

## Voters tell Barnaby Joyce to quit as leader - Newspan

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

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Barnaby Joyce is coming under fresh pressure to stand down with 65% of voters saying he should quit as Nationals leader, in a [Newspan](#) that shows the scandal hitting the government and Malcolm Turnbull.

The two-party vote has the Coalition trailing Labor 47-53%, compared with 48-52% a fortnight ago, halting the improvement the government had at the start of the year. This is the 27th consecutive Newspan in which the Coalition has been behind Labor.

The poll comes as softer weekend messaging from Turnbull added to the confusion around the crisis, and how it will play out remains uncertain.

Turnbull and the Liberals want to see Joyce step down or be rolled by his party. But the Prime Minister is treading more carefully now that it is clear the Nationals could take umbrage and dig in behind Joyce if they think the Liberals are trying to dictate to them.

There is an increasing feeling in Nationals circles that Joyce's position is untenable. The party's MPs will get electoral feedback this week when parliament is not sitting and they are in their electorates. Joyce is desperately trying to hang on to his job despite the huge political fallout from his affair with his former staffer, now his pregnant partner. He is [on a week's leave](#).

In the Newspan published in Monday's Australian, Turnbull's better prime minister rating fell 5 points to 40% and Bill Shorten's rose 2 points to 33%, narrowing Turnbull's lead to 7 points. The Coalition's primary vote declined 2 points to 36%; Labor remained steady at 37%.

[The Australian reports](#) that in the overall breakdown of voters wanting Joyce gone, 29% say he should step down as Nationals leader but stay in parliament as a backbencher; 21% believe he should step down and not contest the election; and 21% say he should leave politics at once.

Regional voters were more inclined to say he should go from parliament at once (25%) than city

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voters (20%). Men were more inclined than women to say he should leave politics immediately (23-20%).

After [Turnbull denounced Joyce on Thursday](#) and said the deputy prime minister “has to consider his own position”, followed on Friday by a counterattack from Joyce, the two men met for more than an hour in the Prime Minister’s Sydney office on Saturday.

On Sunday Turnbull described the talks as “frank and warm, friendly, good, constructive” and said “of course” he could continue to work with Joyce.

He had not apologised to Joyce – “there was nothing to apologise for”, he said.

Turnbull said it was important “to meet, to work through the various challenges and issues that we face. Now the important thing is Barnaby and I are working closely together as we always have, he’s obviously taking leave coming this week and we look forward to him returning from that at the end of the week.”

He stressed “there are no issues between the Liberal and National Parties at all”.

Speaking on [Nine’s 60 Minutes program](#), Turnbull said of his Thursday remarks: “I think Australians wanted to hear their prime minister’s heartfelt views about these events – they wanted to know what I felt about them. They wanted to hear it from my lips but also from my heart.”

He said he felt the values he expressed and the action he took “would have the overwhelming endorsement of Australians. I felt it was absolutely the right thing to do”.

Turnbull said he had discussed with wife Lucy his ban, announced Thursday, on ministers having sexual relationships with staff and she absolutely agreed with it.

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Treasurer Scott Morrison, asked whether it could be “business as usual” if Joyce stayed Nationals leader said “It has to be. We’re a professional government”.

Morrison dismissed suggestions that the sex ban would be hard to enforce.

“You set out a standard that says, don’t sleep with your staff”, he [told the ABC](#) . “The point of a code is preventative. If you have a code you’re telling people. ‘you do this, understand by doing it, that you’ll be gonski’.”

“Now I’m happy to have a prime minister who’s been prepared to call out a political culture in this country that has been going on for decades, if not generations.”

His message to people who argued “private is private” was “I’m sorry, if you sleep with your staff, it’s not private any more, it’s public, because you’re a minister in a position of responsibility and power over those who work for you”

Queensland Nationals MP George Christensen [posted on Facebook](#) : “The bonk ban is bonkers! And it shows that the whole attack on Barnaby Joyce is driven by one thing: sex. As interesting as that topic is, it’s his private life.”

*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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