

## Coalition behind in two new polls as triumphant Joyce heads back to Canberra

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

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The Coalition trails 47-53% in the latest Newspoll and the Fairfax-Ipsos poll, but the government goes into the parliamentary week heartened by Barnaby Joyce's landslide win in Saturday's [New England byelection](#)

[Newspoll](#) published in Monday's Australian shows the government clawing back from the massive 45-55% two-party gap of three weeks ago, and Malcolm Turnbull improving his net satisfaction rating and widening his lead as better prime minister.

But while the government improved compared with the previous poll, this is the 24th consecutive Newspoll the Coalition has lost in two-party terms.

Interviewed on Sky on Sunday, Turnbull said "I don't run the government based on the Newspoll", although in 2015 he cited 30 bad Newspolls as one of the reasons Tony Abbott should be deposed.

The Coalition hopes the decisive New England outcome - where Barnaby Joyce has nearly 65% of the primary vote, representing a swing of about 12.5% - means the result could be officially declared in time to have him back in the House of Representatives by the end of the week or even mid-week.

Turnbull signalled the government will take an aggressive approach to Labor in the parliamentary week - expected to be the last of the year. It will move to have certain ALP MPs referred to the High Court over their citizenship, and pursue Bill Shorten over senator Sam Dastyari's behaviour in relation to a Chinese donor.

In Newspoll, the government's primary vote is up two points to 36%; Labor's is down a point to 37%. One Nation has fallen two points to 8%; the Greens are up a point to 10%.

Turnbull's net satisfaction has improved from minus 29 points to minus 25; Shorten's net

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satisfaction has worsened from minus 19 to minus 21. Turnbull's lead as better PM has widened to 39-33%, compared with only a two point advantage in the last poll.

Turnbull said he had "every confidence that I will lead the Coalition to the next election in 2019 and we will win it".

The [Fairfax-Ipsos poll](#) showed Turnbull well ahead of Shorten as preferred prime minister (48% to 31%).

In that poll, Julie Bishop is the preferred Liberal leader (32%), over Turnbull (29%). Tony Abbott trails on 14%, followed by Peter Dutton on 5% and Scott Morrison on 4%. Liberal voters, however, prefer Turnbull (35%) over Bishop (29%) and Abbott (18%).

But voters overwhelmingly oppose a government changing leaders between elections (71% to 25% who approve). The strength of the opposition indicates the high transactional costs the Liberals would incur if they switched from Turnbull before the election.

On preferred Labor leader, people were relatively evenly split between Shorten (25%), Tanya Plibersek (23%) and Anthony Albanese (20%). Shorten had a clear lead (38%) among Labor voters over Plibersek (24%) and Albanese (17%).

The parliamentary week will be dominated by same-sex marriage and MPs' citizenship. The government will also introduce a suite of legislation targeting foreign interference and espionage.

In his wide-ranging interview, Turnbull talked up his plan to make [personal income tax cuts](#) a focus of his pitch for the election, saying "our intention is to introduce them before the next election".

"That's our intention but of course you've got to stick to your commitment, our commitment to

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keep getting the budget back into balance by 2021,” he said. It remains unclear whether the cuts would be simply announced pre-election or their delivery would start then.

Turnbull indicated that in the [same-sex marriage debate](#) he will support amendments that were moved unsuccessfully in the Senate by Attorney-General George Brandis, the most important of which would allow celebrants to refuse to perform a marriage.

Whatever the fate of the Brandis amendments, the extra safeguards and restrictions unsuccessfully pushed by hardline conservatives in the Senate last week are expected to be defeated in the House as well.

Ahead of the release of MPs’ citizenship declarations, both sides claim the other has MPs who should be referred to the High Court.

Turnbull said he was satisfied, on the basis of the reports from Coalition parliamentarians, “that there are none of our members that are ineligible”.

He said there were plainly a number on the Labor side whose status should be determined by the court, and if Labor would not refer them, the government would do so. This was an “acid test” of Shorten’s integrity, Turnbull said.

But manager of opposition business Tony Burke described the government’s proposed action as appalling. He said it was adopting “a protection racket for their own members” while planning to refer Labor members.

Noting that currently referrals could only be moved by a minister, Burke said that on Monday he would seek to rectify this, so referrals could be moved by either side.

Turnbull continued the government’s attack over [Dastyari](#) who, it was revealed last week, in 2016 told a Chinese donor who is of interest to Australian security agencies that his phone was

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likely tapped.

Turnbull said Dastyari “has betrayed Australia’s interests” and repeated that he “must go” from parliament.

He hinted the Dastyari affair was being investigated by the authorities but said “this is a political matter and I do not give directions to our police or our security agencies on operational matters”.

But there were “a number of facts in the public domain and it’s a matter for the relevant agencies to look into,” Turnbull said.

If Shorten didn’t act on Dastyari it meant the opposition leader was putting his factional survival ahead of Australia’s national security, Turnbull said.

“It’s time for Bill Shorten to show that he’s really on Australia’s side and boot Dastyari out,” he said.

Shorten is standing by Dastyari although he has been demoted; anyway, while it could expel him from the party, Labor has no power to remove him from parliament.

The government’s legislation targeting foreign interference will strengthen and modernise offences including espionage, sabotage and treason, and introduce new offences targeting foreign interference and economic espionage.

Among the new offences, there will be ones that criminalise covert and deceptive activities of foreign actors that fall short of espionage but are intended to interfere with Australia’s democratic system and processes or support the intelligence activities of a foreign actor.

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New provisions will criminalise support for foreign intelligence agencies, modelled on offences banning support for terrorist organisations.

There will be a reformed secrecy regime to criminalise disclosing information such as classified documents. This will replace old offences in the Crimes Act.

A new transparency scheme will be established to inform the public and decision makers of instances of foreign influence on the governmental and political processes. Those who act on behalf of or in the interests of foreign principals will have to register that fact.

*Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.*

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