

The latest Fairfax-Ipsos poll has more dismal news for Malcolm Turnbull, showing his ratings taking a fresh hit and strong support for a royal commission into the banks, which the government is resisting.

The Coalition and Labor are 50-50% on the two-party vote, a fall for the government of three points since March and a 3.5% swing against it since the 2013 election.

Turnbull's net approval is down ten points since March, while his still-big lead over Opposition Leader Bill Shorten as preferred prime minister has narrowed.

Turnbull has a significant margin over Shorten on a majority of personal attributes that the poll asked about. But the strength of his ratings has weakened since October, just after he became leader. Turnbull's biggest falls are in the ability to make things happen, being a "strong leader", having a clear vision for Australia, and having his party's confidence.

The poll reinforces the point that the government is on the defensive over the issue of whether there should be a royal commission into the banks' behaviour, with 65% favouring one and 26% against. Labor has promised a royal commission, which has also been urged by some government MPs. Even a majority of Coalition voters (53%) believes there should be a royal commission.

The period since the last Ipsos poll has seen continued confusion over the government's tax policy, the banks' issue, and signs of disunity in government ranks.

The poll comes as parliament on Monday commences its special sitting for the Senate to consider the government's industrial relations legislation. Turnbull has said that if the Senate does not pass the bills to reintroduce the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC) and to toughen union governance there will be a July 2 double dissolution.

Attorney-General George Brandis confirmed on Sunday that the Senate would have to pass

both measures to avoid a double dissolution. There is a general expectation this will not happen and there will be a July 2 election.

Monday will start with Governor-General Peter Cosgrove opening the session. The Registered Organisations bill, defeated three times and already a double-dissolution trigger, has to be reintroduced. The ABCC bills are before parliament.

The session will also see legislation to abolish the Road Safety Remuneration Tribunal, for which the government believes it has the Senate numbers. Its fallback position, if it cannot get enough crossbenchers, is to move for a recent pay decision from the tribunal to be put on hold.

Turnbull, accompanied by Deputy Prime Minister and Nationals leader Barnaby Joyce, addressed a rally of owner operators in Canberra on Sunday, saying “we’re the parties of truck drivers. We’re the parties of people that get on and have a go and that’s why we’re here”. Shorten said Turnbull probably had the crossbench numbers to secure abolition.

In the Ipsos poll, the Coalition’s primary vote is down three points since March to 42%, Labor is up two points to 33%, while the Greens, on 14%, are unchanged. The poll of 1402 was taken Thursday to Saturday.

Turnbull’s approval has fallen four points to 51%; his disapproval is up six points to 38%, for a net approval of plus 13, a ten-point fall. Shorten’s approval is unchanged (33%); his disapproval has risen by three points to 55%, to given him a net approval of minus 22, a worsening of three points.

Turnbull’s rating as preferred prime minister is down seven points to 54%; Shorten’s rating has risen five points to 27%.

While there has been little change in people’s thinking about Shorten’s attributes, the poll shows that voters have reassessed what they think of Turnbull, although they put him ahead of his opponent on most measures.

The Turnbull-versus-Shorten ratings are:

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competent (Turnbull 70%, Shorten 49%);

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has a firm grasp of economic policy (66-38%);

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open to ideas (63-59%);

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has a firm grasp of foreign policy (61-36%);

-

strong leader (55-31%);

-

has a clear vision for Australia's future 51-34%;

-

trustworthy (51-36%);

-

has the confidence of his party (50-58%);

-

has the ability to make things happen (49-32%);

Ipsos poll: Turnbull takes hit, Coalition-Labor 50-50

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has a firm grasp of social policy (47-54%); and

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is easily influenced by minority groups (34-50%).

The falls in Turnbull's ratings since October are:

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competent, 13 points;

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has a firm grasp of economic policy, 14 points;

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open to ideas, 12 points;

-

has a firm grasp of foreign policy, four points;

-

strong leader, 20 points;

-

has a clear vision for Australia's future, 19 points;

-

trustworthy, seven points;

-

has the confidence of his party, 17 points;

-

has the ability to make things happen, 25 points; and

-

has a firm grasp of social policy, 13 points.

On one measure his rating has risen, but it is not good news. In October 27% saw him as easily influenced by minority groups. Now 34% see him as open to this influence.

Meanwhile, on Saturday former speaker Bronwyn Bishop, 73, failed in her bid to get preselected for her seat of Mackellar, which she has held since 1994, after being a senator from 1987 to 1994. She was defeated 51 votes to the 39 on the third ballot by Jason Falinski, a former Liberal staffer.

Falinski, a moderate, had the support of Turnbull. Hard-right candidate Walter Villatora, who had the backing of former prime minister Tony Abbott, got only a handful of votes. But when he dropped out it appears his nine votes, except for one, went to Falinski, lifting him from 43 to 51, while Bishop stayed on 39, and there was one informal.

Abbott and Bishop, previously long-time allies, fell out in the wake of the row over her infamous A\$5000 helicopter trip between Melbourne and Geelong. She voted against him in the leadership ballot.

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