

## Newspoll: Coalition ends year with poll slump



Prime Minister Scott Morrison visiting the Butterfly Foundation in Crows Nest today. Picture: Hollie Adams

Simon Benson, National Affairs Editor,  
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Scott Morrison will head to the Christmas break with the titanic task of turning around a damaged government before the May election, with the Coalition ending 2018 in the grip of a poll slump.

An exclusive Newspoll conducted for The Australian shows the Coalition now battling the same electoral crisis Malcolm Turnbull was faced with at the end of last year, with popular support remaining historically low.

The results of the final Newspoll of the year show the Coalition's primary vote at 35 per cent, Labor's at 41 per cent and a two-party-preferred split of 45-55, which would equate on a uniform basis to the loss of 21 seats for the government.

The poll is the third in a row to record a 10-point gap between the two major parties and will pose a further setback for Liberal MPs who believed the Prime Minister had delivered a significant blow against Bill Shorten last week over border protection and national security.

But it also comes on the back of a horror start to the last fortnight when Liberal MP Julia Banks shocked colleagues by abruptly resigning from the party and moving to the crossbench, as well as calls from former foreign minister Julie Bishop to revive the national energy guarantee.

Tony Abbott has also said the government could recover and win the next election, despite the fact “the polls aren’t great.” “I think we’re ending the year in much better shape than we started the year, as a party and as a government,” the former prime minister told 2GB radio. “I know the polls aren’t great ... But if you look at the objective reality, we’ve had very strong border protection, we’ve had record job creation, we are within sight of a surplus.”

Voters have all but written the government off as a chance of securing a third term, with the poll revealing less than a quarter believe the Coalition will win the next election and a third of Coalition voters believing Labor has it in the bag.

Blame for the poor standing of the government is likely to fall at the feet of Mr Turnbull, with Conservative MPs claiming the former prime minister’s public intervention last week in Liberal preselections was a deliberate attempt to undermine the government. A majority of Coalition voters believed the former prime minister’s behaviour constituted disloyalty and that he should stop criticising the government. However, a majority judged that this was not enough to warrant expulsion from the party.

With parliament not due to return until February ahead of an April 2 budget and a likely mid-May election, Mr Morrison has maintained his lead over Mr Shorten in the leadership contest. Approval ratings for both leaders dropped in the wake of a chaotic final week of parliament, with Mr Morrison’s satisfaction rating dropping a point to 42 per cent, while the percentage of those dissatisfied with him rose by three points to 45 per cent. Mr Shorten’s approval rating also fell by a point, to 36 per cent, and there was a one-point rise in those unhappy with his performance. However, he managed to close the gap on Mr Morrison as preferred prime minister, gaining two points to 36 per cent while the Liberal leader dropped two points to 44 per cent.

Mr Morrison yesterday continued the attack on Labor over its decision last week to soften its border protection policy to support a Greens bill to fast-track the removal of refugees from Nauru to Australia on medical grounds.

“You can’t trust Labor on border protection. You never could. You couldn’t when they were in government, you can’t when they’re in opposition,” he said.

The positive end to the final parliamentary sitting for the year for the Coalition, in which Labor also buckled to support national security encryption legislation, has so far failed to translate into a boost in electoral support.

Newspoll

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The Coalition’s primary vote of 35 per cent marks a one-point improvement but is still only two points off a record low of 33 per cent. Labor’s primary vote of 41 per cent is only one point shy of the popular vote recorded in the 2007 “Ruddslide” election. The One Nation primary vote sits at 7 per cent and the Greens remain unchanged on 9 per cent.

The poll also revealed that only 24 per cent of all voters believed the Coalition would win the next election, while 55 per cent expected Mr Shorten would return Labor to government. A significant rump of Coalition voters were pessimistic about the chances of a third term, with 32 per cent believing Labor would win compared with 47 per cent backing their own team.

However Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton said this morning that the government can reverse the polls because the Prime Minister has “the attributes of John Howard” and is a superior campaigner to Malcolm Turnbull. “I’ve been parliament for 17 years, I’ve seen John Howard in a much worse position than what we are at the moment, and he came back,” he told Sky News. “Scott Morrison has many of the attributes of John Howard. I think he has the ability to communicate very effectively.

“He will campaign in a way far more superior than we saw in 2016 (when Mr Turnbull led the Liberal Party.) “People have a real hesitation about Bill Shorten. They think there is something dodgy in his past, and that is the case.”

- with Richard Ferguson

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