

Liberal Party doesn't want Tony Abbott or a leadership change



Tony Abbott during Question Time on Monday. Andrew Meares

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Conservative Liberals angry at Tony Abbott's destabilisation say the government would be better off going down fighting at the next election rather than change leaders again.

As Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull blamed his predecessor for the government's record-low poll result on Monday, the majority view among conservatives was they wanted neither Mr Abbott back, nor another leader.

"(Tony's) view is that Malcolm Turnbull will destroy the party," said a source close to Mr Abbott. "The sooner Malcolm is gone, the better."

The new conservative guard, led by Mathias Cormann and Peter Dutton, and which has the following of the vast majority of the Liberal conservatives, believes it was wrong to dump Mr Abbott in the first place and it would be now wrong to dump Mr Turnbull. "We'd be better off losing rather than turf out another leader. It would break the party," said a senior conservative.

Last week's outburst by Mr Abbott, and a decision by the Fair Work Commission to cut penalty rates, were blamed for the latest Newspoll which finds the Coalition's vote had fallen to 34 per cent – 5 per centage points lower than at last year's election. Labor is now leading the Coalition by 55 per cent to 45 per cent on a two-party preferred basis.

One Nation is now equalling the Greens on 10 per cent, milking the support of disaffected Coalition voters. Mr Turnbull still leads Bill Shorten as preferred prime minister by 40 per cent to 33 per cent. Mr Turnbull said Mr Abbott timed his outburst to coincide with the polling period and he was unsurprised with the result. "A poll is a snapshot of opinion at one particular kind, the election is two years away and what we saw was an outburst on Thursday and it had its desired impact on the Newspoll," he said. "It was exactly as predicted and calculated. Is Tony Abbott the reason for this? As I said, he knew exactly what he was doing and he did it. "I'm not going to be distracted by that, it's a fact of life, that's what's happened, I'm focused on the jobs of Australians that we are protecting by delivering the leadership."

Mr Cormann, on Friday, damned Mr Abbott's outburst as hypocritical and destructive, agreed. "It's not a surprise after the internal conversation we've had through the media in recent days," he said. "People mark us down for that."

The Coalition had been bracing for a bad poll after [Mr Abbott mounted another push to destabilise the Coalition](#) on Thursday night with a provocative speech and TV interview in which he criticised the government as Labor lite and said it would lose the election unless it adopted his controversial policy suggestions.

These included curbing immigration and abolishing the renewable energy target. Treasurer Scott Morrison said Mr Abbott's call on the RET would cost jobs because it was a matter of sovereign risk. "That's when people start pulling their money out of the country and people start losing their jobs," he said. "If you go and change that every other Thursday, you put people jobs at risk."

And he said the call to cut immigration was ill-considered because a well managed immigration program was important, Mr Morrison said the the government had to focus on "the things that matter" and that would be the emphasis of the May budget.