

## **Newspoll: Leaders stink but an ALP landslide looms**

David Crowe, *The Australian*, 12:00AM August 21, 2017

Malcolm Turnbull is being sent a warning to make drastic changes to the way he works.

The government has sunk further into a political bog in a Newspoll survey that shows Bill Shorten is on track for a landslide victory at the next election.

No conspiracy theory will explain these numbers away. This is all the government's own work.

Turnbull and his colleagues botched the politics of the citizenship row last week by claiming Labor "treachery" in New Zealand, writing a drama that played out as comedy instead. Now they reap the dismal reward: a fall in the Coalition primary vote to 35 per cent while Labor storms ahead to 38 per cent, its strongest position since November.

The citizenship affair is just one example of a contest where the Coalition is routinely outfoxed by its opponents, who play their politics harder and faster every day. Labor was both devious and clever to suggest a question in the New Zealand parliament to cause trouble for Barnaby Joyce, but the Coalition response was to express outrage that the enemy was not playing fair.

Turnbull remains the nation's preferred leader compared to Shorten but a pattern is emerging that should trouble the government. A wave theory is at work. Turnbull widens his lead against Shorten over two or three Newspolls and then sees the gap narrow, like a series of peaks and troughs. Turnbull never loses his lead but never makes any lasting gains.

The hard politics of the past week have taken their toll on the two leaders. Turnbull and Shorten share the same net satisfaction rating of minus 20 percentage points. Voters think they both stink.

The consolation for Shorten is that Labor gains ground even when voters do not like the way he leads the party.

The past fortnight began with an emergency Coalition meeting on same-sex marriage and ended with a third cabinet minister falling foul of the Constitution. The partyroom's disagreements wiped out the first week while the leadership group stumbled in the second.

Turnbull is now in a political trough that is deeper and longer than anything predecessors such as John Howard experienced. The Coalition's primary vote fell to 35 per cent in early 2001 but Howard began recovering within months. Turnbull lacks Howard's political cunning – but that is exactly what he needs to climb out of this bog.