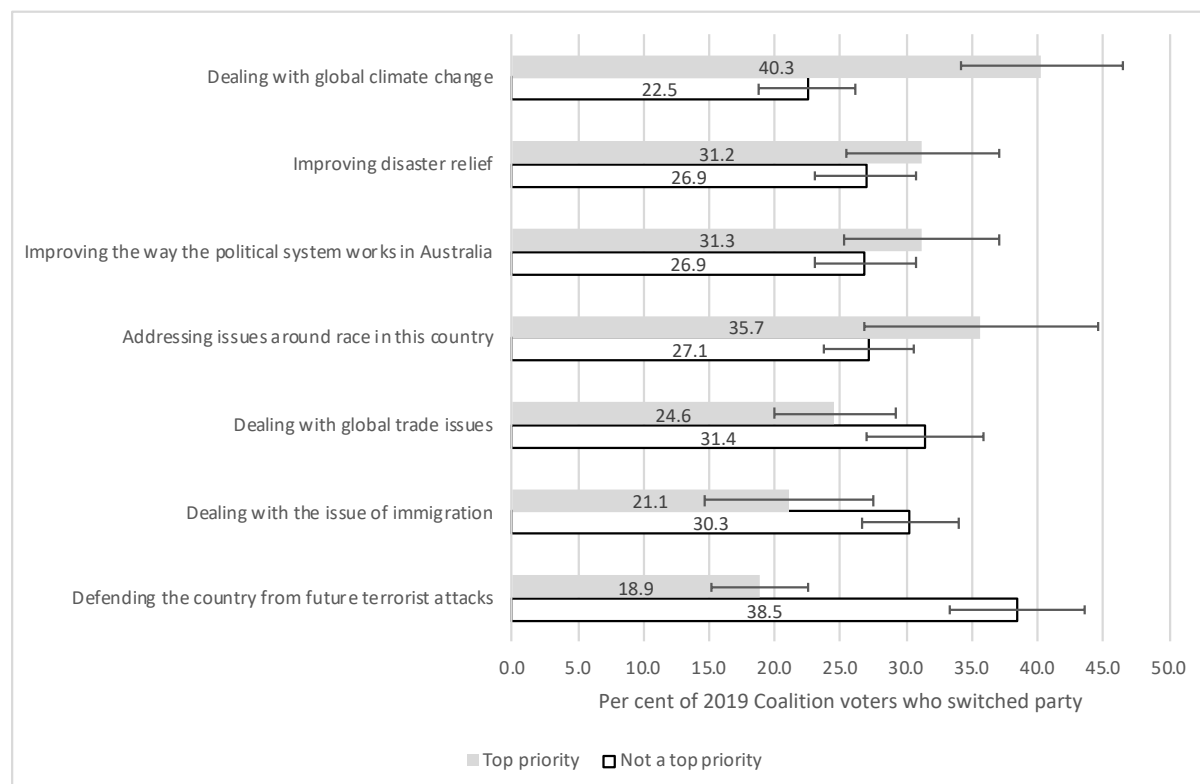


Note:           The "whiskers" on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source:         ANUpoll: April and May 2022

## 4   Concluding comments

There was some criticism (arguably justified) that the 2022 Federal Election was devoid of policy debate. It is true that views on the leaders of the major parties appear to have been particularly salient (in particular the very low support for the former Prime Minister Scott Morrison), but there were still some key policy differences between the two major parties, as well as between the major parties and the Greens and the minor parties/independents. Furthermore, analysis presented in this paper shows that policy views appears to have been important in predicting voting choice.

In this paper we focus on vote switching – a person changing their vote between elections. Controlling for voting choice in 2019 and a range of other background characteristics, there were three priorities that predict a lower probability of voting for a party other than the Coalition in 2019 (that is, sticking with the Coalition). These were Defending the country from future terrorist attacks; Dealing with the issue of immigration; and Dealing with global trade issues. On the other hand, there were four policy areas that predict a higher probability of a vote for another party (switching from the Coalition): Dealing with global climate change;

Improving disaster relief; Improving the way the political system works in Australia; and Addressing issues around race in this country.

Comparing the policy priorities that appear to have influenced people's votes in May 2022 with the relative level of prioritisation leading into the election gives a good indication of why the Coalition fared so poorly in the 2022 election. Three of the policy issues that predicted a swing away from the Coalition were ranked 5th, 9th, and 12th across all 22 areas, with only one ranking relatively lowly (21st). However, the policy issues that predicted a retention in the Coalition vote were ranked much lower – 14th, 16th, and 22nd.

Looking forward over the first term of the Labor government, if Prime Minister Albanese is able to keep the focus on the policy areas that helped them win the election, and be seen to respond adequately to then they will be very well placed to win the next Federal election, and consolidate major policy gains. If the Coalition opposition is able to turn the focus to the areas that helped them maintain their support, or if the government is unable to make serious policy success in the other areas then the Albanese government may struggle to win a second term.

## References

Biddle, N. and Gray, M., 2022 Views on policy and politics on the eve of the 2022 Federal Election https://csrm.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/views-policy-and-politics-eve-2022-federal-election

Biddle, N. and McAllister, I., 2022 Explaining the 2022 Australian Federal Election Result https://csrm.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/explaining-2022-australian-federal-election-result

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Policy priorities and the 2022 election result

# Appendix     Regression tables

### Table 1     Factors associated with vote switching, May 2019 to May 2022

| Explanatory variables | Coeff. | Signif. |
|---|---|---|
| Voted for Labor in 2019 | 1.978 | *** |
| Voted for Greens 2019 | 1.945 | *** |
| Voted for other party in 2019 | 1.695 | *** |
| Didn't vote in 2019 | 0.911 | *** |
| Not eligible to vote in 2019 | 0.890 | *** |
| Didn't know who they voted for in 2019 | 0.968 | ** |
| Top priority - Defending the country from future terrorist attacks | -0.404 | *** |
| Top priority - Dealing with the issue of immigration | -0.304 | *** |
| Top priority - Dealing with global trade issues | -0.261 | *** |
| Top priority - Reducing crime | -0.109 | |
| Top priority - Addressing issues around race in this country | 0.237 | ** |
| Top priority - Improving the way the political system works in Australia | 0.246 | *** |
| Top priority - Improving disaster relief | 0.281 | *** |
| Top priority - Dealing with global climate change | 0.563 | *** |
| Female | -0.027 | |
| Aged 18 to 24 years | -0.098 | |
| Aged 25 to 34 years | -0.074 | |
| Aged 45 to 54 years | 0.037 | |
| Aged 55 to 64 years | -0.108 | |
| Aged 65 to 74 years | -0.203 | |
| Aged 75 years plus | -0.440 | ** |
| Indigenous | 0.263 | |
| Born overseas in a main English-speaking country | -0.036 | |
| Born overseas in a non-English speaking country | 0.203 | |
| Speaks a language other than English at home | -0.224 | |
| Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification | -0.190 | |
| Has a post graduate degree | -0.063 | |
| Has an undergraduate degree | 0.125 | |
| Has a Certificate III/IV, Diploma or Associate Degree | -0.028 | |
| Lives in the most disadvantaged areas (1st quintile) | -0.099 | |
| Lives in next most disadvantaged areas (2nd quintile) | -0.148 | |
| Lives in next most advantaged areas (4th quintile) | -0.148 | |
| Lives in the most advantaged areas (5th quintile) | -0.287 | ** |
| Lives in another capital city | -0.193 | ** |
| Lives in lowest income household (1st quintile) | 0.223 | |
| Lives in next lowest income household (2nd quintile) | 0.074 | |
| Lives in next highest income household (4th quintile) | -0.079 | |
| Lives in highest income household (5th quintile) | 0.020 | |
| Constant | -0.233 | |
| Sample size | 2,922 | |

Source:     ANUpoll, April and May 2022

Notes:     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; lives in neither a high income or low income household (third quintile).

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 *

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