

## Abbott gets poll relief as Coalition narrows the gap

Written by The Conversation

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The Coalition has had a substantial lift in the [latest Newspoll](#) , now trailing Labor in two party terms 49-51% compared with 45-55% a fortnight ago.

This is its best two party result since September.

The Coalition's primary vote has risen 3 points to 41%, the first time it has been above 40% since September, in the poll in Tuesday's Australian.

With parliament in its last sitting week before going into recess ahead of the May budget, the Newspoll gives some encouragement to Abbott as he tries to rebuild, and is likely to lift the spirits of a depressed backbench.

But the federal Liberals are also waiting nervously for the results in next Saturday's NSW election. The Baird government is widely expected - on the basis of polling - to win but has had a struggle with the privatisation issue and there has been a negative Abbott factor.

On Monday tensions at senior levels of the federal government were on display when Foreign Minister Julie Bishop reacted sharply to a [newspaper claim](#) that foreign aid was likely to "suffer a further small cut" in the budget. She then very conspicuously rolled her eyes when Treasurer Joe Hockey referred in Parliament to the expenditure review committee.

After her public displeasure, she got an assurance from Hockey that her budget is safe.

In Newspoll Labor's primary vote is down 2 points to 37%; the Greens have fallen a point to 11%.

Abbott has reduced Bill Shorten's lead as better prime minister to trail by 5 points. This compares with 18 points six weeks ago. A fortnight ago Shorten had a 44-33% lead - his

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support fell 3 points to 41% and Abbott's rose 3 points to 36%.

Abbott's satisfaction level increased for the third time running, up a point to 29%; his dissatisfaction rating fell 2 points to 61%.

Shorten's satisfaction rating is down 3 points to 36%; dissatisfaction with him rose 5 points to 47%.

The polls come as Abbott has been pulling out all stops to try to improve the government's ratings, including again assuring the public that the budget won't be one that hits households. But he has also been under considerable criticism in the last week, including for mixing the government's economic messages.

Bishop said the first she had heard of any new threat to foreign aid was when she saw a reference in Monday's Australian.

Asked if she would be aware if her budget was going to be cut again, Bishop said tartly: "Well you'd hope I would be wouldn't you? So I will certainly be taking it up with the Treasurer to find out the source of that story."

She later received an assurance from Hockey and Finance Minister Mathias Cormann that the aid budget would survive intact.

Foreign aid has suffered a total cut of some \$11.3 billion, including in the budget last year and then in the mid year budget review.

Cormann told Sky TV the story had come as a surprise to him. "I think that probably gives you as much as you need to know about that particular proposition," he said. "I think we have done as much as we can," Cormann added, pointing to the "significant effort" already made.

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During the parliamentary condolences for former prime minister Malcolm Fraser, Bishop rolled her eyes and put her face in her hand when Hockey praised Fraser setting up the expenditure review committee – the so-called razor gang.

Hockey said: “He was the great initiator – and we will be forever thankful – he was the great initiator of the expenditure review committee. And that committee has endured, much to the chagrin of my colleagues but it has endured, and it is one of his many lasting legacies.”

Bishop late on Monday welcomed the assurances that foreign aid was safe. “We have a significant challenge in front of us to ensure our aid budget is delivered effectively and efficiently, so I am pleased that there will not be any uncertainty surrounding that.”

Bishop has made it clear she would contest any leadership ballot, and she is keeping her profile very high.

*Michelle Grattan 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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