

Labor leads 56-44% in Newspoll, but Morrison rates better than Shorten

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

Newspoll has the Coalition still trailing Labor 44-56% in two-party terms, as government members return to parliament with wounds remaining raw from the leadership coup and tighter numbers in the House of Representatives.

The Liberal party is also reeling after a massive swing has cost it the previously safe seat of Wagga Wagga in Saturday's NSW state byelection.

In Newspoll Scott Morrison has, however, gone ahead of Bill Shorten as better prime minister, leading him 42-36%. A fortnight ago, immediately after the coup, the two-party vote also had the ALP leading 56-44% but Shorten was in front of Morrison as better PM 39-33%.

This is the 40th consecutive Newspoll the government has lost. Labor's primary vote increased one point in the fortnight to 42%. The Coalition's primary vote is up a point to 34%.

The [poll](#), published in Monday's Australian, has Morrison with a satisfaction rating of 41%, with 39% dissatisfied, a net rating of plus 2. Satisfaction with Shorten was 37%; his dissatisfaction rating was 51%, giving him a net rating of minus 14.

The poll comes as parliament meets for the first time since Malcolm Turnbull was ousted. With Turnbull gone the government has lost its majority on the floor. Its survival is not at risk, but conduct of the house will be difficult.

While Morrison is trying to unify his party, debate about federal factors in the loss of the state byelection, the continuing row over allegations of bullying, and the Dutton au pair affair mean the Prime Minister is facing strong head winds.

Read more: [**VIDEO: Michelle Grattan on changing the pension age, women in parliament and the au pair saga**](#)

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A 28.4% plunge in the Liberal vote in Wagga Wagga was driven by state issues – the previous MP resigned in a corruption scandal - but it obviously also included a voter backlash over the federal chaos. The Liberals have held the regional seat since 1957.

With nearly 87% of the vote [counted](#) , ABC electoral analyst Antony Green said the independent candidate Joe McGirr, a doctor and an academic, is set to clinch the seat, ahead of Labor. On counting so far McGirr has 25.4%, the Liberals 25.3%, Labor 23.8%, and the four other candidates collectively 25.5%.

NSW premier Gladys Berejiklian, while accepting the voters' message for her government, said on Sunday that the timing of the byelection, coinciding with "other major political events" provided "the perfect storm."

The Liberals are now bracing for a big swing in the coming federal byelection in Turnbull's former seat of Wentworth, which is on a margin of 17.7%.

The strength of McGirr's showing indicates that if, as expected, the high profile local doctor Kerryn Phelps runs as an independent, she could be expected to attract a big protest vote. Turnbull had a very large personal vote in the electorate.

The Speaker, Tony Smith, is expected to announce the byelection date any day and the Liberals will choose their candidate on Thursday.

Preselection contestants include Andrew Bragg, who was briefly acting federal director of the party, former Australian ambassador to Israel Dave Sharma, and barrister Peter King, the one-time member for the seat, who Turnbull beat for preselection in 2004.

Others are Mary-Lou Jarvis, a vice-president of the NSW Liberal party; Michael Feneley, a leading cardiologist; Carrington Brigham, a digital communications specialist; Katherine O'Regan, a commercial board director; Richard Shields, who works for the Insurance Council of Australia, and Maxine Szramka, a rheumatologist. .

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In parliament, eyes will be on Liberal senator Lucy Gichuhi, who has threatened to name people who have engaged in bullying.

Meanwhile senior Liberal figures have been working to ensure that Julia Banks, who has denounced bullying and said she will quit parliament at the election, doesn't leave early. Banks holds the Victorian marginal seat of Chisholm.

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Treasurer and Liberal deputy leader Josh Frydenberg said on Sunday that he had been speaking to Banks regularly and he was confident she would remain in parliament until the election.

Home Affairs minister Peter Dutton will be under pressure in parliament this week in the au pair affair, with the Senate committee inquiring into it due to release a clarifying letter from former Australian Border Force chief Roman Quaedvlieg, whose account of an alleged intervention from Dutton's office in a visa case has been denounced by Dutton as a "fabrication".

Read more: [Dutton and former Border Force chief trade accusations in au pair affair](#)

The cabinet will ratify Morrison's decisions, already announced, to drop the planned rise in the pension age to 70, and kill off the National Energy Guarantee.

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Read more: [Morrison does about-face on age pension eligibility rising to 70](#)

Frydenberg, who worked doggedly over a long period to try to achieve the NEG, which in the end was sunk by the right in the Coalition, admitted that “no one is more disappointed than I am” that it was now dead.

“But as Bismarck said ... ‘politics is the art of the possible’ and it was very clear that the legislation [on the emissions target] couldn’t proceed,” he told the ABC.

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

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