

POLLING NEWS

Coalition close gap on Labor with Turnbull still preferred PM



Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull finally has some reasons to smile again.

Picture: AAP

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The Australian

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Malcolm Turnbull has gained a vital polling boost to his leadership as the Coalition regains ground against Labor ahead of a bruising parliamentary debate on same-sex marriage this week that is set to spark a divisive push by conservatives to widen religious protections.

After a week that included internal attacks on his leadership, Mr Turnbull has widened the gap against Bill Shorten as preferred prime minister to lead by 39 per cent to 33 per cent as the government gained on Labor but still trailed by 53 per cent to 47 per cent in two-party terms.

Mr Turnbull's poll bounce as preferred prime minister halted a perilous slide in support as parliament resumes today with a fight looming over same-sex marriage and citizenship questions facing dozens of MPs.

With marriage reform set to dominate parliament this week, The Australian has learned former prime minister Tony Abbott will move an amendment that

formally acknowledges traditional marriage and aims to ensure “no one is discriminated against” because of their conscientious views.

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The latest Newspoll, conducted exclusively for The Australian, shows the Coalition’s primary vote has rebounded from 34 to 36 per cent over three weeks, as Mr Turnbull surrendered to a backbench push for a royal commission into the banks.

The final session of parliament will also include crucial votes to refer MPs to the High Court to decide whether they should be disqualified over their citizenship, as the government makes it clear it will use its numbers to refer Labor MPs if necessary despite Mr Shorten’s objections.

Mr Turnbull yesterday admitted to “tough issues” facing the government but tried to capitalise on the Coalition’s by-election victory in New England on Saturday, which returns deputy prime minister Barnaby Joyce to parliament with a swing of 12 per cent towards the Nationals. “When you mark down what we have achieved, you can see that, step by step, we’re getting barnacles off the boat, we’re making real changes resulting in real jobs and real investment,” the Prime Minister said.

Countering questions over his leadership after the government’s year-long slump in the polls, the Prime Minister declared “I don’t run the government based on the Newspoll” and argued that nobody could claim he had broken any election promises. “I have every confidence, every confidence, that I will lead the Coalition to the next election in 2019 and we will win it, because we are putting in place the policies that will deliver for the Australian people,” he said.

Labor retains a convincing lead over the Coalition and would secure power with a gain of more than a dozen seats if today’s Newspoll were repeated at an election, but the new figures show a significant recovery for Mr Turnbull and his government after weeks of grim results.

This is the 24th consecutive Newspoll where the Coalition has trailed Labor, a tally Mr Turnbull set as a benchmark for leadership when he cited the loss of

“30 Newspolls in a row” as a reason for challenging Mr Abbott in September 2015.

In a blow to Pauline Hanson’s One Nation after it secured a single seat in the Queensland election, the minor party has seen its federal primary vote fall from 10 to 8 per cent as voters swung back to the Coalition.

Mr Turnbull last week warned voters that backing One Nation only helped Labor secure power, and he hardened his line against the minor party yesterday to rule out preference deals at the next federal election. Labor has a primary vote of 37 per cent, down one percentage point over three weeks, while the Greens have increased their core support by the same amount to 10 per cent.

The government suffered from a horror fall in the last Newspoll, which showed Labor was ahead by 55 to 45 per cent, but it has narrowed the gap to 53 to 47 per cent.

The latest result is a rare boost in the Coalition’s primary vote this year, on par with a two-point gain at the end of August but smaller than its three-point gain in late February. The three weeks since the last Newspoll included the announcement of the postal survey results on same-sex marriage, the internal Coalition dispute over religious freedom, the government’s decision to delay the House of Representatives for one week, Labor’s narrow victory in the Queensland state election, Mr Turnbull’s vow to pursue personal income tax cuts and the Nationals’ backbench push to hold a banking royal commission.

The period also included widespread media coverage of a threat from an anonymous Coalition MP to quit the Coalition unless Mr Turnbull was removed as leader. Liberal National Party backbencher George Christensen confirmed yesterday he was the MP.

Polling was conducted during a time when NSW Nationals leader John Barilaro called for Mr Turnbull to step down by Christmas, drawing a rebuke from former prime minister John Howard.

The survey of 1560 voters began on Thursday, hours after Mr Turnbull announced the royal commission into banking and superannuation, and continued until yesterday morning.

As well as gaining ground as preferred prime minister, Mr Turnbull saw an improvement in the number of voters satisfied with his performance, which rose from 29 to 32 per cent in the latest Newspoll; those dissatisfied with him fell from 58 to 57 per cent.

The Prime Minister's net satisfaction rating — the difference between those satisfied and those dissatisfied with his performance — improved from minus 29 points to minus 25 points over three weeks.

The number of voters who were satisfied with Mr Shorten's performance fell from 34 to 33 per cent, while the number of dissatisfied voters increased from 53 to 54 per cent. Mr Shorten's net satisfaction rating deteriorated from minus 19 points to minus 21 points but the changes were within the margin of error of 2.5 percentage points for this survey.

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