

Newspoll: Malcolm Turnbull's popularity surges on the back of the budget



Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and wife Lucy wave to participants at the start of Mother's Day Classic in Sydney on Sunday.

- The Australian, 6:17AM May 14, 2018, SIMON BENSON, National Political Editor

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Malcolm Turnbull's popularity has leapt to its highest levels since the 2016 election on the back of one of the most well-received budgets in a decade and a \$140 billion personal income tax cut plan that has been endorsed by a majority of Australians.

The Coalition consolidated gains made over the past month to remain in election contention, trailing Labor on a two-party-preferred vote of 51 to 49 for the second successive Newspoll, conducted exclusively for *The Australian*.

With the government having failed to make headway on a negative 53-47 split for most of last year and for the period during the Barnaby Joyce love-child scandal, the result maintains an electoral position for the Coalition that it has not enjoyed since September 2016.

Increasing pressure on Bill Shorten, Mr Turnbull strengthened his position as the preferred prime minister to 46 per cent, jumping eight points to establish a 14-point lead.

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The Opposition Leader suffered a three-point drop as preferred prime minister to 32 per cent, his worst result this year.

The improved personal ratings for the Prime Minister come as both parties adopt a war footing ahead of five by-elections, expected in early July, triggered by Labor's citizenship crisis.

The latest Newspoll also builds momentum for the government as it prepares to go into battle with Labor and the Senate crossbench over its seven-year budget tax plan.

The Coalition has continued to enjoy a steady rise in its primary vote since February, lifting a point to 39 per cent — having hit record lows last year of 33 per cent — with Labor also improving a point to 38 per cent.

The gains in the primary vote for both major parties have come at the expense of minor parties, including Pauline Hansen's One Nation, which continues its seesaw ride with voters, dropping a point to 6 per cent.

The Greens' vote also remains down a point at 9 per cent.

In Queensland yesterday, tensions erupted within the ranks of the Liberal National Party after Turnbull government frontbencher Jane Prentice was rolled for preselection by a Brisbane city councillor.



Federal Opposition Leader Bill Shorten during a visit to Jax Tyres in Melbourne on Sunday.

While the federal budget failed to deliver an immediate boost to the Coalition's two-party-preferred standing, key Liberal figures had attempted to manage expectations following the budget, telling *The Australian* that were not anticipating a post-budget bounce.

“The idea of the budget was to give us something to build on over time, and take to an election,” one senior Liberal MP said. However, with the tax plan - receiving the endorsement of 51 per cent of voters, there is likely to be frustration at the senior levels of government that this had not translated into an immediate lift in its two-party-preferred standing.

The results suggest Labor's alternative tax plan, announced two days after the budget, has not given the opposition an edge either. Any traction Mr Shorten's crusade against the government's company tax cuts may have had appears to have been cancelled out by questions over the Labor leader's handling of the citizenship crisis within his own party.

The national poll of 1728 voters, conducted between May 10 and 13 across both city and country regions, captured the immediate post-budget sentiment, with the bulk of respondents having been surveyed after Mr Shorten's budget-in-reply speech delivered on the night of Thursday, May 10.

The preference flows were based on recent state elections and the last federal election.

It is the 32nd Newspoll in which the Coalition has trailed Labor.

Satisfaction with Mr Turnbull's performance also rose three points to 39 per cent while assessment of Mr Shorten's performance fell a point to 33 per cent.

The poll comes on the back of a budget that will be hotly contested in the lead-up to the Super Saturday of by-elections, with Labor claiming it would support only the first phase of the government's plan of cash handouts of up to \$530 a year for low to middle-income earners from next year, and demanding it split the legislation.

Yesterday, two key Senate crossbench voting blocs — One Nation and Centre Alliance — weighed in behind Labor, warning the government that unless the bill was split to allow them to support the first round of cuts, the entire package could be defeated in the Senate. Scott Morrison yesterday repeated the government's demands that the package be passed in full to allow the entirety of the tax cuts to flow through for low-income earners, then through to middle-income earners and eventually bring relief to those on higher incomes.

The Newspoll results also reflect the fallout from the citizenship fiasco last week that saw three Labor MPs — Justine Keay, Susan Lamb and Josh Wilson — join Centre Alliance MP Rebekah Sharkie in resigning from parliament after admitting they were in the same boat as Labor senator Katy Gallagher, who was ruled ineligible to sit in the Senate by the High Court because she held dual British citizenship at the time of her nomination.

The Newspoll result for One Nation is down to the low levels recorded after the Queensland state election in November, having come off highs of 10 per cent.

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