

Shorten favourite to win next election, says Abbott

Abbott urges Turnbull to learn from UK poll



Former PM Tony Abbott has urged Malcolm Turnbull to learn lessons from UK PM Theresa May's election campaign
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Tony Abbott: "Shorten can certainly win". Picture: AAP

[Brad Norington](#), The Australian, 12:00AM June 13, 2017

Tony Abbott has rated Bill Shorten favourite to win the next federal election, while blasting his own Liberal Party branch in NSW for trying to freeze out ordinary people as members.

Barely disguising his attitude towards Malcolm Turnbull, Mr Abbott said yesterday the British election result in which the Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour Party performed much better than expected showed how voters punished complacent governments.

The former Liberal prime minister also claimed his party in NSW was an “insiders’ club” run by factional bosses whose attempts to manipulate seat preselections and control of the state executive would lead to many disaffected people saying “to hell with the Libs, we can go elsewhere”.

Speaking on Sydney radio 2GB, Mr Abbott said he had assumed British Prime Minister Theresa May would coast to a comfortable election victory — but the problem with coasting was “you come unstuck”. “When you are complacent and overconfident you normally get punished, and that’s exactly what’s happened,” he said.

“So I’m disappointed for Britain and the world because I think they need a strong Conservative government right now. But this is what happens. It shows — does it not? — that big decisions turn on personal decisions, big things turn on personal conduct.”

Asked further about parallels with Australia, Mr Abbott said people should never underestimate Mr Shorten as ALP leader because he was a capable politician. “There should be no doubt, as things stand, Bill Shorten would have to be the favourite to win the next election. “That’s unfortunate for our country, but Shorten can certainly win, as surely as we nearly saw Corbyn come quite close to an improbably and ultimately counter-productive victory. “This is why it is so important that good people and strong parties are at the top of their game.”

Mr Abbott did not mention Mr Turnbull by name, but the Coalition has lagged behind Labor for 13 consecutive Newspolls even if Mr Turnbull remains comfortably ahead of Mr Shorten as preferred prime minister. Disappointing polls were used as a primary reason to dump Mr Abbott for Mr Turnbull nine months before last year’s election.

With the NSW Liberals set to hold a constitutional convention to consider party reforms, Mr Abbott attacked party bosses for trying to “freeze out” ordinary members by charging a \$150 attendance fee in addition to annual membership dues. He said the state party’s governing council had a vested interest in maintaining control, but the party should be handed back to its membership and democratised by allowing one-person, one-vote.

Party members also needed something to fight for, he said.