

Newspoll: Turnbull's house tactics turning voters off

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The federal Coalition's performance in parliament is dragging it down in the polls as Malcolm Turnbull struggles to emerge from a political slump, with ministers admitting the government is losing "oxygen" in the fight with Labor.

A new analysis shows voters turn against Mr Turnbull and his government after federal parliament meets, in a repeated pattern that sends a warning signal about the tactics they use against Bill Shorten.

But the government tends to hold its support in the regular Newspoll surveys when parliament is not sitting — and enjoys an improvement in Mr Turnbull's lead over Mr Shorten as preferred prime minister.

The analysis of 10 Newspolls, conducted exclusively for The Australian over the past year, shows Mr Turnbull lost ground on key leadership measures in polls taken after parliament sat for a fortnight. In contrast, Mr Turnbull gained support as preferred prime minister in four of the five polls taken after periods when parliament was not sitting.

Energy Minister Josh Frydenberg yesterday conceded the government had been thrown off course by debates on same-sex marriage and the citizenship of its ministers, when households were worried about energy prices and the economy. "There's been a lot of political noise over the last couple of weeks and these have not been the major issues that the Australian people are focused on," he told Sky News.

The latest Newspoll, conducted from Thursday to Sunday, showed the government had lost more support from voters, to give Labor a lead of 54 to 46 per cent in two-party terms. Labor gained a big increase in its core support, with its primary vote rising from 36 to 38 per cent, after two weeks of parliament that saw Coalition infighting over same-sex marriage and ministers being caught out on dual citizenship.

Newspoll surveys are conducted every two or three weeks during the year, sometimes after two weeks of federal parliament and sometimes in periods when MPs are absent from Canberra or about to return. The Coalition's primary vote fell in three of the five surveys conducted after a fortnight of parliament, with one survey showing an increase and another showing no change. The changes were within the margin of error in each case.

The Coalition primary vote was steady in three of the five Newspolls conducted after periods when parliament was not sitting and improved in two of these surveys, although the gains were also within the margin of error.

Mr Turnbull's net satisfaction rating — the difference between those who are satisfied and those who are dissatisfied with his performance — fell in the five surveys done after two weeks of parliament. In four of these instances it moved outside the margin of error.

Mr Turnbull's lead over Mr Shorten as preferred prime minister also fell in all five of the five surveys done after a sitting fortnight, with two of these shifts beyond the margin of error.

Assistant Industry Minister Craig Laundy admitted the polls were "not good" and warned that "oxygen is being sucked up" by issues that did not matter to voters. "I think they highlight the fact that we need to get our message through a lot more effectively than we have, and that is an economic narrative about the future of the country," he said.