

While the Coalition accusingly targets Labor for “class war” politics, Tuesday’s Essential poll reinforces the fact that Australians think there are classes and tag themselves and political parties to them.

The poll found 81% believe social classes still exist in Australia. Nearly one in two (48%) identified themselves as middle class and one third (34%) as working class. A tiny 2% were willing to describe themselves as upper class.

Asked whose interests the Labor Party mainly represents, 39% nominated the working class and 17% the middle class; 10% said the upper class. Only 8% said the ALP represents all classes; 13% said it represents none.

Just 15% said the Liberal Party mainly represents the middle class. A majority (53%) said it mainly represents upper-class people. Only 4% said the Liberals represent the working class; 12% said all classes and 4% said “none of them”. Some 28% of Liberal-National voters said the Liberals mainly represent the middle class and 29% said they represented all classes.

Since the question was asked in August 2014, the proportion thinking the Liberals represent the upper class has risen from 47% to 53%.

Independent polling analyst John Stirton, who was formerly Fairfax’s pollster, says that it seems “the 2014 Abbott/Hockey and the 2016 Turnbull/Morrison budgets might have reinforced some voters’ views of the Liberal Party as a party for the rich or an ‘upper class party’.

“This is a traditional perception among non-Liberal voters that seems to have become more widely held over the last couple of years, rising from 40% of all voters in 2013 to 53% now,” he said.

The question of class is much more complicated than simple self- description, as the 2015 “ANUpoll – Social class in Australia: Beyond the ‘working’ and ‘middle’ classes” points out.

But such basic figures indicate the sub-soil that Labor is seeking to tap into when it paints Malcolm Turnbull as a wealthy toff out of touch with the average person. They also highlight why Peta Credlin's description of Turnbull last week as "Mr Harbourside Mansion" is seen as so potentially damaging.

There are two obviously contrasting ways of viewing Turnbull's affluence in political terms and mobilising it into a narrative.

One is Labor's approach: to suggest he's someone who is removed from ordinary people's lives and so can't understand them. The alternative view, espoused by the Coalition, is that of Turnbull as the successful self-made man, which can feed into a wider story about aspiration.

But there is another, intermediate, view that says Turnbull mightn't be "one of us" but is a viable leader. This is probably about where he is now, although over the months people have come to see him as less effective as a leader than they'd expected. The danger for him is that the further he slips on the effectiveness scale, the more risk that not being "one of us" comes into play.

Tuesday's Essential poll has Labor ahead 51-49% (unchanged since the last poll) in two-party terms. For the first time more people disapprove than approve of the job Turnbull is doing (42-40%), a net rating of minus two which is down two since April.

The poll found 52% thought the campaign too long, a view perhaps vindicated by a slow Tuesday. The penalty rates debate, which is mainly being conducted on the left of politics, went into another day, with Shorten declaring of his Green critics, "I've never got stuck in a traffic jam behind a car load of Greens going to stand up for workers".

Turnbull hammered Labor ever harder on border protection, doing an Abbott and getting on a patrol boat in Darwin.

The Coalition half cleaned off a barnacle by announcing a six month delay in the so-called "backpacker tax", with its future to be reviewed post-election. Under the tax, that had been due to start July 1, those on working holidays were facing a rate of 32.5% from the first dollar

earned. The tax has brought a backlash from rural areas, but the decision is inconclusive, providing no certainty about what a re-elected Coalition government would do.

The announcement was made by Assistant Treasurer Kelly O'Dwyer. It was one that presumably Treasurer Scott Morrison was happy to delegate, though to be fair he had flagged action in his news conference on budget day. O'Dwyer said Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce – who was not with her at the announcement – would lead the review.

Questioned later, Morrison said this was a very complicated issue, involving labour shortages in rural areas, visa integrity, and consistency of tax treatment. He said the results of the review would feed into the budget update at the end of the year.

The one exploding cracker of the day was the revelation that Labor frontbencher and member for Batman, David Feeney, had failed to declare on his register of interests a A\$2.3 million house that is rented out and negatively geared. He and his wife bought the house in 2013 with the intention of renovating it and living there.

Read more <http://theconversation.com/politically-turnbulls-affluence-can-be-used-to-feed-different-narratives-59556>