

Shorten on the slide in better PM stakes



Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has widened the gap with Bill Shorten in the better PM stakes. Picture: AAP.

David Crowe, The Australian, 12:00AM September 4, 2017

Malcolm Turnbull has gained his biggest personal lead over Bill Shorten since last year's federal election as the Coalition lifts its primary vote from 35 per cent to 37 per cent, recovering some of the ground it had lost against Labor.

Voters have increased their support for Mr Turnbull as preferred prime minister in a substantial shift over the past two weeks, with 46 per cent of voters backing him while 29 per cent favour Mr Shorten.

The latest Newspoll, taken exclusively for The Australian, shows Labor holds a convincing lead over the Coalition of 53 per cent to 47 per cent but Mr Shorten has suffered his biggest slide in the key leadership measure since February. The survey reveals an improvement in the government's fortunes from its slump two weeks ago, when Labor led by 54 to 46 per cent.

Scant reward for discipline

Parliament resumes today with Labor determined to disrupt the government's agenda in a continued storm over the citizenship of Barnaby Joyce, demanding the Deputy Prime Minister step aside until the High Court decides whether he should be disqualified. Labor deputy leader Tanya Plibersek said it was "absolutely vital" that parliament move on to major issues such as Australians' standard of living but argued it could not do so while questions remained over Mr Joyce's eligibility to hold office. "We do want to get onto the issues that concern Australians — things like their pay, their living standards, health, education," she said yesterday.

“But while it’s the Deputy Prime Minister’s vote that is holding up the government that is inflicting pay cuts upon Australians, health cuts, education cuts, then we’ve got a right and an obligation to pursue the truth.”

Defence Industry Minister Christopher Pyne dismissed the Labor threats and said the government would continue to focus on energy prices this week while also passing legislation. “If Labor chooses to walk out of the parliament, well, that will be good news,” he said. “First, it will increase the average IQ, and second, of course, the crossbenchers will have more time to ask questions of the government. “So if they don’t want to be there, there’s plenty of other people who would like to be.”

At 37 per cent, the government’s core support among voters has returned to the level last seen in March.

Labor’s primary vote has held steady at 38 per cent while the Greens are also unchanged on 9 per cent, while there was a small fall in support for others. Pauline Hanson’s One Nation saw its primary vote slip from 9 per cent to 8 per cent in another sign of the “softness” of its vote. One Nation Queensland senator Malcolm Roberts two weeks ago described a one-point increase in the party’s primary vote as a “surge” of support for Senator Hanson’s decision to wear a burka in the Senate.

While the shifts in primary vote were within the margin of error of 2.5 per cent, the changes in preferred prime minister were greater than this margin. Mr Turnbull widened his lead over Mr Shorten as preferred prime minister to 17 percentage points, the same gap he enjoyed in the Newspoll survey taken in the days before last year’s election. The gap between the two leaders was 10 points two weeks ago.

Voters increased their support for Mr Turnbull as better prime minister from 43 to 46 per cent, while scaling back support for Mr Shorten from 33 to 29 per cent.

Mr Turnbull’s net satisfaction rating — the difference between those satisfied and dissatisfied with his performance — was unchanged at negative 20 points. While his satisfaction rating fell from 35 to 34 per cent, his disapproval rating fell from 55 to 54 per cent and the proportion of voters “uncommitted” on his performance rose from 10 to 12 per cent. There was no change in Mr Shorten’s satisfaction, dissatisfaction or net satisfaction ratings: 34 per cent are satisfied with his performance, 54 per cent are dissatisfied and he has a net rating of negative 20 points. The combined support for the Greens, One Nation, other parties and the “uncommitted” reached 35 per cent in February, in a grim poll for the government, but has fallen to 30 per cent now.

The survey of 1606 voters was taken from Thursday to yesterday and has a margin of error of 2.4 per cent. It is the 19th consecutive Newspoll where the Coalition has trailed Labor, a tally Mr Turnbull turned into a benchmark for leadership when he named the loss of “30 Newspolls in a row” as a reason for challenging Tony Abbott in September 2015.