

# 8

## Talking pictures (and cartoons, videos, memes, etcetera)

Lucien Leon and Richard Scully

On the morning of Sunday, 10 April 2022, viewers of ABC TV's weekly current affairs program *Insiders* received a very rude shock: the 'Talking Pictures' segment was dropped from its sacrosanct place in the last 10 minutes of the show. Mike Bowers' regular run-through of the week's cartoons and pictures was shunted in favour of footage of Scott Morrison in transit from Sydney to Yarralumla to ask Governor-General David Hurley to prorogue parliament and dissolve the House of Representatives and half the Senate. Thousands flocked to social media, where fans of all things cartoony could not only watch the unaired segment but also troll away to their hearts' content, questioning the national broadcaster's priorities.

It is easy to miss something significant here. The fact that viewers were able to catch up on the segment in this way—taking to the web to watch a free-to-air TV segment that consists of a photojournalist running through the best print-media cartoons while in conversation with a prominent commentator or cartoonist (in this case, cartoonist Cathy Wilcox)—tells us a great deal about the changed and changing landscape of political satire in twenty-first-century Australia. 'Talking Pictures' is a hybrid of old and new media forms and one that can now sit in an open browser window on the same desktop or tablet as the newest in politicised social media or a digitised newspaper. While *Insiders* first appeared in 2001 and, by 2008, ABC iView allowed easy perusal of 'Talking Pictures' and the like, by 2022—more so than in any previous federal election campaign—the Australian electorate

was spoiled for choice when it came to satire and was able to access it via an often-bewildering array of media and social media platforms, in all manner of genres and forms.

That very sense of bewilderment was itself something palpable as the major and minor parties struggled to weaponise satire yet again. The Greens and the more progressive groups did well to realise the usefulness of TikTok; the Coalition manifestly failed to do so and retreated to Facebook and Twitter. Meanwhile, the Nine Entertainment, Seven West and Murdoch-employed cartoonists engaged in more traditional commentary, both in the papers and via Twitter or Patreon. And, by the time the campaign was properly up and running, even the right-of-centre cartoonists were hammering the Liberals and Nationals for their lack of engagement. This was a major shift from ‘Morrison’s miracle’ of 2019, when the Coalition’s apparent social media skill was a subject of reflection in the election washup.

Bewilderment also threatens the historian of the cartoon campaign: the quantum of visual satirical material produced is too vast to cover in encyclopaedic fashion. So, in this chapter, we examine how the satirical mosaic of cartoons, videos and memes circulating throughout the campaign responded to and illuminated a selection of key themes and events. In determining which images should be included for analysis, we have given preference to content with broad public reach (rather than the internal-party ‘dark web’). Current newspaper readership and viewing figures validate the inclusion here of cartoons published in the editorial pages and webpages of the nation’s metropolitan daily newspapers and video content broadcast or streamed on network media platforms. Also included are selected videos from independent satirists—for example, The Juice Media, The Chaser and Friendly Jordies all have subscriber bases that number in the hundreds of thousands. The sample also captured TikTok videos from political party accounts as well as content by citizen satirists identified by ‘scraping’ the top 100 results returned from each of the trending hashtags ‘#auspol’, ‘#auspol2022’, ‘#ausvotes’, ‘#scomo’ and ‘#albo’.

The memes that featured in the mainstream news media were sourced almost exclusively from a pool of 1,113 images mediated by nine Facebook groups: ALP Spicy Memes Stash, The Simpsons against the Liberals, Toilet Paper Australia, Australian Green Memes for Actually Progressive Teens, the Liberal Party of Australia, the ALP, the Greens, Young Liberals and Young Australian Greens. These have a combined subscriber base of more than 1.4 million, each of whom is a potential node in additional social networks.

The sharing and posting of memes, as well as their intermediation with legacy news media (traditional cartoons were also shared extensively), extend the reach of these images beyond their partisan base to a wider mainstream audience. The memes mediated by these groups provide a comprehensive cross-section of those proliferating online in discussion forums and Twitter, Instagram and Reddit feeds, and on this basis present a viable sample for analysis. In aligning the satirical responses with the election outcome, the images collectively frame a narrative of voters who, although underwhelmed by Labor's lack of vision, had lost patience with the incumbents' inaction on climate change, corruption and the cost of living.

## The clock: TikTok-ing for the Coalition

If the visual campaign of the 2019 election was distinguished by the Coalition's successful weaponising of 'Boomer' memes on Facebook, the story of the 2022 campaign was the emergence of Gen Z videos on TikTok.<sup>1</sup> The 2020–21 Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns helped establish the online video-sharing platform as a social media staple for 32 per cent of Australians aged 16–64; with the 23.4 hours spent by Australians on the app each month representing an increase of 40 per cent over the course of 2021 (Kemp 2022). Leading into the pandemic, Australian TikTok users were predominantly young and female (Roy Morgan 2020).

Heading into the 2019 federal election, the Coalition engaged digital marketing agency Topham Guerin to manage their social media campaign. The agency's 'water dripping on a stone' strategy (Nehring et al. 2019) successfully prosecuted the Coalition's key slogan, 'The Bill Australia can't afford', via the production and dissemination of hundreds of low-quality memes. In reviewing their subsequent election loss, the ALP found their digital strategy wanting, observing that the content they produced 'was less engaging and made fewer impressions' with voters compared with 2016, while at the same time the Coalition had upped its game dramatically. Blaming Bill Shorten for Labor's lack of digital literacy, the review concluded that 'the party that develops a genuine "digital-first" culture will have a big advantage in the next campaign' (Emerson and Weatherill 2019: 79).

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1 'Boomer' memes describe images disseminated predominantly on Facebook during the 2019 federal election campaign that were authorised by the Liberal Party and targeted at Baby Boomer voters (those born between about 1946 and 1964); Gen Z refers to the generation born between about 1997 and 2010.

Fast forward to 2022 and it is surprising that after such a strong social media performance in 2019 (Knaus 2019), the Coalition had largely disappeared from the meme space, both in its official messaging and in its non-affiliated ‘fan’ accounts. For example, the Young Liberals’ Facebook page posted 70 per cent fewer meme images in 2022 than in 2019, while Innovative and Agile Memes—one of the more prolific and heavily subscribed 2019 aggregators of pro-Coalition memes—posted only a single meme on day one of the campaign before giving up entirely. Conversely, the progressively aligned Facebook accounts that featured prominently in the 2019 campaign maintained or increased their meme activity in 2022. The non-affiliated Australian Green Memes for Actually Progressive Teens (for which there is no conservative equivalent) churned out 698 memes to its 126,000 subscribers. This uptick in activity resulted in a dramatic increase in the proportion of memes critical of the Coalition. The comparative lack of interaction rates between pro-Coalition memes and others identified by Mark Rolfe (2022) could be attributable to the content itself: largely derivative of older, static meme formats and lacking any narrative (besides the economic threat posed by Labor).

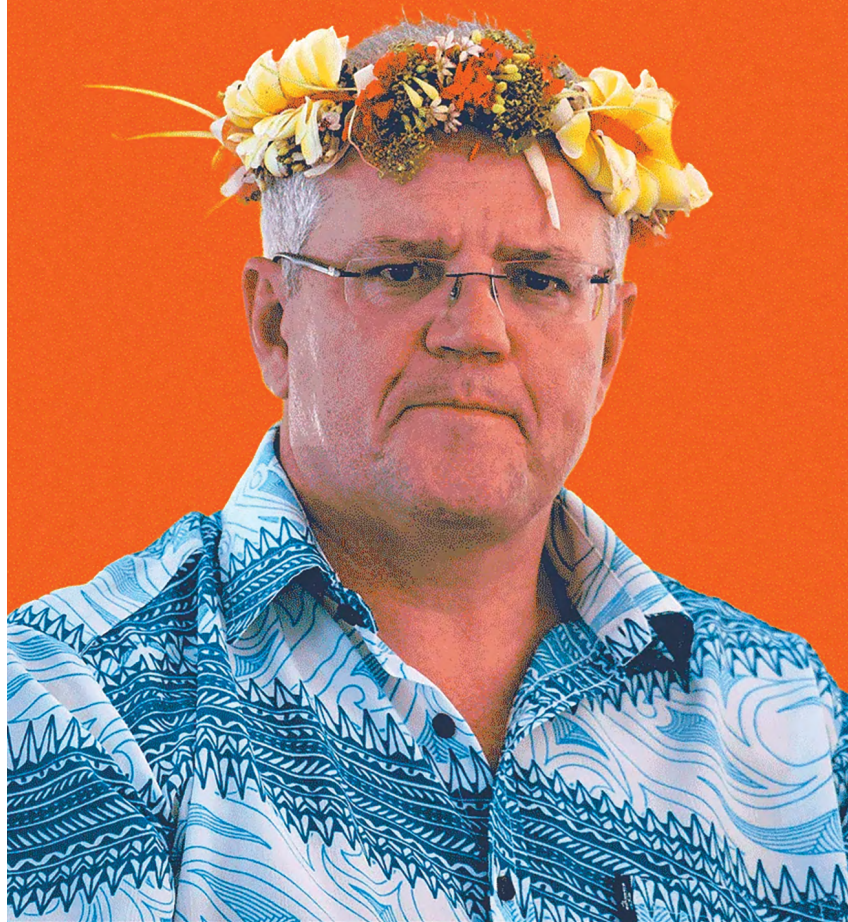
Engagement on TikTok became an essential plank in the social media campaign strategy of all parties. TikTok provides a totemic reference for the impact of young voters and women on the election result, with Teal and Greens candidates stealing a march on the Coalition, wresting nine seats from the government. The Coalition evidently failed to understand the cultural features of TikTok that make it distinct from Facebook. For example, when Scott Morrison joined TikTok with a personal account in December 2021, his first posts were staid ‘Seasons Greetings’ and his profile was ‘fortified’ to disallow duets, stitches, mentions, saves and comments—staples of TikTok culture. By disabling these interactive elements and posting stage-managed content, Morrison’s foray demonstrated a fundamental misunderstanding of TikTok audience engagement. Struggling with a growing public perception that Morrison engaged in excessive photo opportunities and led a corrupt government—exemplified in the oft-trending Twitter hashtags ‘#ScottyFromPhotoOps’ and ‘#FederalICACnow’—a youth audience valuing authenticity and accountability witnessed Morrison’s apparent aversion to both.

The Liberals' official TikTok account fell similarly flat. Created just three days before the start of the campaign, the content privileged quantity over quality. Despite posting at twice the rate of the ALP (129 uploads to 62), Liberal TikTok videos achieved fewer total views than Labor's (approximately 3 million views versus nearly 4.5 million) and fewer engagements with respect to likes, shares and comments (approximately 180,000 engagements versus 500,000). Labor's more successful strategy can be attributed to understanding the community better than the Liberals. They engaged in duets (split-screen videos that riff off other users' videos), stitches (videos that build on the videos of other users) and clap-backs (responses to critical comments or treatment) and employed ephemeral TikTok trends and humour notes familiar and specific to Gen Z. The Greens, Jacqui Lambie and Bob Katter also played a solid TikTok game, though the 'fan' accounts were the ones that produced the most original and engaging content and afforded greater insight into the electoral mood of young voters. Of the 100 most popular videos in the #auspol list, just seven came from official political accounts. A similar ratio applied to the other trending hashtags.

## Heading into the campaign

Several graphic interventions in the leadup to the campaign telegraphed the lines of attack that would be employed by the major parties during the campaign proper. Australian Unions mobilised to gift and sell thousands of corflutes reminding voters that the prime minister 'doesn't hold a hose' (Plate 8.1). This throwaway line, ill-fatedly uttered by Morrison during the 2019–20 Australian bushfires, was subsequently exploited by Labor as shorthand for Morrison's apparent inaction on all fronts, including the Covid-19 vaccine rollout, provision of rapid antigen tests, Queensland's floods and the China–Solomon Islands security pact. Together with the even more cutting 'That's not my job' slogan and imagery (something Morrison had claimed repeatedly in various contexts since the late 2000s), this was a significant early mobilisation of satire. Meanwhile, conservative lobby group Advance Australia installed corflutes in several electorates depicting various Independents as closet Greens candidates (Plate 8.2): the opening salvo in a scare campaign that signalled Coalition concern about the rising popularity of Teal or 'Climate' Independents.

# DOESN'T HOLD A HOSE



Authorised by Sally McManus, Australian Council of Trade Unions, 4/365 Queen Street, Melbourne VIC 3000.

**Plate 8.1 'Doesn't hold a hose' corflute by Australian Council of Trade Unions**

Source: Australian Unions website ([shop.australianunions.org.au/products/election-corflute-doesnt-hold-a-hose](http://shop.australianunions.org.au/products/election-corflute-doesnt-hold-a-hose)).



**Plate 8.2 Corflutes by Advance Australia targeting Independents David Pocock and Zali Steggall**

Sources: David Pocock's Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=549406636551423](http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=549406636551423)); Zali Steggall's Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=322362170013232](http://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=322362170013232)).

Advance Australia also sponsored mobile truck billboards to drive around Canberra, Melbourne and Perth, featuring Chinese president Xi Jinping casting a ballot for Labor (see Chapter 15, this volume). The defence minister, Peter Dutton, had in February primed for a 'khaki' election by accusing Albanese of being the Chinese Government's Manchurian candidate; he declared on Anzac Day—and again in his National Press Club debate with his opposition counterpart Brendan O'Connor—that Australia should 'prepare for war' with China and described a Chinese surveillance vessel's lawful navigation off the coast of Western Australia as an 'aggressive act'. Dutton's anti-China fervour was not only undermined by the announcement early in the campaign of China's security pact with Solomon Islands, but also prompted a warning that the hardline rhetoric could cost the Coalition votes in electorates with a high percentage of Chinese Australians. In the end, almost every area with greater than 10 per cent Chinese ancestry swung to Labor (Raue 2022).

A collaboration between comedian Dan Ilic and the Clean Energy Council saw tens of thousands of Australian suburban rubbish bins emblazoned with large-format stickers (Plate 8.3) featuring Scott Morrison wielding the lump of coal he famously used as a prop in parliament five years earlier. When Hornsby Shire Mayor and former Liberal heavyweight Philip Ruddock threatened to suspend rubbish collection unless residents removed the stickers, it merely served to increase sales. Ilic, well known for his crowd-funded billboards attacking Australia's climate credentials during the 2021 UN Climate Conference in Glasgow, led a team of writers, producers, directors and graphic designers in prosecuting the 'It's not a race' social

media campaign (utilising yet another of Morrison’s backfiring phrases). In addition to the bin stickers, the team targeted ‘fossil-fuel’ candidates with a series of memes and videos. Their video of Morrison’s infamous *60 Minutes* ukulele performance, composited over a backdrop of footage from the 2019–20 Australian bushfires, was viewed more than 100,000 times within 48 hours of its Facebook and Twitter release.



**Plate 8.3** Examples of bin stickers produced by the Smart Energy Council

Source: Twitter/Smart Energy Council.



**Plate 8.4** Digitally edited billboard image on Twitter

Source: Twitter feed of Adrian Elton (@TheSurrealMcCoy).

Public satire was evident in other ways. Some of the \$100 million that Clive Palmer is reputed to have paid in advertising went towards the installation of the distinctive, near-ubiquitous yellow billboards that many voters would recall from the 2019 campaign. While Adrian Elton’s digital spoof ‘Ikea’ billboard image from three years earlier once again circulated widely on social media (Plate 8.4), several activist groups and citizens defaced dozens of real-life United Australia Party (UAP) billboards. The ‘culture jammed’ billboards presented voters with messages deriding UAP’s stance



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on climate policy and Covid-19 mandates, as well as personal attacks on Palmer (Plate 8.5). In the end, Palmer's UAP secured one Senate seat (in Victoria), but ultimately, the lesson of 2019 was even more compelling in 2022: money was not enough in the face of crowdsourced campaigning, and the billboard and corflute infrastructure made possible by vast outlays of funds was very vulnerable to defacing by activist groups and ridicule by fed-up voters.

 Extinction Rebellion South Australia  
@XRSouthAus · Follow

Replying to @XRSouthAus and @AdJackers  
Here we go.



2:40 PM · Apr 22, 2022

77 · Reply · Copy link

[Explore what's happening on Twitter](#)

 AdJackers  
@AdJackers · Follow

Craig Kelly's bullocks propaganda is getting adjacked faster than Clive can pay people to put it up for him.



4:21 PM · Apr 19, 2022 from Holsworthy Station

400 · Reply · Copy link

[Read 14 replies](#)

 Fraz  
@Fraz9000 · Follow

Waiting 4 the bus home + saw this reimagining of Clive Palmer's billboard 4 United Australia Party.

Gotta love the vandals of the inner west!

#AusPol2022



9:49 AM · Feb 20, 2022

83 · Reply · Copy link

[Read 2 replies](#)

 AdDistortion  
@DistortedAd · Follow

Why spray paint words if you can just cut them? (via @AdJackers)



6:43 PM · Apr 1, 2022

112 · Reply · Copy link

[Read 1 reply](#)

**Plate 8.5 Various examples of defaced UAP billboards on Twitter, 25 January – 20 February 2022**

Sources: Twitter feeds of Extinction Rebellion South Australia (@XRSouthAus); Adjackers (@AdJackers); AdDistortion (@DistortedAd); Fraz (@Fraz9000).

## Albo's gaffes



**Plate 8.6 Still showing an image sequence from Liberal Party (@liberalaus) TikTok video**

Sources: Liberal Party of Australia Facebook page, 21 April, 28 April, 7 May and 7 May 2022.



**Plate 8.7 Front page, Daily Telegraph [Sydney]**

Source: Liberal Party of Australia Facebook page, 12 April 2022.

The first day of the campaign was notable for Anthony Albanese's failure at a press conference to recall the national unemployment rate. This was the first of several stumbles by the Labor leader that punctuated the campaign and the Coalition attempted to frame Albanese's gaffes into a narrative that he was not across the policy detail. They prosecuted this relentlessly in their official and unofficial campaign messaging (Plate 8.6), ably supported by sections of the mainstream media (Plate 8.7), but this did not seem to cut through with voters. Neither did the tone-deaf attempt to make fun of Albanese's mellifluous surname nor the bizarre attempt to contrast the visibly fitter, healthier Labor leader (the fruits of a 'carb-free, grog-reduced 2021') with the more

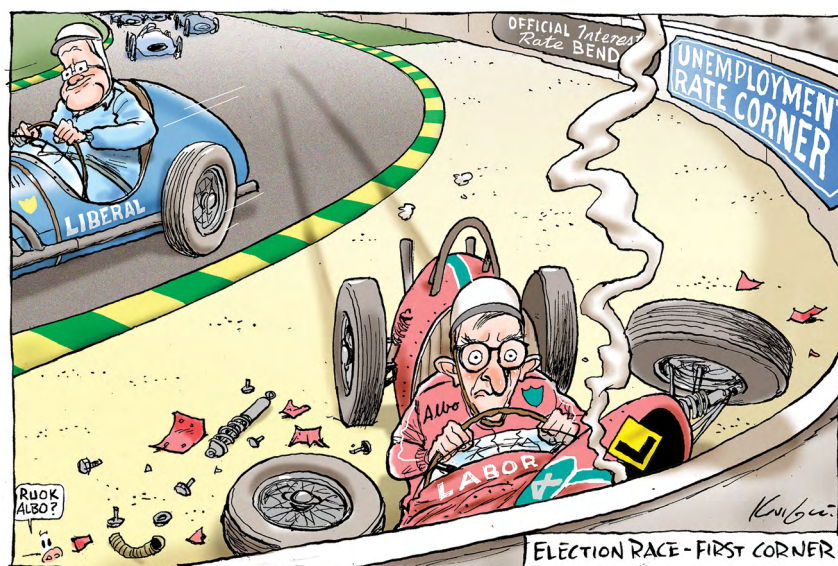
‘authentic’ Morrison. In perhaps a telling failure to convince themselves of their own message, the Liberals’ anti-Albanese billboards and messages invariably used images of the pre-2021, 18-kilogram heavier Labor leader.

As a gift to traditional cartoonists, the gaffe also featured in the mainstream media. In News Corp’s *Herald Sun*, Mark Knight began his commentary on the election campaign with the image of the two leaders in 1950s Formula One cars—Morrison’s visit to Yarralumla having coincided with the racing of the Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne (Plate 8.8). The gaffe then gave Knight the perfect metaphor to continue his theme the following day: Albanese (complete with ‘L’ plate) crashing out on ‘Unemployment Rate Corner’, while a smirking Morrison moves ahead (Plate 8.9). The more middle-of-the-road Nine Entertainment paper *The Age* saw John Shakespeare depict an ALP minder reassuring Albanese that he would be ‘an unemployment expert in no time’; and *The Australian* used an unflattering press photo of the Labor leader as surrogate satire on its front page (12 April) as well as the traditional cartoon—by John Spooner (13 April)—to twist the knife. But these ultimately were more like wishful thinking on the part of the Coalition-aligned press. By the following Sunday, the cartoons downplaying the gaffe were the ones that dominated ABC TV’s ‘Talking Pictures’ (including those by *Sydney Morning Herald/Age* cartoonist Megan Herbert, Alan Moir’s self-published online effort, Jon Kudelka’s for the Hobart *Mercury* and Brett Lethbridge for Brisbane’s *The Courier-Mail*).



**Plate 8.8 ‘And we’re off’ by Mark Knight**

Source: *Herald Sun*, [Melbourne], 11 April 2022.



**Plate 8.9 'Election race: First corner' by Mark Knight**

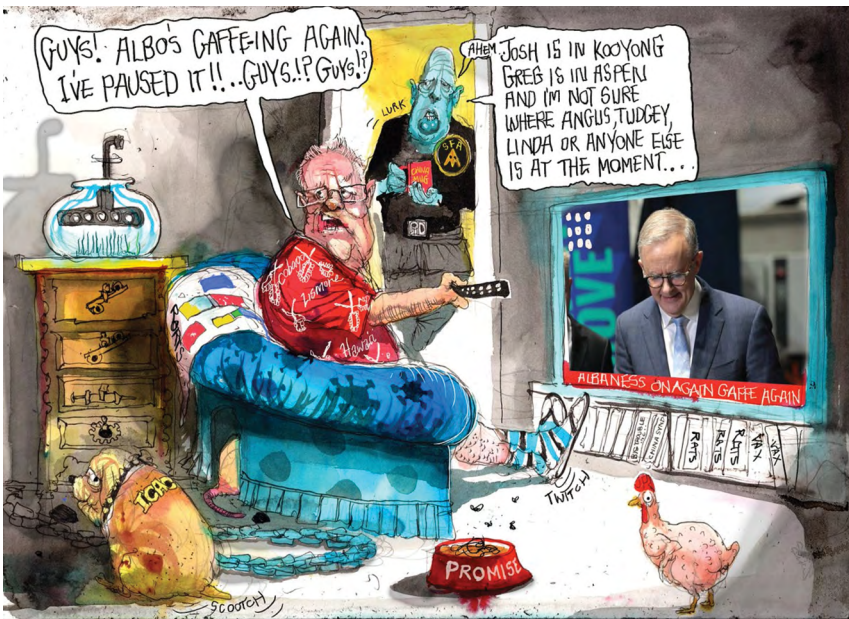
Source: *Herald Sun*, [Melbourne], 12 April 2022.

No doubt, this change in perspective was helped by an ABC favourable to the ALP cause, but the impact of commentary in the intervening period was crucial. Lethbridge's cartoon relied for its effect on John Howard's 'So what?' comment on being quizzed about Albanese's gaffe. Reported in the mainstream media, the comment gained huge TikTok exposure via the likes of @belinduhpyne (248,500) and @ettigdirb (49,500). Greens leader Adam Bandt's comment to a journalist to 'Google it, mate' gained plenty of attention via the Young Greens and *The Guardian* on TikTok; and, within days, the pithy directive showed up on stickers, coffee mugs and T-shirts (including the one worn by Mike Bowers on *Insiders'* 'Talking Pictures' on 17 April). As such, follow-up gaffes-that-weren't by Albanese—on urgent care clinics not being formally costed (15 April) or the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) six-point plan (6 May)—received little attention from satirical commentators. David Rowe made the issue of the media reportage of gaffes itself a subject of comment. His typically grotesque rendering of a depressed Liberal–Nationals leadership sitting glued to the TV, hoping for a slip-up (Plate 8.10), was followed by a sequel: Morrison calling his now largely absent colleagues back to watch 'Albo's gaffe-ing again ...', only to be told that they had all departed for their constituencies (or whereabouts unknown) (Plate 8.11).



**Plate 8.10 'Politics now #247' by David Rowe**

Source: Australian Financial Review, 1 May 2022.



**Plate 8.11 'Guys! Albo's gaffe-ing again' by David Rowe**

Source: Australian Financial Review, 5 May 2022.

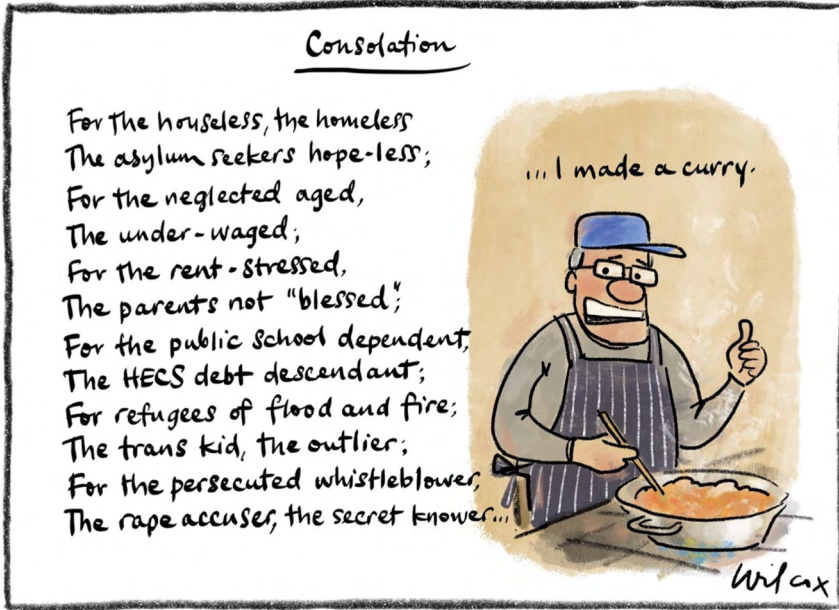
## Morrison's baggage

Rowe's image of Morrison sitting on the couch is typical of the approach taken by cartoonists and satirists in 2022, showing a prime minister now much more afflicted with the baggage of his term in office than in 2019. That largely 'clean' Morrison was better able to shape his own image, and cartoonists largely obliged in their depiction of a man garbed in all sorts of Cronulla Sharks merchandise. Come 2022, the merch was still there, but so, too, was the near-ubiquitous Hawaiian shirt, *lei* (or floral crown) and ukulele. Cathy Wilcox could scatter it throughout the background of her pre-election cartoon on 'authenticity' (Plate 8.12), throwing in Novak Djokovic, the Bilocla family and a federal independent commission against corruption for good measure. Cartoonists and satirists also had plenty of recourse to the prime minister's own attempt to dress himself up as an ordinary bloke who cooked a curry every week—something first highlighted as far back as 2015 on Annabelle Crabb's *Kitchen Cabinet* for ABC TV and dissected by Sean Kelly (2021: 14–15). Morrison's 3 May Instagram post of what appeared to be a raw chicken curry spread virally (if not bacterially) and Wilcox used the trope to run through all the failings for which a curry was poor 'consolation' (Plate 8.13).



**Plate 8.12 'Some people are saying you're racist ...' by Cathy Wilcox**

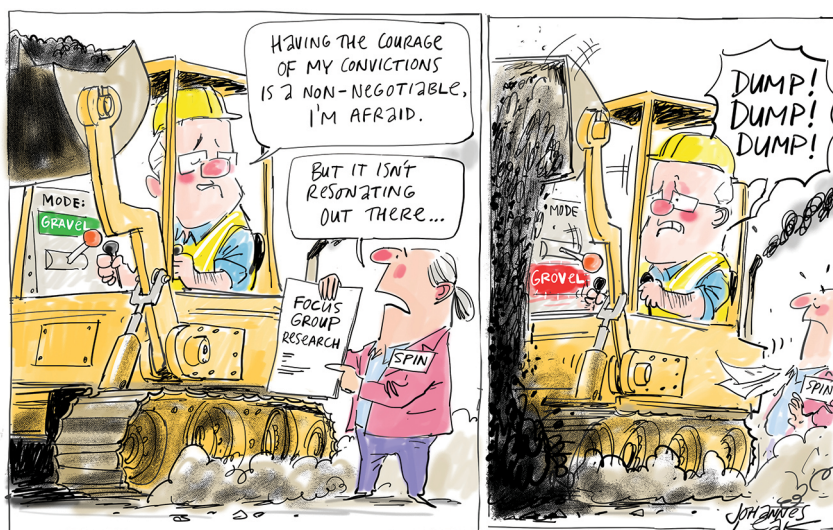
Source: *The Age*, [Melbourne], 5 April 2022.



**Plate 8.13 'Consolation' by Cathy Wilcox**

Source: *The Age*, [Melbourne], 3 May 2022.

The high-vis vest was now another pointer towards the style-over-substance critique that had dogged the prime minister for several years, and it was something shared by both disenchanted Coalition-leaning cartoonists and critics of Morrison and his government. Johannes Leak deployed the same pink-shirted, ponytailed 'Spin Doctor' he normally used to ridicule Albanese's image-making in one particularly cutting cartoon in *The Australian*. After being informed by a smug, high-vis-wearing and excavator-driving Morrison that 'having the courage of my convictions is a non-negotiable', the focus group research presented by the Spin Doctor prompts the prime minister to go from 'gravel' to 'grovel' mode, dumping his convictions as soon as he hears his message 'isn't resonating out there' (Plate 8.14).



**Plate 8.14 'Having the courage of my convictions' by Johannes Leak**

Source: *The Australian*, 16 May 2022.

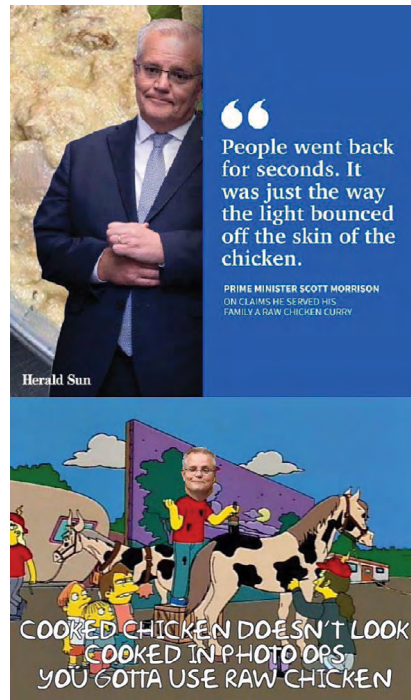
Leak was not the only one to imagine a Coalition campaign being driven more by appearance than integrity. Matt Golding viewed the constant attempt by the Coalition to shift the election on to their preferred issues, resulting in constant rebuffs from the campaign manager: national security was countered by the China–Solomon Islands' pact, the climate 'scare' by Matt Canavan and the net-zero 2050 target and economic management by the seemingly endless list of 'inflation, cost of living, interest rates, wages, debt, deficit'. Golding's final panel, 'Character', results in the bemused apparatchik simply stating 'Um ... you!'.

Meanwhile, Morrison's own gaffes seemed to amplify existing perceptions of his weaknesses. When he proclaimed that he and wife Jenny were 'blessed' not to have a disabled child, it exhibited a tone-deafness to those struggling with cuts to the NDIS. When he posted the apparently raw chicken curry to Instagram, it had a distinct '#ScottyfromPhotoOps' vibe about it, giving the lie to Morrison's carefully curated and confected public persona (Plate 8.15). Morrison's response to *A Current Affair* host Tracy Grimshaw's assertion that he had 'over-egged' his claim that he had 'saved the country' could hardly have been a stronger affirmation of his catalogue of failures. Clips of the interview popped up all over social media: TikTok



user @candymoore remixed the exchange into an electronic dance music (EDM) ‘banger’ that was viewed more than 200,000 times (Plate 8.16). At the same time, Morrison’s promise to change his leadership style from ‘bulldozer’ to something more palatable seemed to undermine his campaign pitch that voters ‘knew who he was’—also allowing Albanese to frame his own identity in stark relief to Morrison: ‘A bulldozer wrecks things. A bulldozer knocks things over. I’m a builder, that’s what I am’ (*ABC News*, 13 May 2022). Cartoonists of all persuasions were unimpressed. Warren Brown’s ‘Election shock therapy’ showed a Morrison-faced bulldozer confessing to his psychologist, ‘I’ve suddenly realized I identify as a bulldozer ...’ (*Daily Telegraph*, [Sydney], 13 May 2022). For a readership, a paper and a cartoonist not known for sympathy towards transgender people, this was doubly damning.

Satire was sometimes unnecessary: Morrison’s clumsy tackle of a young child in a soccer game was instantly memed into a litany of things that Morrison had indeed knocked over (Plate 8.17). And it seemed too good to be true for the traditional press cartoonists, too, featuring in Dean Alston’s *West Australian* work and David Pope’s in *The Canberra Times* (both in the week 16–22 May). While Alston’s Morrison was ‘tackling anyone who might look like a Labor voter’, Pope’s victim was ‘Wages’. Because of the production cycle of traditional cartooning, though, the endlessly recyclable memes were already clocking up the likes and shares well before Alston’s and Pope’s work appeared online or in print. Glen Le Lievre was able to be nimbler, via his Patreon account, showing Morrison decking Australia itself (19 May).



**Plate 8.15** Meme by *The Simpsons* against the Liberals

Source: The Simpsons against the Liberals Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/Simpsonsagainsttheliberals/photos/3228586707361720](https://www.facebook.com/Simpsonsagainsttheliberals/photos/3228586707361720)), 3 May 2022.



Plate 8.16 Still showing image sequence from @candymoore's TikTok video

Source: TikTok, @candymoore, 18 May 2022.

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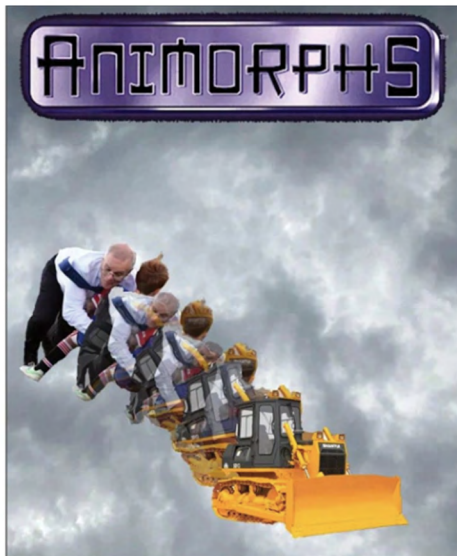
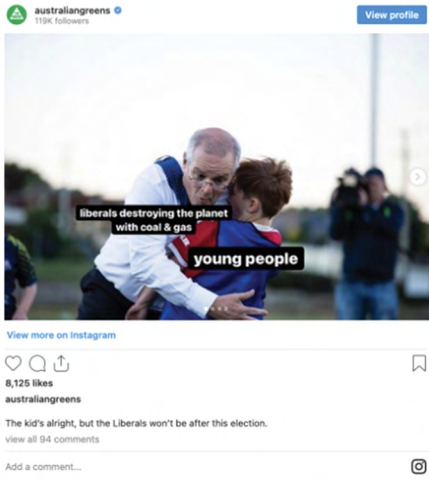


Plate 8.17 Morrison tackles child memes, 18–19 May 2022

Sources: (Clockwise from left) Greens Instagram page ([www.instagram.com/p/CdsSP9Dr6Fr/?hl=en](https://www.instagram.com/p/CdsSP9Dr6Fr/?hl=en)); Toilet Paper Australia Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=309940277996309&id=100069410160572](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=309940277996309&id=100069410160572)); The Simpsons against the Liberals Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/Simpsonsagainsttheliberals/photos/3241053366115054/](https://www.facebook.com/Simpsonsagainsttheliberals/photos/3241053366115054/)); @bobkatters\_crocodilefarm Instagram page ([www.instagram.com/p/CduB-zfPW5e/?hl=en](https://www.instagram.com/p/CduB-zfPW5e/?hl=en)).

The most comprehensive account of Morrison's baggage was provided by The Juice Media's 1 May 'Honest government ad', laying out in excoriating detail the Morrison Government's perceived failures and shortcomings. The six-minute video (viewed more than 1.5 million times across all social media platforms) comprises a 35-item roll call of the Coalition's performance on ministerial ineptitude, climate change, cost of living, corruption, funding rorts, the treatment of women and First Nations peoples, the national Covid-19 response, aged care, the NDIS, natural disaster response, national security, 'Robodebt' and housing affordability. Thanks to the Coalition's largely presidential campaign style, Morrison's challenge was to convince voters that he was a caring, trustworthy, highly competent leader whose perceived failings were wholly attributable to global forces and events. After three years of getting to know Morrison, this was a big ask. In a TikTok video uploaded two days into the campaign, Jordan Shanks (aka Friendly Jordies) condemned the prime minister for cultivating a 'daggy dad' persona to effectively camouflage his government's poor policy record, declaring: 'ScoMo's family values schtick is not only getting old, it's become impossible to believe' (@friendlyjordies, *TikTok*, 12 April 2022).

## Independents and minor parties

The fact that the Coalition's heavy election loss did not translate into a Labor landslide reflects the strong alternative voting patterns that a great many satirists pointed to before the election. The Greens' relative mastery of social media—so obvious in TikTok campaigning—also came through in other apps. Stephen Bates (Brisbane) used the gay dating app Grindr to employ several double-entendre ads that skirted the boundaries of satire (Plate 8.18) in a clear indication that he understood his constituency (he defeated his sitting LNP opponent with a two-party-preferred result of 53.7 per cent to 46.3 per cent).

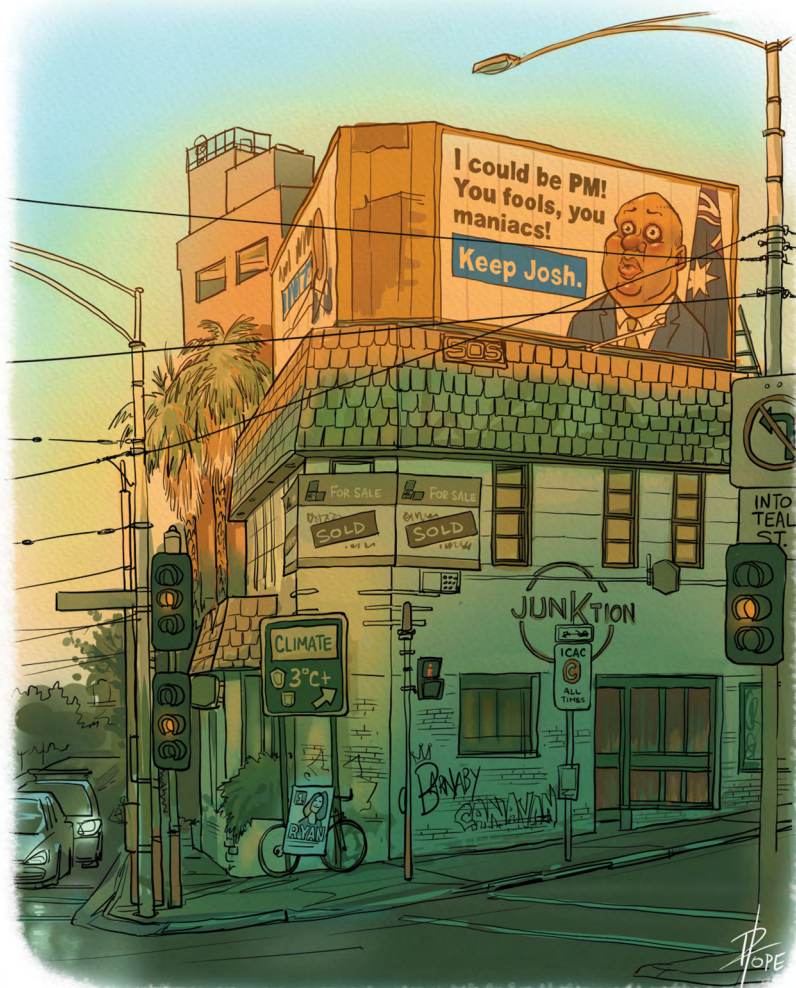
While the Greens were a great success story, it was the 'Voices of' Independents movement that perhaps best spoke to a constituency focused more on the merits of local candidates than party affiliation. Satirists had trouble in such a context, with Mark Knight's assertion that the Teals were not so independent as all that (*Herald Sun*, [Melbourne], 1 May 2022) seeming to fall on deaf ears. The earlier Coalition insistence that voting Independent invited chaos or (worse) a Labor or Greens-dominated parliament received very little attention.



**Plate 8.18 Stephen Bates’ digital campaign stickers**

Source: Australian Green Memes for Actually Progressive Teens Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/GreenMemes/photos/7618581941545532](http://www.facebook.com/GreenMemes/photos/7618581941545532)), 28 May 2022.

Himself laid up at home with Covid-19, David Pope summed up so much of the crisis facing the Liberal heartland in a striking, self-published landscape of Kew’s Junktion Hotel in Josh Frydenberg’s Kooyong constituency (Plate 8.19). The minor controversy over Teal Independent candidate Dr Monique Ryan’s posters being affixed to the dilapidated pub—even while the building itself sported enormous digital billboards urging voters to ‘Keep Josh’—was reimagined for comic effect. ‘Keep Josh—I could be PM! You fools, you maniacs!’ replaced the more positive message of the real thing; there is graffiti on the pub exterior reading ‘Barnaby’ and ‘Canavan’ (referring to Nationals politicians) and Liberal Party posters are obscured by ‘Sold’ signs. In the finer details, the road signs show ‘Climate’ rising in the direction of 3°C+, an ICAC clearway and ‘No Left Turn into Teal Street’.



**Plate 8.19 'I could be PM' by David Pope**

Source: Self-published, 6 May 2022.

With the Teals largely immune from outright caricature (not least because their gender posed a risk to the more cautious cartoonists post #MeToo), the minor parties were a safer bet for many. The calculated switch by George Christensen to contest a likely defeat for One Nation attracted a typically grotesque comment from David Rowe (*Australian Financial Review*, week of 11–17 April 2022), as did the reassignment of Coalition preferences to One Nation (@roweaf, week of 9–15 May 2022).



## Youth

Youth were also largely ignored by the satirists but were highly active in generating satirical content. They were not in the picture, so to speak, but making it. They embraced templates provided by Australian Green Memes for Actually Progressive Teens, creating dozens of scenarios explaining why ordinary voters ‘won’t be affected by the Greens’ plan to tax billionaires and corporations’ (Plate 8.21); these memes accounted for just more than 25 per cent of the total number of memes published by this group. Youth were highly engaged with TikTok during the pandemic, creating, sharing and liking content that reflected their concerns about climate change and an economy from which they felt excluded. The contempt expressed for the Coalition in these videos is palpable: apart from two Liberal Party videos, not a single video favoured the government. TikTok creator @mates.rates attracted more than 1.7 million likes for his videos taking aim at Morrison’s character and the mainstream media’s bias against Albanese (Plate 8.22). The Morrison in these clips is inauthentic and deceitful (‘My favourite beer is Shark lager’), given to outrageous claims and subsequent revision (‘My dad invented the pencil ... I never said my dad invented the pencil’) and unprepared to take responsibility for his mistakes (‘It’s not my responsibility to keep the ball in the court, that’s not my job’). Albanese, on the other hand, is shown in these videos as a caring, decent bloke whose words and deeds are reframed in mock-hostile front-page headlines (‘Albanese goes for a fist bump instead of a high-five ... Will he fist the economy the same way?’). Deftly interwoven with these narrative structures are references to Morrison’s Hillsong Church allegiance, inadequate response to natural disasters, fervour for fossil-fuel projects and disregard for education.

if your student diet consisted entirely of this, you will not be affected by the Greens plan to tax billionaires and corporations



if your phone has had a cracked screen for the past 3 months, you will not be affected by the Greens plan to tax billionaires and corporations



**Plate 8.21 ‘Billionaire tax’ memes from Australian Green Memes for Actually Progressive Teens**

Source: Australian Green Memes for Actually Progressive Teens Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/GreenMemes/photos/7443342875736107/](https://www.facebook.com/GreenMemes/photos/7443342875736107/)), 21 April 2022.



8. TALKING PICTURES (AND CARTOONS, VIDEOS, MEMES, ETCETERA)

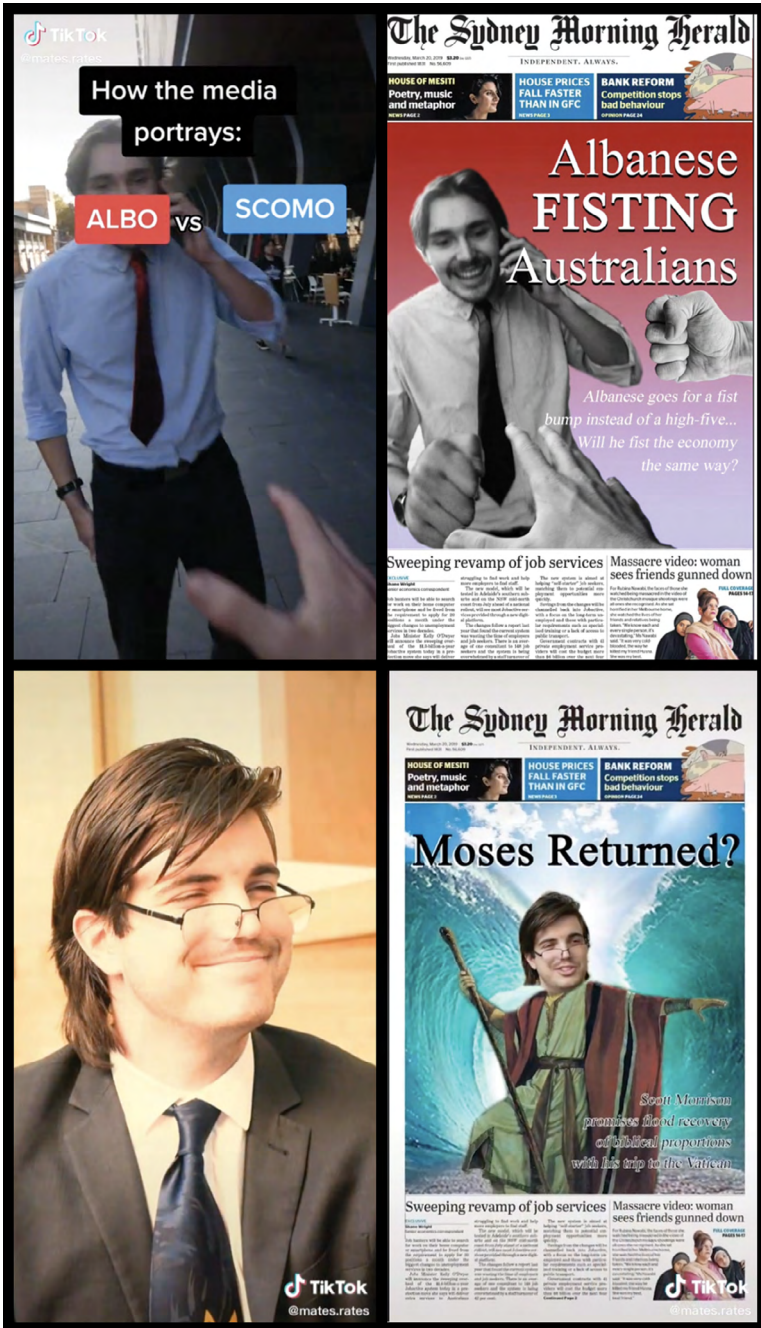


Plate 8.22 Still showing image sequence from @mates.rates's TikTok video

Source: TikTok, @mates.rates, 18 May 2022.

Other prominent creators—@icacplz, @friendlyjordies, @tikyleaks and @genunited—challenged the narrative that the Coalition were inherently superior economic managers and railed against government pork-barrelling and rorting, housing affordability, stagnant wage growth, poor First Nations relations and Morrison’s endorsement of anti-transgender candidate Katherine Deves. The nonpartisan content in the sample typically comprised informative videos explaining preferential voting and how to vote for candidates in both the House and the Senate. The high view, like and share counts for these videos indicate an inclination on the part of TikTokers to both inform and be informed about the participatory democratic process.

## Cost of living

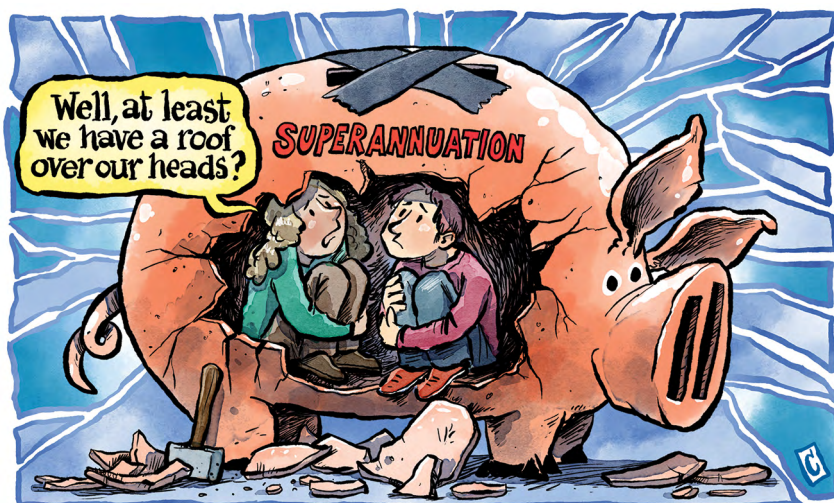
Inflation data released two weeks into the campaign revealed what voters intuited from the price of their groceries, petrol and home-building: the cost of living had risen more in the previous quarter than at any time in the previous two decades. Morrison’s strategy was to convince the electorate that Australia was faring well in relative global terms and that, in ‘uncertain times’, it was best to stick with the Coalition’s superior economic management. Fearmongering about Albanese’s ‘inexperience’ and the prospect of ‘higher taxes under Labor’ was summed up in the Liberals’ ‘There’s a hole in your budget’ ad, which showed coins dropping into and then falling out of a rusty bucket to the tune of an earworm-worthy jingle. The advertisement featured prominently in print, broadcast and online, providing one of the very few successes for the Coalition in terms of audience reach and engagement. It was also one of the Coalition’s few TikTok wins, with the original ad and a remixed EDM banger attracting more than 500,000 views (nearly four times the view count of the next most viewed video). The replies on TikTok and YouTube, however, should have concerned Liberal Party strategists. Viewers were impressed by the catchiness of the ad but remained focused on the perceived failings of the Morrison Government (‘This song is so fire that I want to go to Hawai`i for a holiday’).



**Plate 8.23 ‘Knock knock’ by David Rowe**

Source: *Australian Financial Review*, 2 May 2022.

The interest rate rise was seen by cartoonists across the political spectrum as likely fatal to the Coalition: Warren Brown not only imagined a massive ‘Interest Rates’ freight train smashing through the front door of two ordinary Australians, but also a Frankenstein’s monster appearing at the front door of Morrison and Frydenberg (*Daily Telegraph*, 3 May 2022); and the view from the other side of the door also saw David Rowe imagine Dutton, Morrison and Frydenberg cowering in fear of Reserve Bank of Australia governor Philip Lowe (Plate 8.23). The desperate vote-buying exercise of proposing Australians be able to tap into their superannuation to purchase property fell flat. Christopher Downes imagined a young couple cowering inside their now-empty piggybank (Plate 8.24), while Cathy Wilcox pointed out the obvious result of first homebuyers seeking to compete with ‘downsizing boomers’ on the property market (*The Age*, [Melbourne], 20 May 2022).



**Plate 8.24** 'Well, at least we have a roof over our heads' by Chris Downes

Source: *Mercury*, [Hobart], 18 May 2022.

## Climate

If the Coalition's credibility in the climate arena was not already irreparably damaged after nine years of obfuscation, Morrison's job of convincing the electorate that his government was committed to the emissions reduction target formalised at Glasgow was made virtually impossible with Matt Canavan's 26 April intervention, when he told the media 'the net zero thing is all sort of dead' (ABC 2022). Labor seized gleefully on the split between inner-city Liberals and rural Nationals (Plate 8.25), while the Greens sought product differentiation by casting a pox on both the major parties' houses for their commitment to new fossil-fuel projects (Plate 8.26). The Liberals, after flirting briefly with a 'carbon tax' scare campaign that immediately ran out of steam (it turned out that the 'tax' was in fact a safeguard mechanism implemented by former prime minister Tony Abbott), retreated to familiar ground by avoiding any mention of the environment, talking up energy bills and accusing Albanese of walking both sides of the climate fence (Plate 8.27).



**Plate 8.25 Meme by Australian Labor Party**

Source: ALP Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/AustralianLabor/](http://www.facebook.com/AustralianLabor/)), 27 April 2022.

when Labor and the Liberals approve 114 new coal and gas projects



**Plate 8.26 Meme by Australian Green Memes for Actually Progressive Teens**

Source: Australian Green Memes for Actually Progressive Teens Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/GreenMemes/](http://www.facebook.com/GreenMemes/)), 6 May 2022.

In addition to the stickers that colonised the nation's rubbish bins in the months leading up to the election, images of that lump of coal became a potent symbol on social media of the Coalition's disdain for the environment. TikTok creator @abitofpud paired Morrison's accompanying 'coalophobia' speech with images of recent natural disasters in a video viewed 800,000 times in the leadup to the campaign (@abitofpud, 9 March 2022). A piece of oratory designed to rally support for the coal industry had been effectively repurposed in condemnation of it. Then, on 22 April, *The Chaser* created a mash-up of Morrison's debate responses, posting it to Reddit, where a user suggested that it 'just needs a sick beat and some autotune'. The comedy team obliged, transforming an initially incoherent mash-up into a 90-second EDM banger of Morrison profanely proclaiming himself to be a corrupt and racist climate criminal driven by his love of coal (*The Chaser*, 23 April 2022). 'Coal makes me cum' was viewed 730,000 times across all social media platforms, with iTunes and Spotify downloads totalling more than 1 million (enough to see it take the number-one spot on the Australian iTunes chart in its first week of release). After so much said by Morrison's detractors, it was ultimately Morrison's own words that were weaponised against him.



**Plate 8.27 Meme by Liberal Party of Australia**

Source: Liberal Party of Australia Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/LiberalPartyAustralia/](http://www.facebook.com/LiberalPartyAustralia/)), 18 April 2022.

## The outcome

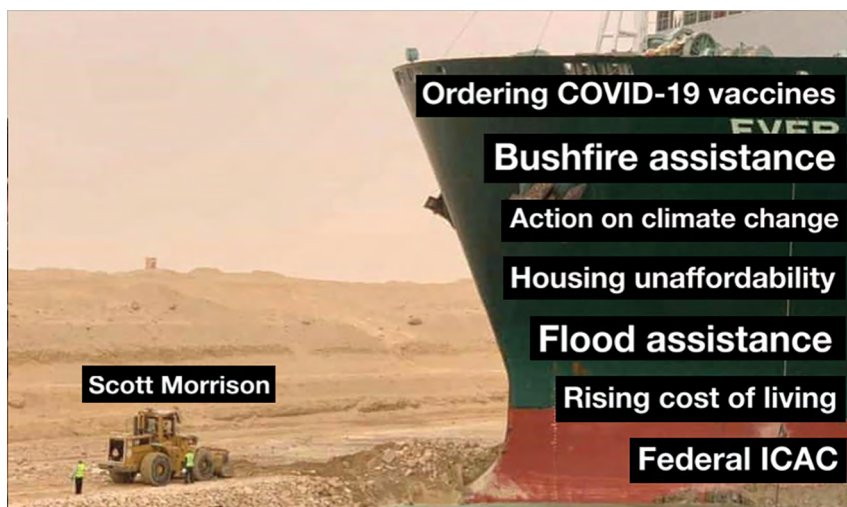
Warren Brown (*Daily Telegraph*, [Sydney], 23 May 2022) was clear in his view about who was responsible for Morrison's demise: burned at the stake by an angry mob of mostly women holding 'Teal 1' posters.



**Plate 8.28 Meme by Australian Green Memes for Actually Progressive Teens**

Source: Australian Green Memes for Actually Progressive Teens Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/GreenMemes/](http://www.facebook.com/GreenMemes/)), 22 May 2022.

While Brown's take aligns with the popular wisdom throughout the campaign that presumed the crucial element would be disaffected Liberal voters drawn to the inner-city Independents, in the end, Labor won power on the back of a substantial tactical vote by left-wing voters (McAllister 2022). Youth might feel aggrieved at once again being left out of the picture, having helped the Greens snatch two seats from the Liberals to secure a record four House of Representatives seats and six Senate seats (Plate 8.33). Teals and Greens alike campaigned heavily on key issues of import to voters—most notably, climate change, gender equality and political integrity. Policy inertia in these areas—set against a backdrop of rising inflation, increasingly unaffordable housing and ill-conceived responses to natural disasters and the pandemic—sealed the government's fate. In the end, no promise of reinvention by Morrison would be enough to turn the Coalition ship around (Plate 8.34). In the campaign washup, Cathy Wilcox tweeted an ironic plea: 'Cartoonists of Australia will be engaging in a lot of soul-searching today. Please be understanding in our time of loss' (@cathywilcox1, 22 May 2022). The context was the departure of the cast of characters who had sustained satire for the past decade—Morrison and Frydenberg most notably.



**Plate 8.29 Meme by Australian Green Memes for Actually Progressive Teens**

Source: Australian Green Memes for Actually Progressive Teens Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/GreenMemes/](http://www.facebook.com/GreenMemes/)), 13 May 2022.

## Conclusion

If a week is a long time in politics, three years is an eon in the digital age. The Coalition did not adapt their visual campaign to a social media environment that had moved on from ironic, low-quality memes built on slogans. Labor's visual content was seen by voters as more authentic, while the Greens exemplified how to engage voters via grassroots engagement with community social media pages, the production of meme templates and explainer videos. The Liberals ran pretty much the same social media campaign they did in 2019, but with far less intensity, and adopted an 'old school' and cynical approach to TikTok, demonstrating just how out of touch they were with youth. Apart from content produced by the Liberals themselves, pro-Coalition sentiment was wholly absent from TikTok. The voter content that achieved the highest engagement—measured in terms of views, likes, comments and shares—ran exclusively against the Coalition. Memes and videos told a story of a lot of anger in the electorate—particularly among young voters—towards the Morrison Government and Morrison in



particular. Cartoonists from the still-mainstream (but only just) newspapers were more benign overall, but even the Murdoch and other Coalition-aligned artists were unimpressed with Morrison and his colleagues.

The beginnings of a long post-campaign realignment, and the difficulties in imagining the new landscape, bathed in the Teal wave (David Pope, *The Canberra Times*, 22 May 2022) was apparent from ABC TV's final *Insiders* episode of the campaign (29 May 2022). Fiona Katauskas joined Mike Bowers to review the work of Warren Brown, Matt Golding, Glen Le Lievre and others—happily, without interruption from breaking news.

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This text is taken from *Watershed: The 2022 Australian Federal Election*, edited by Anika Gauja, Marian Sawer and Jill Sheppard, published 2023 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

[doi.org/10.22459/W.2023.08](https://doi.org/10.22459/W.2023.08)