

Newspoll: Malcolm Turnbull loses 30 in a row



Malcolm Turnbull attends Easts Rugby Club at Woollahra in Sydney's east on Sunday on the eve of his 30th Newspoll loss. Picture: John Feder

- The Australian, 12:00AM April 9, 2018, SIMON BENSON, NATIONAL AFFAIRS EDITOR, Sydney

Malcolm Turnbull has failed a key test he set for deposing Tony Abbott as prime minister — losing a 30th consecutive Newspoll — but insists he can still win the next election and maintains popular support to remain Liberal leader.

While the latest Newspoll, published exclusively in *The Australian*, extended the government's losing streak against Labor to 564 days, the Coalition moved within striking distance of Bill Shorten's opposition for only the second time in the past 12 months, improving its two-party-preferred position by one point to trail by 48 per cent to 52 per cent.

If an election were held this weekend, the government, which holds a one-seat majority, would lose 14 seats, based on a uniform national swing.

The latest Newspoll reveals that 55 per cent of voters nationally believe the benchmark Mr Turnbull set as one of the pretexts for seizing the leadership from Mr Abbott would demonstrate a failure in the Prime Minister's own leadership.

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Coalition voters were split on the significance of the 30 lost polls, with 41 per cent judging Mr Turnbull as a “failure” compared with 42 per cent believing otherwise.

On the Liberal leadership, Mr Turnbull was narrowly the preferred choice, backed by 28 per cent of voters, while his deputy Julie Bishop received 27 per cent support and Mr Abbott 13 per cent. Mr Turnbull was still overwhelmingly regarded as preferred leader among Coalition voters, with 46 per cent backing him over his closest rival, Ms Bishop, on 22 per cent.

Mr Abbott said yesterday he had no intention of seeking to retake the leadership as cabinet ministers continued to come out in support of Mr Turnbull.

“Nope — while from time to time I might challenge the government to rethink (its priorities and policies) — the last thing I want to see is instability in government,” Mr Abbott said.

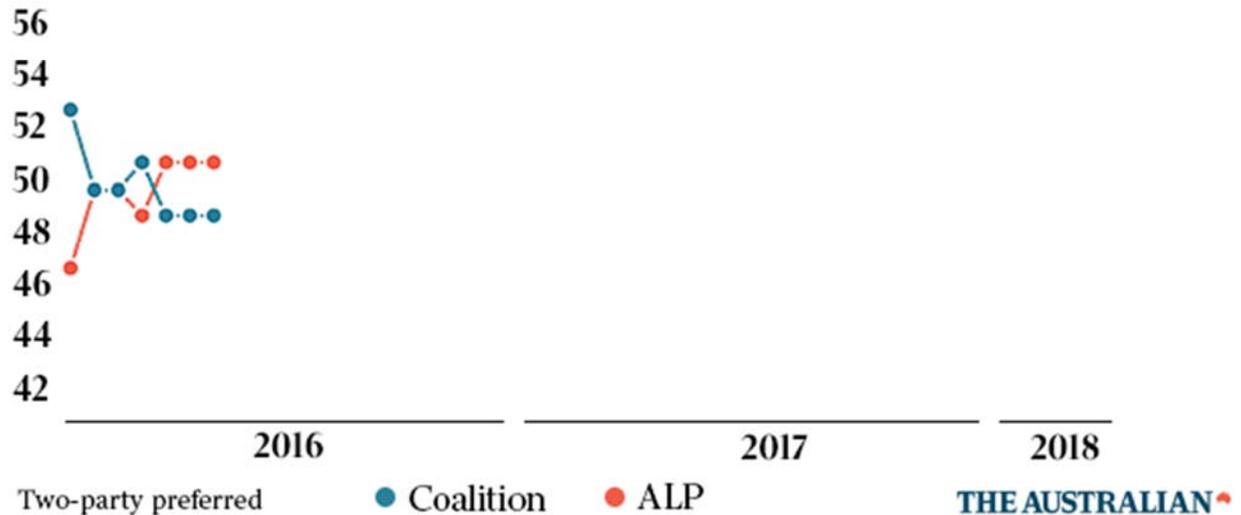
“None of us should live in the past or dwell on things; we’re getting on with our job.”

Mr Turnbull said yesterday that it was “critically important to make sure that Australians understand the risk of a Labor government”.

“It is clear the electoral prospects of the government and opposition are very evenly matched,” he said.

Turnbull's descent

Results of *The Australian* Newspoll since February 2016



Malcolm Turnbull's Newspoll fortunes have fallen since 2016.

The poll reveals Mr Shorten has returned to being the favoured leader of the Labor Party, as Mr Turnbull's lead over Mr Shorten as preferred prime minister narrowed again to just two points.

The national poll of 1597 voters, conducted from last Thursday to yesterday, recorded a one-point gain in the Coalition's primary vote to 38 per cent, however it failed to lift the Coalition out of near record low numbers.

Labor will be frustrated that it has dropped two primary vote points to 37 per cent. There was little movement for the other parties, with the Greens up one point to 10 per cent, One Nation stuck on 7 per cent and others remaining on 8 per cent.

The most punitive judgment on Mr Turnbull's leadership came from One Nation voters, representing many disenchanted former conservative Coalition voters, with 72 per cent agreeing that 30 lost Newspolls signalled a failed leadership.

Among One Nation voters, Mr Abbott was the most popular choice as Liberal leader.

Voters' assessment of Mr Turnbull's performance remained largely unchanged compared with the previous poll two weeks ago. His satisfaction rating remained at 32 per cent while his dissatisfaction rating increased one point to 57 per cent.

Mr Shorten, however, suffered a two-point drop in his satisfaction rating to 32 per cent and a three-point rise in dissatisfaction to 57 per cent — level with Mr Turnbull on both measures.

On the question of preferred prime minister, Mr Turnbull dropped a point to 38 per cent, falling back to levels experienced during the citizenship crisis, while Mr Shorten remained unchanged at 36 per cent. In anticipation of the looming poll blow, Mr Turnbull and his supporters had engaged in a concerted campaign over the past week to renounce the now infamous proclamation he made 2½ years ago.

Cabinet minister Josh Frydenberg called for colleagues to rally behind Mr Turnbull and echoed calls from former prime minister John Howard last week for unity within the partyroom. He said Mr Turnbull had delivered “good economic leadership” amid turbulent and difficult times. “If you look at his record and if you look at the alternative, it is a clear-cut choice,” Mr Frydenberg said.

He said the Coalition had a “collective responsibility” to ensure “the Labor-Green alternative is not given a chance”.

Mr Shorten yesterday refused to make any judgment about the poll numbers.

“Well I’ve made it a practice of not commenting on polls, when the polls have been good, bad or indifferent,” Mr Shorten said.

“Unlike my opposite number, I don’t define my success by opinion polls. Mr Turnbull obsesses about polls, as does the Liberal and National parties of Australia.”

Former Nationals leader and deputy prime minister John Anderson called on Mr Turnbull to hone his political messaging.

Mr Anderson said it was never too late to level with Australians, look them in the eye and say: “This is what I believe and this is where we’re going.”

Conservative Liberal MP for the West Australian seat of Canning, Andrew Hastie, said the government should acknowledge the poll but then “move on”.

“Everyone keeps talking about the 30 Newspolls. Let’s get it done and move on. It changes nothing,” Mr Hastie said.

“We should acknowledge it and move on. It’s a very uncertain world we’re living in, with big national security challenges and economic uncertainty. All we need is good stable government.

“The Prime Minister has my support and I’m looking forward to getting this budget out and delivering for Canning and the Australian people.”

The Coalition under Mr Turnbull has now trailed Labor on two-party-preferred support for 564 days. Julia Gillard’s government trailed the Coalition for 521 consecutive days, Mr Abbott’s government trailed Labor for 493 days while Mr Howard’s longest period trailing Labor was 364 days.

Mr Turnbull yesterday warned division within the party would destroy the - Coalition’s chances of an election victory.