

## Analysing Past Midterm PM Changes

Written by The Conversation

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There is increasing speculation that Tony Abbott could be ousted by the Liberal Party in favour of Malcolm Turnbull when Parliament resumes tomorrow. A ReachTEL poll conducted on Thursday night, from a sample of 3500, indicates that the Coalition would receive a massive poll boost from such a transition: they trail Labor by 55-45 with Abbott as PM, but would lead by 54-46 under Turnbull, and 51-49 with Julie Bishop. [Today a Galaxy poll](#) has the Coalition trailing 57-43 under Abbott, 51-49 under Turnbull and 53-47 with Bishop. By a 55-35 margin, voters say Abbott should resign.

The [Poll Bludger](#) notes that this hypothetical question gives opponents of Abbott the chance to lodge a protest vote. If Turnbull were to become PM, I am sure that the Coalition would initially do much better than under Abbott, but I doubt there would be the nine-point swing towards the Coalition that ReachTEL shows.

There have been three midterm transitions of PM since regular polling began. In December 1991, Paul Keating replaced Bob Hawke. In June 2010, Julia Gillard replaced Kevin Rudd, and in June 2013, Rudd replaced Gillard. In each case, the question is whether the new PM measurably improved their party's standings in the polls, and, if so, how long that honeymoon bounce lasted.

Paul Keating defeated Bob Hawke in a leadership spill by 56 votes to 51 on 19 December 1991. The [Newspoll taken over the first](#) two weekends of December '91 gave the Coalition a 51-36 primary vote lead over Labor. A Newspoll taken in mid-January '92 still had the Coalition ahead by 48-38, and the Coalition primary vote returned to the 50's in the two February '92 Newspolls. So judging by Newspoll, Labor only had a 2-3 point lift in their vote following Keating's instalment as PM, and this small bounce had faded within two months.

Labor's win at the March 1993 election was due to a scare campaign against Hewson's "Fightback!" package; Keating was unpopular at that election, with an election-eve Newspoll net approval rating of -25.

Julia Gillard became Prime Minister on 24 June 2010 after incumbent PM Kevin Rudd resigned rather than contest a leadership spill. In the days immediately following Gillard's ascension, [Nielsen, Galaxy](#) and

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### [Newspoll](#)

showed Labor's primary vote increasing substantially to over 40%, but mainly at the expense of the Greens, not the Coalition. As a result, Labor's two party vote share increased only modestly; they led 52-48 in the Newspoll before Rudd was deposed, and 53-47 the following weekend.

By mid-July, Labor's primary vote was below 40% in [Galaxy and Nielsen](#) polls. Gillard announced the 21 August election on 17 July, and the first two campaign polls had

[contradictory](#)

results. At

[the end of July, Nielsen](#)

gave the Coalition a shock 52-48 lead, and Labor effectively tied the Coalition at the August 2010 election, surviving only due to Independents backing Labor.

Julia Gillard's bounce was only worth about one point to Labor after preferences, and it probably only lasted two weeks. The election result was 2% worse for Labor than Rudd's final Newspoll.

On 26 June 2013, Rudd regained the Prime Ministership, defeating Gillard by 57 votes to 45 in a leadership spill. Gillard's final BludgerTrack aggregate had the Coalition ahead by a [crushing 56.8-43.2 margin](#)

; the final Gillard-era Newspoll was 57-43 to the Coalition. After the change,

[Galaxy and Newspoll](#)

gave the Coalition only 51-49 leads, and Labor improved to a 50-50 tie in July. In August, Rudd's honeymoon bounce began wearing off, and Labor was thumped by 53.5-46.5 at the 7 September 2013 election.

For July 2013, Rudd improved Labor's standing in the polls by seven points according to BludgerTrack. Even though Labor convincingly lost the election, they still performed 3% better at the election than before the change. The change to Rudd was by far the most successful of the midterm changes in PM.

Abbott has never been popular, and his latest ratings are brutal, with ReachTEL giving him a total good rating of just 21% (down 1) and a total poor rating of 63% (up 1), for a net approval of -42. Ipsos last week had Abbott's approval on 29% and his disapproval on 67% for a net rating of -38.

If the Liberals change to Turnbull, I think they would receive a significant boost in voting intentions. The electorate would be relieved if Abbott goes, and this in itself would help the Coalition. Turnbull is currently seen as a moderate, given his views on gay marriage and climate change, so he could win some initial approval from left wing voters. However, it is likely that those voters would quickly become disillusioned.

### More on ReachTEL

A head to head Turnbull vs Bishop question has Turnbull leading by 13 points among all voters, but Bishop leads by 9 points among Coalition voters. [In last week's ReachTEL](#), voters opposed the extra fee for visiting the doctor by 57-29. Replacing state taxes with a GST increase was opposed by 46-24, and applying the GST to fresh food was opposed by a huge 74-16.

### Newspoll Update Sunday Night

[Newspoll is 57-43 to Labor](#), a 3% gain for Labor since the last Newspoll in mid-December. Abbott's satisfied rating fell 9 points to 24% and his dissatisfied rating rose 10 points to 68% for a net approval of -44, down 19 points. Abbott is crushed as preferred Liberal leader by both Turnbull (64-25) and Bishop (59-27), while Turnbull leads Bishop by 49-38. However, [among Coalition voters](#), Abbott leads Turnbull 54-40 and Bishop 57-37, while Bishop beats Turnbull 46-39. Here's a tweet on Newspoll from Kevin Bonham.

*Adrian Beaumont does not work for, consult to, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has no relevant affiliations.*

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