Twitter Thread by Michael Harris

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So I'm not the first, & won't be the last, to be irked by this. But anyway, here goes.

What Murph's reporting (& opining) on is a survey that showed, in a time of international crisis where Australia has performed relatively well, politicians benefit from a "competence dividend"

> \U0001f644 pic.twitter.com/odGMUKzPnT
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> — Richard Chirgwin (@R_Chirgwin) December 25, 2020

That's neither a surprise, nor something to be sneered at. But it's a one-paragraph story. It's what you'd expect to see.

The journalist's role, you'd think, would be to critically unpick that. Work through what premiers & the PM did to deserve it, or otherwise.

One case that could be made is that the premiers stepped up, acted visibly & decisively on behalf of their respective states, & the PM is largely riding on their coattails.

Murph, though, has been on a weird campaign to position Morrison in particular as a statesman-in-waiting.

Once the federal government authorised Job Seeker/Lover/Keeper, Murph was convinced this was (bound to be) the end of Ideological Warrior Morrison and we'd see the emergence of pragmatic Morrison who could govern reasonably, in ways atypical of the way his party had been trending

LOL

And LOL again.

The early economic interventions were made with a gun to his head. The idea he'd suddenly become a learning learner who learns was something Murph seemed desperate to hold on to, like it was important for her sense that federal politics could work properly.

The interesting thing (to me) from the state perspective was how immune premiers were from (i) their own missteps and (ii) attacks by a hostile press, in some cases.

That they stood up in public, and achieved results, however clumsily, was what mattered.

I mean, we can all see what's happening in other countries as deaths mount and harsh lockdowns occur (or don't, with deaths mounting faster). Australia's a success story, and credit will occur.

There are multiple stories behind that success. Murph barely even hints at them.

I mean, we could pick apart individual premiers' responses, and make the obvious point that they win by "acting tough", relative to the actual competence and proportionality of their respective technocratic (public health) and legal (political) responses. This is fascinating.

It's also important. One can view those two arms of the response as a see-saw of sorts; the worse the public health response is, the more/harsher the political measures need to be.

Capable journalists should work through this. NSW Health have been stunning through this.

But the "faith in politics" narrative here is offset by a perception that conflates public health and political responses -- put simply, Gladys "should be doing more" (mandating and locking down), or worse, that NSW are somehow fudging numbers for political purposes.

I think this is mostly a brain-addlement of social media; meaning, most people not terminally online don't think NSW is doing a bad job, and a lot of the criticism of NSW's response comes from out-of-staters stull jumpy from the long lockdowns they endured.

But still.

Commentators should be emphasising the fact that strong political responses are a sign that your technocratic (public health) response is inadequate/overwhelmed.

Trust-in-politics surveys will tend to elide these distinctions. Those with a platform should highlight them.

Now to the feds. Morrison has mostly done one thing, at least visibly. He's thrown money out when it was desperately needed, and in circumstances where he was being advised from all sides that this was needed to avoid calamity. It's pretty clear he wants to revert to type asap.

(However much Murph wishes/hopes otherwise.)

You'd think something the feds have carriage over--the rollout of vaccines--would be in Murph's line of sight, as well as other commentators. This is going to be the single biggest test of their competence going forward.

If Murph cannot bring herself to say that it's possible that the competence dividend Morrison has benefitted from is in large part a result of riding the premiers' collective coat-tails, and that his biggest test of competence is yet to come, then what value is her commentary?

Seriously, why do we have a commentator class that just runs past the substance, INCLUDING those that sometimes on a Sunday morning Insiders' chair complain about the gallery's focus on the horse-race and the optics?

I don't know if we deserve better, but we desperately need it.

@threadreaderapp please unroll