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Body

Welcome to an election campaign that really is like no other. The extraordinarily lopsided nature of politics in Western Australia since Mark McGowan's record-breaking 2021 win means we enter the formal four-week state election campaign with little doubt - or no doubt - about the outcome of this contest.

While modern politics has taught us all to be wary of unequivocally declaring likely outcomes too early, the magnitude of the challenge facing the WA Liberals and their leader, Libby Mettam, is simply so large it is difficult to foresee a scenario that does not see Labor return for a third term after March 8.

Even if the Liberals were to secure a 10 per cent swing - the sort of move that would typically prove decisive in most elections - they would not even be halfway towards the more than 23 per cent swing they need to claim government.

It seems at this stage that the only two people who, at least based on their public comments, are not certain about the likely outcome next month are the two main combatants: Premier Roger Cook and Mettam.

Mettam deserves credit for her continued efforts to try to make a fist of the election, something she has had to do with only a handful of parliamentary colleagues, a meagre staff, and an alliance partner in the Nationals with whom her party has not exactly enjoyed a rosy relationship.

Cook's branding of his opponents on Wednesday as the "laziest Liberals in the country" seemed particularly unfair on Mettam, who for all her limitations is at least continuing to throw herself into what looks to be a hopeless task.

She continues to insist the election is there to be won, a stance necessitated by voter response when Zak Kirkup conceded the 2021 election weeks before polling day.

Cook, meanwhile, knows that one of the big risks to his job is the hubris that can creep into governments seeking a third term. Labor came to power in 2017 after successfully painting Colin Barnett and his government as arrogant; for months, Cook has been drilling into his MPs the need to not take anything for granted, especially the election outcome.

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Arguably the most interesting dimension of this race is what, if anything, it will say about the standing of Anthony Albanese and federal Labor. The government's flirtations with nature-positive laws and the live sheep export bans caused angst in the west. Just as Albanese leveraged off McGowan's popularity in the west in 2022, so too can Mettam et al leverage off Albanese's unpopularity in 2025.

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