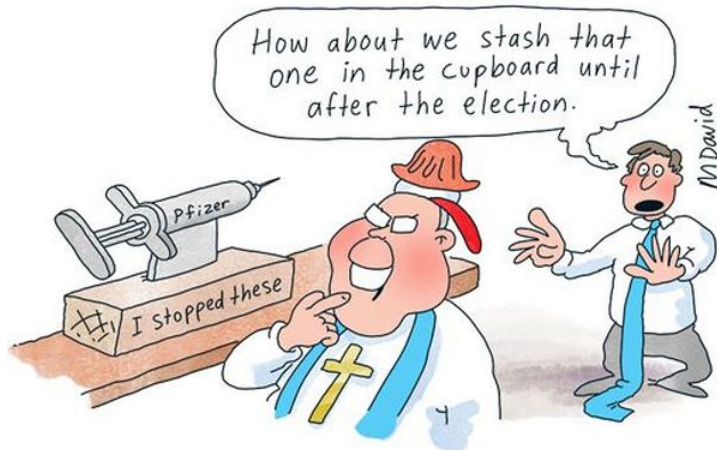


Polls show Morrison's spin wearing thin

By Emma Dawson

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Cartoon by Mark David / @MDavidCartoons

With growing criticism toward his poor leadership of our country, particularly through the pandemic, Scott Morrison's popularity is slipping, writes [Emma Dawson](#).

WITH AROUND HALF the population of Australia now under lockdown orders as state-based contact tracers try to run down the Delta variant of COVID-19, all three major [opinion polls](#) this week show that the Prime Minister's "all spin, no substance" approach to governing is [wearing thin](#).

As shown in the [Essential](#) poll published on Tuesday, three-quarters of Australians [believe](#) the PM is playing politics at a time of national crisis. In the same poll, Scott Morrison's rating for being 'good in a crisis' has dropped from 66% in May last year, when voters gave a tick to his Government's economic rescue packages after the first nationwide COVID-19 lockdown, to just 49% today.

Perhaps most interesting is a relatively new

question in the *Essential* survey: since March this year, pollsters have been asking people whether they think the Prime Minister 'avoids responsibility'. Four months ago, just 48% said that he did, but today that figure is 54%.

Just over two years on from his "[miracle](#)" Election win, are those "[quiet Australians](#)" whom he credited for giving the Coalition Government an unexpected third term in office finally waking up to the fact the Prime Minister has no clothes?

Since he seized the leadership of the nation from [Malcolm Turnbull](#) almost three years ago, Scott Morrison's prime ministership has been unlike any other. Australia has had its share of bad prime ministers: [William McMahon](#) regularly comes out [bottom of the pile](#) when historians are asked about the performance of PMs past, while the more recent and mercifully short tenure of one [Anthony John Abbott](#) was considered by many to be the [nadir](#) of federal leadership.

But have we ever seen in the top job a man so thoroughly uninterested in governing as Scott Morrison?

Morrison is now our longest serving PM since [John Howard](#). After nearly three years of his leadership, it's increasingly apparent that the early [moniker](#) "Scotty from Marketing" was, if anything, too kind. Marketing men, after all, generally have some sort of vision, a creative spark and an ability to read the room — all things sorely lacking from the Prime Minister when he is put to the test by events.

No, as an entirely avoidable outbreak of the Delta strain shuts down our biggest states and with them

around half of Australia's economic activity, it's becoming clear that the PM is more appropriately compared to the middle manager in charge of procurement, who fell asleep on the job and failed to lodge essential purchase orders in time. Now that the goods have failed to show up, causing a company-wide crisis, his energy is spent either [hiding](#) from the boss or doing the rounds of the office to tell everyone why it's not his fault. He'd be found shifting the blame onto [supply chains](#), [quality control](#) — any department he can claim not to be responsible for.

The nation is being led by that guy: the one who everyone knows was over-promoted because he was mates with the boss's son, or because he barracks for the same footy team as the owner; the one who got the job because the guy who originally applied didn't get his references in order and the company was desperate; the one who expends all his energy avoiding any actual work and creating ever more elaborate excuses as to why deadlines have been missed.

The one who behaves with bluster and bravado, but is secretly terrified of being found out and whose bloke-next-door, curry-cooking, easy-going dad façade is slowly crumbling, a new crack appearing with every short-tempered snap at a journalist or nasty dig at a (Labor) state premier. That guy.

Leaving laboured metaphors aside, it should now be obvious to all but the most rusted-on Scotty fan that Morrison's approach to government comes down to creating low expectations and then invariably blaming others when those expectations are not met. As a leadership style, this isn't unique: there are significant parallels with the mendacious right-wing populism of Prime Minister [Boris Johnson](#) in the UK, but Johnson isn't regularly shown up, as is Morrison, by state premiers who are unafraid to take responsibility and demonstrate how real leaders act.

At times last year, with the National Cabinet apparently working well and a path out of crisis looking promising, Morrison's lack of vision for the nation could be seen as a minor concern: the only

job he had to do was to steer us through an unprecedented health crisis and economic shock. With the co-operation of the states and – critically – the support of the Federal Opposition for the eye-watering levels of spending required to keep the economy afloat, it looked to some as though Morrison's [transactional](#) approach to politics might be well suited to the challenge of battling COVID-19.

A year on, Australia is now [lagging](#) the rest of the developed world on vaccinating our population and international borders are likely to [remain closed](#) well into next year. Added to that an obviously rushed and [ad hoc approach](#) to providing income support during the latest round of lockdowns causing unnecessary confusion and anxiety for citizens in different states, Morrison's web of spin is disintegrating before our eyes.

Well before the onset of COVID-19, Australia was faced with big challenges: our fragile ecosystem is amongst the world's most vulnerable to climate change; our water system is in [crisis](#); the Great Barrier Reef is [dying](#) (not that the Government wants to know).

We have had a decade or more of stagnant wage growth, rising asset prices and growing economic inequality. Our aged and disability care systems are at breaking point. Our tax system relies too heavily on income taxes from working and middle-class families, while we tax wealth and resource extraction at pitifully low levels. Our public schools are chronically underfunded and the Government has, under the cover of COVID-19, taken a sledgehammer to the university sector.

Our export economy is based on digging things up and shipping them overseas, where value is added by other nations. Locally, we've relied on importing students and tourists to spend money in an increasingly service-based domestic economy. Rather than invest in our own capacity, business and government have for decades preferred to rely on temporary migrants to fill gaps in the labour market, exploiting the desperation of workers at the bottom of the global market and keeping wages

down across the Australian economy.

After decades of neglect, the restrictions imposed on our economy by COVID-19 have laid bare the shaky foundations of our prosperity: more than [1.7 million](#) Australians are looking for work but we don't have the jobs they need. Business has no incentive to invest in new technologies that will drive sustainable productivity growth. Our tax base is shrinking, with more burden on working families and more largesse for the wealthy, at the same time as our costs for social care and infrastructure are growing.

Yet the Government has no plans. The Prime Minister [runs](#) from the work of negotiating change through the Parliament and has stated openly that he has no appetite for the reforms necessary to drive the next era of Australian prosperity. Apparently, governing with an eye on the future and tackling the challenges that face our nation in the face of the existential threat of climate change are nothing more than a [vanity exercise](#) in the eyes of our "pragmatic" PM.

Morrison is nothing if not a clever politician and the shock of this week's polls may prompt another shape-shift from the man who has built his career on telling the people in front of him exactly what they want to hear, allowing him to recover ground among the quiet Australians who backed him at the last Election.

But the view that we have a Prime Minister who avoids responsibility is now held by a majority of Australians and if Morrison doesn't reverse that quickly, it is likely to be terminal for his Government.

Australians are beginning to ask what the point is of a Prime Minister who doesn't actually want to lead the country. From there, it's a short step to giving the job to [someone who does](#).

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