

Newspoll 54-46 to Labor as Turnbull's ratings fall back

Written by Adrian Beaumont, Honorary Associate, School of Mathematics and Statistics, University of Melbourne

This [week's Newspoll](#), conducted 17-20 August from a sample of 1770, has broken the string of six consecutive 53-47 leads for Labor. Labor had a 54-46 lead, a one point gain since last fortnight. Primary votes were 38% Labor (up 2), 35% Coalition (down 1), 9% Greens (down 2) and 9% One Nation (up 1). This is the Coalition's 18th consecutive Newspoll loss under Turnbull; Abbott lost 30 in a row.

In last fortnight's Newspoll, Turnbull had an eight-point improvement in his net approval, from -20 to -12. This improvement lasted only one Newspoll; in this Newspoll, 35% were satisfied with Turnbull's performance (down 3), and 55% were dissatisfied (up 5), for a net approval of -20. [Kevin Bonham says this](#) is the ninth time in Newspoll history a PM has gained eight or more net approval points, then lost them all the next poll. Shorten also lost five points to fall to -20 net approval.

Last week, the media focus was on Deputy PM Barnaby Joyce's discovery that he was a New Zealand citizen by descent, and may be ineligible to sit in Parliament. This revelation is damaging for the government as Joyce is a lower house MP. Labor can argue that the government's one-seat majority is invalid until the High Court rules on Joyce.

One Nation's slight increase may be a result of Pauline Hanson's burka stunt last Thursday. Labor's primary vote is its highest in Newspoll since November 2016, although Labor's gains came at the Greens' expense.

Essential's questions below may explain why Labor has had a persistent poll lead. A majority of voters think their income has fallen behind the cost of living, with energy costs perceived to have increased a lot. The government receives very poor ratings for its handling of energy.

[67% said they will definitely vote](#) in the same sex marriage voluntary postal plebiscite. Among definite voters, 67% supported same sex marriage, and 31% were opposed (63-30 for the whole sample). By 49-43, voters were in favour of the postal plebiscite, and by 62-18 they supported guarantees for freedom of conscience, belief and religion.

Australia does not usually use voluntary voting, so our pollsters have no experience at

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estimating likelihood to vote. Even in countries with voluntary voting, pollsters sometimes mess up their turnout filters, and have had big misses of the actual results.

Newspoll's age breakdowns show young people are least likely to be definite voters, and that same sex marriage support is highest for young people. It is odd that definite voters support same sex marriage more than the overall sample; this is explained by greater enthusiasm to vote among same sex marriage supporters.

In last fortnight's Newspoll, [voters supported an Australian republic](#) by 51-38, almost the same as in January 2016 (51-37). If Prince Charles becomes King, voters would favour an Australian republic 55-34, the same as in January 2016.

Essential 53-47 to Labor

This [week's Essential](#), conducted over the last two weeks from a sample of 1820, gave Labor a 53-47 lead, a one point gain for the Coalition since last fortnight. Primary votes were 37% Coalition, 37% Labor, 9% Greens, 8% One Nation and 3% Nick Xenophon Team. Labor's primary vote is down two as a pro-Labor sample from last fortnight washes out. Additional questions are based on one week's sample.

74% of same sex marriage supporters say they will definitely vote in the postal plebiscite, compared to 58% of opponents. Among the 63% "definite voters", 67% will vote for same sex marriage, and 30% against (57-32 for the overall sample). By 49-39, voters disapproved of the postal plebiscite.

52% thought terrorism the biggest threat to global stability (up 3 since April), followed by 14% for North Korea aggression (not asked in April), 13% climate change (up 2) and 9% US aggression (down 6, presumably due to North Korea's inclusion).

By 38-35, voters thought Australia should not commit military support to the US if it became involved in a war with North Korea. By 61-22, voters thought a declaration of war should be voted on by Parliament, not decided by the PM alone.

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Last week, [Essential asked whether the Coalition](#) is handling various issues well or poorly. With the exceptions of terrorism (a net +30) and the economy (net +3), the Coalition had negative ratings on the 12 issues surveyed. At the bottom were the NBN (net -28) and providing affordable and reliable energy (net -34). 59% thought they were paying a lot more for electricity and gas than two or three years ago, with insurance the next highest on 31%.

33% thought the top marginal tax rate of 47% on earnings over \$180,000 per year was too high, 12% too low and 39% about right. 47% disapproved of the postal plebiscite and 39% approved, a shift from 43-38 approval a fortnight ago, though the question wording was different.

53% thought their household's income had fallen behind the cost of living, 25% said it had stayed even and 15% that it had gone up more.

YouGov 51-49 to Coalition

This week's [Australian YouGov](#), conducted 17-21 August from a sample of 1010, had the Coalition ahead by 51-49, a one point gain for the Coalition since last fortnight. Primary votes were 34% Coalition (steady), 33% Labor (up 1), 10% Greens (down 1), and 10% One Nation (up 1).

By previous election preferences, this poll would give Labor 52 or 53 percent two party. YouGov is recording low major party primaries compared to other polls, and an excessive respondent allocated skew to the Coalition.

By 45-38, voters thought Barnaby Joyce should step aside while the High Court considers his case. It is not clear whether voters thought Joyce should "step aside" from Cabinet or from voting in the lower house.

Upcoming High Court decisions

On 5-6 September, the Australian High Court will hold a full bench hearing on whether the postal plebiscite, which the government authorised without Senate approval, is constitutional. With ballot papers scheduled to be mailed out from 12 September, a decision will probably be announced soon after this hearing.

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In the coming months, the High Court will decide whether Greens Senators Larissa Waters and Scott Ludlam, One Nation Senator Malcolm Roberts, Nationals Senators Matt Canavan and Fiona Nash, Senator Nick Xenophon, and Deputy PM Barnaby Joyce were ineligible to be elected, owing to violations of [Section 44\(i\) of the Constitution](#), pertaining to dual citizenships.

While the media have been focused on the dual citizenship issue, [Labor is also challenging Nationals](#) House member David Gillespie over Section 44(v), pertaining to a conflict of interest with the Commonwealth public service. Nationals [Senator Barry O'Sullivan](#) could also be challenged under this clause.

If the Senators are ruled ineligible, their positions will be filled from their parties' tickets after a special recount. If either or both Joyce and Gillespie are found ineligible, there would be by-elections in their seats of New England and Lyne respectively, putting the Coalition's one-seat lower house majority at risk.

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